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ALEX GOLDIȘ¹
COSMIN BORZA²

THE SUBGENRES OF THE ROMANIAN NOVEL: IMPORTS, BACKDROP, HYBRIDIZATIONS

As Margaret Cohen broadly argues in her volume *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, it has been common for modern literary theorists and historians to “doubt” the analytic relevance and the conceptual functionality of the literary genre. Cohen relies on seminal studies like Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*³ and Jean-Marie Schaeffer’s *Qu’est-ce qu’un genre littéraire?*⁴, in order to point out that the literary genre was given a “coup de grâce” by “the deconstructive strain of poststructuralism, with its negative notion of textuality”⁵. Cohen highlights through the whole range of criticism the persistence of essentialist assumptions about “internal forms” or “deep structures” which were presumed to naturally emerge among groups of literary texts.

This state of matters should explain, at least to some extent, the strong reluctance of Romanian critics, or even their manifest refusal to address the (sub)genre systems/categories of the novel. Most often than not, they preferred instead to assign a given novel with canonical value at the extent that it transgressed the confines of one or several subgenres. To this day, Romanian criticism still lacks a conceptual “encyclopedia” of the novel, be it original or translated. Moreover, local lexicographical projects dedicated to literary concepts and ideas usually avoid to define subgenres, and debates concerning the formal structures of the novel are usually led in vague, speculative terms, with little concern for theoretical definition. While interwar critical debates had been shaped by watchword pairs such as “subjective” – “objective” or “creation” – “analysis” (see, in this respect, Magda Wächter’s article from the current issue), postwar criticism drew upon the ideals of the “total novel”⁶ or the “monumental novel”⁷,

¹ Alex Goldiș’s work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2019-0946, within PNCDI III.

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³ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1981.

⁴ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Qu’est-ce qu’un genre littéraire?*, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

⁵ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 16.

⁶ Eugen Simion, “Romanul total” [“The Total Novel”], *România literară*, 1980, 13, pp. 10, 15.

⁷ Ion Ianoși, *Romanul monumental și secolul XX* [*The Monumental Novel and the Twentieth Century*], București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1963.

added to which was Nicolae Manolescu's highly influential metaphorical triad of "Doric – Ionic – Corinthian"⁸. It is no wonder then that even the best-known Romanian monograph of a subgenre, Al. Protopopescu's *Romanul psihologic românesc* [*The Romanian Psychological Novel*], had to extensively cover the history of paradoxes, contradictions and hesitations that marked the attempts made by Romanian critics and writers, but didn't forge a stable understanding of the psychological novel. Protopopescu could therefore only conclude that "the so-called Romanian psychological novel is, in fact, an *anti-psychological* or, in any case, a *post-psychological* novel"⁹. One thing to take into account in order to explain the long-lasting suspicion towards genre theories or taxonomies is the obvious preference shown by Romanian critics for the essay and for aestheticized writing (equally biased against ideological or sociological arguments), a critical discourse whose deeply ingrained tradition surpasses a simple rejection of structuralism or a typically poststructuralist stance.

Such approaches tend indeed to ignore what Margaret Cohen brilliantly analyzed in *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, namely the genre's ability to provide the most substantial reflection of the ways in which literature assimilates and confronts social tensions, contradictions and changes throughout time:

The concept may reveal nothing about textuality, but it reveals much about literature as a social practice, for genre is a social relation, or, as Jameson puts it, a social contract. The poetic record of the writer's and reader's expectations shaping a text, generic conventions convey crucial information about a text's position within the literary exchanges of its time and illuminate how it engages its audience. Attention to genre thus counteracts a vulgar sociology of literature that identifies a text's social dimension on the level of content as well as complicating the Foucauldian equation of a text's social significance with its participation in nonliterary discourses¹⁰.

That is why, a reassessment of the genre that takes into account the hybridizations, the dislocations, the ramifications or the transformations of subgenres in close relation to both national and transnational cultural, historical, social, and political fields is far from bringing forth the danger of a "new formalism". Instead, during the last decades of the 20th century and in the 21st century, this emerges as one of the most salient tendencies whereby literary studies managed to regain some form of social relevance.

Not coincidentally, in *The Atlas of the European Novel (1800–1900)*, Franco Moretti, the leading contemporary theorist of the novel, claims that this genre is the "ideal analytical unit" for studying "narrative markets: sociology of literature, as it

⁸ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [*Noah's Ark. Essay on the Romanian Novel*], I–III, București, Minerva, 1980–1983.

⁹ Al. Protopopescu, *Romanul psihologic românesc* [*The Romanian Psychological Novel*], București, Eminescu, 1978, p. 289.

¹⁰ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education*, p. 17.

used to be called; history of the book, history of reading, as we call it nowadays”¹¹. The almost 2000 pages of the Moretti-edited collective volumes gathered under the title *The Novel*, include tens of case studies that prove that the novel, as “the first truly planetary form”¹², and its subgenres are one of the most productive means to forge a transnational cultural history of modernity. At least during the last two centuries, that history has seen societies and mentalities undergo transformations across similar, but also divergent paths.

The novel remains indeed one of the most common currencies in transactions between national cultures, but is also the genre with the greatest variation across time and space. While classic accounts of the novel emphasized the homogeneity of its (sub)species, recent works, like Margaret Cohen’s analysis of the sentimental novel, Franco Moretti’s study of the *Bildungsroman*¹³, Fredric Jameson’s account of the *romance*¹⁴, or Nancy Armstrong’s overview of the domestic novel¹⁵ highlight precisely the historicity of the genre’s forms. How do certain species of the novel take shape and change while traveling from one culture to another? How do they evolve from one century to another? Which are the historical circumstances or formal determinants that make one species run its course, or help another outlast its competing forms?

Relying on such revised approaches and methodological inquiries as mentioned above (already with a substantial impact in recent Romanian research¹⁶), the 7th issue of the journal *Dacoromania litteraria*, called “The Subgenres of the Romanian Novel: Imports, Backdrop, Hybridizations”, develops a reflection on the novelistic (sub)genres in Romanian literary history while focusing on establishing a series of their possible taxonomies, definitions, internal histories, influential models, local variants etc. All the articles in this thematic issue are engaged in the debate on the multitude of novelistic forms within the Romanian literary space, on the cultural codes thereby set in motion, as well as on the historical forces that give them a voice and transform them into a reflection of society.

Every contribution to this thematic issue is meant to illustrate how novelistic forms emerge within complex negotiations among various cultural contexts that

¹¹ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900*, New York – London, Verso, 1998, pp. 145, 143.

¹² Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, I–II, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. ix.

¹³ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, New York – London, Verso, 1987.

¹⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*.

¹⁵ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987.

¹⁶ See Andrei Terian, Daiana Gărdan, Cosmin Borza, David Morariu, Dragoș Varga, “Genurile romanului românesc în secolul al XIX-lea. O analiză cantitativă” [“The Genres of the 19th Century Romanian Novel. A Quantitative Analysis”], *Transilvania*, 2019, 10, pp. 17-28, and Andrei Terian, Daiana Gărdan, Emanuel Modoc, Cosmin Borza, Dragoș Varga, Ovio Olaru, David Morariu, “Genurile romanului românesc (1901–1932). O analiză cantitativă” [“Genres of the Romanian Novel (1901–1932). A Quantitative Analysis”], *Transilvania*, 2020, 10, pp. 53-64.

determine the way in which subgenres are defined at some point. The notion of the novel itself acquires specific meaning in any particular culture, in accordance with the tradition of the local literature, as Magda Wächter argues in her paper. The following articles expand upon this premise by analyzing the development of subgenres in the Romanian or Eastern-European context. The Romanian forms of the haiduk novel (Constantina Raveca Buleu) or the ghetto novel (Liliana Burlacu), for instance, are very similar to their counterparts from abroad. At the same time, the dynamic of the genre also makes manifest cases of cultural resistance, defined as “the presence in the recipient cultures of material and systems which are, or are felt to be, irreconcilable with the invading traits or system”¹⁷. This mechanism could explain Romanian literature’s reluctance towards the political novel, which was compromised by its association with Soviet propaganda (Ștefan Firică), or towards the detective novel, whose development was hindered by the elitist, hierarchical assumptions of the local culture (Ovio Olaru). Mihai Iovănel’s essay dismantles some of these assumptions, by recovering the evolution stages, often neglected by traditional literary histories, of mass subgenres like the science-fiction novel, the detective novel, the fantasy or the thriller.

Adding to these explorations of the local circumstances of the novel are the studies that approach subgenres as “world genres”. In line with recent attempts to study the forms of the novel in their global diffusion¹⁸, the articles from this special issue also consider the international circulation of locally evolving subgenres. Daiana Gârdan’s essay correlates the meaning acquired by the social novel in the Romanian literature with its meanings from other national contexts. Angelo Mitchievici’s contribution revolves around the argument that the French decadent novel found fertile soil in the Romania during the first decades of the 20th century. In the same vein, Elena Crașovan’s essay enriches the world map of magical realism with the Romanian “periphery”.

Romanian literature also serves as a privileged site of observation in order to redefine socialist realism as a world subgenre, whose concrete manifestations cannot be reduced to the homogeneity of form that was claimed by traditional criticism (Ștefan Baghiu). Moreover, Mihaela Mudure eloquently demonstrates that the postcommunist Romania hosts important subsidiaries of the campus novel, seen as world subgenre. Equally challenging is the emergence of new global typologies triggered by similar political contexts, such as the memory novel that was shaped by 20th century European totalitarianisms (Andreea Mironescu and Doris Mironescu). On the other hand, very different social-cultural contexts can also produce similar formal structures, as exemplified in Adriana Stan’s article about

¹⁷ A.L. Kroeber, “Diffusionism”, in Amitai Etzioni and Eva Etzioni-Halevy (eds.), *Social Change: Sources, Patterns, and Consequences*, New York, Basic Books, 1964, p. 143.

¹⁸ Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, Theo D’haen, *Crime Fiction as World Literature*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

two subgenres of the new literary realism emerged around the year 2000 across the two sides of the Atlantic, in North America and Romania.

In a more or less overt manner, all essays from the current issue argue that the subgenres of the novel should be seen as complex combinations of patterns that are impossible to reduce to static configurations. Since the novel's international diffusion makes it epitomize the circulatory system of world literature, no future account of the genre can ignore a conceptual approach of the various subgenres whereby complex formal and ideological transactions were overtaken.

DISTANT READING THE SOCIAL NOVEL IN ROMANIA. THEORETICAL AND TAXONOMICAL CHALLENGES¹

As a critical construct, “the social novel” fits like a glove the literary historians and critics of early 20th century Romania. As realist novels were already praised and canonized in the international literary field, the autochthonous cultural ideologists active at the time were in search of a literary formula that shared an affinity with their legitimizing programmes. That is, I think, the key factor that makes pinpointing the introduction and first definitions of this particular subgenre (a technical term that has retrospective application, of course) in the Romanian critical discourse an almost impossible task. Populist propaganda journals such as *Sămănătorul* [*The Sower*] or *Viața Românească* [*The Romanian Life*] seem to register the highest frequency in using this label. A rather odd fact surfaces, however, when looking closer at these occurrences: the social novel is an applied label rather than an issue discussed or theorized, as if its very nature were self-explanatory. In 1910, while reviewing Dumitru C. Moruzi’s novel *Înstrăinații* [*The Estranged*], Nicolae Iorga provided one of the most articulate comments regarding the social novel, maybe the one that hits closest to base when searching for a definition. In this sense, Iorga states the following:

About ten years ago, the world was won over by the novelty of one shining literary form, by the observational truth enclosed in it, by the interest in human typologies that either appeared for the first time or have taken back their rightful place after being overwhelmed by imitations of Paris latest fashions [...]. Ever since, people have demanded a literature that works like a symbol, a watchword, a battle cry, a true awakening of national energies, a solution for the emerging moral, political and social crises. [...] They [the young writers] can learn one important thing from Maupassant’s techniques: that a novel as per today’s standards must be the product of either a vast experience, or of an honest study of our national, social, and moral realities².

Therefore, a social novel is, for Iorga, a social instrument: honest (in terms of current social contexts), but aspirational; observational, but instructive. In this paper, I aim to retrace some of the historical negotiations of this subgenre as they can be found in foreign theoretical discussions, as well as its many uses in

¹ This article is a revised and extended version of a paper presented at the International Conference „Zilele Sextil Pușcariu” (12-13 September 2019) and published, in Romanian, in the conference proceedings (*Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, 2019, 4, pp. 418-427). This is the first internationally available rendition.

² Nicolae Iorga, “În legătură cu un roman social” [“Regarding a Social Novel”], *Neamul Românesc Literar*, 2, 1910, 31, p. 1. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Romanian literature and criticism in the first half of the 20th century. My objective is not only to reveal the many contradictions and problematic aspects that surround this subgenre, but also to provide a more functional definition that may be of use for quantitative and digital approaches dedicated to this particular period.

International Use

My first attempt at investigating the genealogy of this concept is based on the premise that the presence of the social novel as a novelistic subgenre or typology in Romanian pre- and interwar criticism is due to foreign import, most likely from the French cultural space³. In French criticism, the social novel attracted the literary historians' attention especially at the dawn of the 20th century. In the first decade, two volumes entirely dedicated to this particular novelistic formula make their entrance on the publishing market.

The first, entitled *Le roman social en Angleterre (1830–1850)*, belongs to Louis Cazamian. Published in 1903, reedited, and extended in 1904, this ample volume not only assigned this subgenre to a specific historical and spatial context (Victorian England), but also aimed to delineate thoroughly between different types of social novel, consequently delving into internal sub-categorization of this already well established subgenre. Following a proposed periodization, the social novel registered three phases, each one of them presenting internal differentiations while the main objective remained the same, that of metabolizing and acting towards the impact of industrialization on society. The first phase (1830–1850) – and the most carefully analysed – is an exalted one, with a revolutionary tonality:

Le roman social est animé d'un esprit nouveau. Le second système de forces, dirige vers la correction de l'individualisme, apparait de plus en plus nettement à côté du premier; en même temps, un mouvement sentimental de la conscience publique se cristallise dans la notion d'une solidarité sociale. Le roman de Dickens et de Kingsley en est à la fois l'un des effets et l'une des causes⁴.

Following the socio-political conflicts and tensions, the social novel written between 1850 and 1870 – the second phase, as Cazamian identifies it – leaves behind the enthusiastic revolutionary emotional tone and replaces it with a sceptical one: people have started to lose both faith and aggressiveness in demanding social change and started relying on science. Analysing Charles Dickens's work, the author he finds the most relevant literary phenomenon to shape the youth's social consciousness and inflating their civil spirit, the French

³ This analysis reiterates elements from Andrei Terian, Daiana Gărdan, Cosmin Borza, David Morariu, Dragoș Varga, "Genurile romanului românesc în secolul al XIX-lea. O analiză cantitativă" ["Genres of the Romanian Novel from the 19th Century. A Quantitative Approach"], *Transilvania*, 10, 2019, pp. 17-28.

⁴ Louis Cazamian, *Le roman social en Angleterre (1830–1850)*, Paris, Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition, 1903, p. 111.

scholar delves into an evolutionary approach to the literary object. While commenting on “the social scope of Dickens’ novels”, the French author notes the following:

La valeur sociale de son œuvre nous apparait donc comme psychologique. Elle réside dans les émotions que l’auteur éprouve et suscite, à propos de l’inégalité humaine connue et décrite dans sa généralité. Aux problèmes spéciaux de la société industrielle, tels qu’ils se posaient entre 1830 et 1850, ses romans ne fournissent pas de réponse directe. Son influence n’en est pas moins réelle, mais c’est sur les âmes qu’elle s’exerce. Elle est à la fois effet et cause d’une réaction profonde du tempérament national : elle accentue la révolte du sentimentalisme chrétien contre la sécheresse utilitaire⁵.

After carrying out his social reading of Dickens, Cazamian further investigates Kingsley’s, Disraeli’s and Gaskell’s works with an evolutionary-orientated eye (“Nous avons vu le sentimentalisme social naître, se nourrir, et aboutir au socialisme chrétien”⁶ – he thus concludes this extensive panorama). The author’s analysis of the so-called third phase of the social novel is absent, however. Identified around 1880, there is little to no clear information on its nature, other than the fact that it is more “pessimistic” than the previous two. Cazamian’s study engages much more in political and socio-economic aspects of the targeted time frame than in the hermeneutics of the social novel. In conclusion, the social novel is, according to Louis Cazamian, a social instrument – an object that can function both as a trigger or as a result, or, in the author’s own words, both as a cause and as an effect.

The second critical text concerning the social novel belongs to Jean Charles-Brun, another French scholar interested, at the turn of the century, in defining the subgenre. Charles-Brun knows Cazamian’s works and engages in an extended dialogue with Cazamian in his own volume. Writing *Le roman social en France au XIX^e siècle* in 1910, Charles-Brun transplants Cazamian’s critical assessments on the English novel into the French literary space. For this second French scholar, the social novel is divided into two subcategories: *roman social* and *roman à thèse*. Although this separation may seem functional, Charles-Brun’s analysis is a constant (re)negotiation of the relationship between literature and the social phenomena. While Cazamian seems to depart from a well-grounded premise regarding the very legitimacy of a social novel (and social literature in general), Charles-Brun tends to question the core issues: inner contradictions, its flexible uses, the superposition of *social* and *moral* literature – an issue I will address later in this article –, and finally, the very slippery nature of this label. In this sense, quite early in his demonstration he notes the following:

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 313.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 540.

On peut ne pas savoir avec exactitude ce qu'est une œuvre sociale, tant ce terme imprécise cache de notions diverses. On ne peut ignorer, du moins, l'extraordinaire floraison des œuvres qui se parent de ce titre. Le mot semble magique. Un article de revue, une exposition artistique, une méchante représentation de plein air, ont une « portée sociale ». Le moindre geste de nos esthètes s'inscrit en valeur. Et, pour le roman, c'est, sans doute le genre ou la prétention sociale s'affiche avec le plus de frénésie⁷.

One should keep in mind that for the given period, the novel was rather an underdog among literary genres⁸. It is not at all surprising that the novelistic genre is in some ways the genre of and for the people, a genre we would now call, following Bakhtin's writings, *democratic* – thus, a social genre. Charles-Brun himself feels the need to motivate his choice. He responds to the question of why a discussion of the novel in a paradigm dominated by theatre as the star-genre is worth having with the following argument: “la thèse du philosophe, la spéculation du théoricien ont besoin, pour pénétrer la masse, d'une transcription plus aisément accessible. Entre eux et le gros du public, le romancier sert d'intermédiaire: il décante, il simplifie, il grossit, il vulgarise”⁹. Starting from such a premise, it seems that, no matter what subject a novel may have, it has an inherent social purpose. From a metacritical point of view, it would appear that Charles-Brun divides the novel – the genre itself, the *whole* production – into *roman social* and *roman à thèse*, rather than proposing two subgenres localized in a broader field. A “social novel” is, as per the author's demonstration, the novel that has to do with “social pressure”, while a “thesis novel” is a novel that has to do with “social preoccupation”. The latter is actually the one that we tend to label as a social novel now: the instrument/ object of instruction/ literature with an active role in a given socio-political background.

The type Charles-Brun identifies as social novel, however, is the problematic one. It depicts, the French scholar states, a world where the characters' (especially the protagonist's) thoughts and actions are driven by the “social milieu”. In other words, he identifies the realists. At least, that would be the first conclusion. Nevertheless, if we look at, let us say, Proustian novels, this statement could still be viable. This is exactly the kind of vicious circle that this particular label is likely to fall into: everything is a social novel and nothing is a social novel – the very reason why most approaches to genre theory avoid this label.

Although both are indebted to the same cultural space – France – and build on more or less the same premises, the two scholars reach very different conclusions.

⁷ Jean Charles-Brun, *Le roman social en France au XIX siècle*, Paris, V. Giard & E. Brière Libraires-Éditeurs, 1910, p. 51.

⁸ I have tried to briefly retrace this evolution, from a “minor” literary genre to a canonical one, in a recent article: Daiana Gârdan, “One Theory's Underdog Is Another Theory's Treasure: The Novelistic Genre in Different Regimes of Relevance”, *Transilvania*, 2020, 5, pp. 15-19.

⁹ Jean Charles-Brun, *Le roman social en France*, p. 46.

However, something in particular stands out: both Cazamian and Charles-Brun understand the social novel more as an instructive object than as a novelistic form.

The social novel seems to have no special architecture, no particular device, and no outstanding feature. It can penetrate almost every setting: it can be a love story, a rural novel, a bourgeois or family drama. So how can we surmount such a paradox? Before trying to answer this difficult question, I will retrace the national ramifications of this label.

National Use

The import of this novelistic typology from the French space in Romania seems plausible due to two logistic realities. One: the French language was the prevalent foreign language Romanian men of letters not only read, but also borrowed from in their own academic writing. Two: as I demonstrated on earlier occasions¹⁰ in quantitative form, Romanian modernity translated and discussed French novels more than those of any other national literature – including our own. While there is little to no reference to these two particular French scholars or their volumes, it does not seem far-fetched to suspect that this label still entered the Romanian literary circuit after making its way into the French one first and then being borrowed from authors and critics that had a steady presence in the Romanian cultural space. Direct contacts remain, however, impossible to trace.

For the “traditionalists”¹¹, the social novel usually meant what Nicolae Iorga synthesized in the paragraphs I quoted at the beginning of this article. A distant reading of the periodicals in which populists like Ibrăileanu or nationalists like Iorga wrote (an endeavour made possible through *the Bibliography of the Relations between Romanian Literature and Foreign Literatures in Periodicals*¹² and by digitized versions of some of these periodicals¹³), one can notice that the social novel was rather an ideological construct – in the sense of a desirable instructive

¹⁰ Daiana Gârdan, “The Great (Female) Unread. Romanian Women Novelists in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: A Quantitative Approach”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 4, 2018, 1, pp. 109-124.

¹¹ This label is usually used to denominate the populist and nationalist camps, like the ones active in and around periodicals like *Viața Românească* [*The Romanian Life*] or *Sămănătorul* [*The Sower*]. For terminological clarifications, see Cosmin Borza, “Translating against Colonization. Romanian Populists’ Plea for Peripheral Literatures (1890–1916)”, in Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 31-43.

¹² Luminița Beiu-Paladi et alii, *Bibliografia relațiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice (1859–1918)* [*The Bibliography of the Relations of Romanian Literature with Foreign Literatures in Periodicals (1859–1918)*], vol. I–III, București, Editura Academiei RSR, 1980–1985 and Ana-Maria Brezuleanu et alii, *Bibliografia relațiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice (1919–1944)* [*The Bibliography of the Relations of Romanian Literature with Foreign Literatures in Periodicals (1919–1944)*], vol. I–X, București, Saeculum, 1997–2009.

¹³ See, for instance, *Viața Românească*, 1906–1939 here: <http://dspace.bcu-iasi.ro/handle/123456789/657>.

object – that they promoted. Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gorki, Balzac, Maupassant, Flaubert, Zola, Hugo, even Henry Sienkiewicz were writers of social novels – all of their productions canonical models, all of these authors actively shaping European realism. In an article later included in *Note și impresii* [*Notes and Impressions*], G. Ibrăileanu glorifies Tolstoy's novel by saying that it is “the most powerful novel of our times, due to its social, evangelical, political, and sometimes revolutionary nature”¹⁴. As I have already mentioned, Romanian scholars did not engage in formulating a rigorous definition of what the social novel meant for them. It was a notion somehow taken for granted. The label seems to be such an autonomous notion in their texts that they used it mostly as some kind of certificate of high achievement. For “traditionalists”, a social novel was not a subgenre, it was a literary quality all novels should aspire to possess.

For the “modernists”, the social novel was something closer to a subgenre, but nonetheless fluid in its features. In 1925, G. Silviu, a constant presence at E. Lovinescu famous literary circle *Sburătorul*, writes a review for N. Davidescu's novel *Conservator & Cia* in the modernist journal *Dimineața*. He makes the following general observations:

The contemporary novel – the social novel – can only be the image of the burlesque society that the bloody events of the past few years have left us with. The man of our times does not think – does not feel – does not have the same emotional response to things as the man that lived eleven years ago. This truth is so natural yet so hard to understand, and that is why so many tragedies – big or small – are born [...] D. N. Davidescu is – obviously – going to make a part of our critics unhappy. He does no longer speak of romantic lovers or their pink letters. D. N. Davidescu has cut, with a firm hand nonetheless, a slice of life from the first years after the war. He forged it as if it had been an odd piece of ore, he examined in a contemporary fashion [...] At any rate, his novel [*Conservator & Cia*] is a textbook social novel, written with the nerve and talent of a true artist¹⁵.

As for most of the modernists that attended the same social and literary circles as he did, George Silviu understood the social novel in a radically different way than his “traditionalist” counterparts. For young writers entranced by fashionable, modern aspirations and who happened to suffer the traumatic experience of war, social literature embodies an almost therapeutic process, or at least it should do so. The world has changed forever and even though Romanian novelistic production does not have a “Lost generation” novel, young modernist writers expressed the same needs. Thus, the distance between the social novel advertised by the nationalist parties and the social novel promoted by Lovinescu and by his circle is the distance between *Anna Karenina* and *The Great Gatsby*. Nevertheless, as per Charles-Brun's definition, a social novel is a novel that has to do with social

¹⁴ G. Ibrăileanu, *Note și impresii* [*Notes and Impressions*], Iași, Viața Românească, 1920, p. 139.

¹⁵ G. Silviu, “Romanul social de după război” [“The Social Novel after the War”], *Dimineața*, 21, 1925, 6541, p. 3.

pressure and the impact of historical events on the social behaviour and psychology of the characters. Looking at it from this point, Tolstoy and Fitzgerald do not seem so different; after all, they both metabolized the way people react while facing social pressure and tried to make an instructive point out of doing so. The modernist party, however, seem to be closer to pinning down a specific formula for the social novel. While the “traditionalist” has talked about an instructive spirit, the modernist is targeting a certain topic – the aftermath of the war.

We are now left with the same series of contradictions we started out with in the first place. The two French scholars I have chosen for this demonstration either superimposed social literature and the literature of manners, or chose to display an array of novels that engage in social topics and politics so vast and different in their narrative and thematic particularities that it has made it impossible to find what can or cannot be a social novel. The Romanian space provided a mere confirmation of these contradictions. So how can the social novel be a viable subgenre for distant-reading the modern Romanian novel?

The Current State

Two “textbook definitions” for the social novel are the subject of critical consensus. The first is the following: “une œuvre littéraire qui dénonce, généralement par le biais d’une fiction réaliste, des problèmes sociaux et leurs effets sur les personnes ou groupes qui en sont victimes, issus des classes populaires” (*Grande Encyclopédie*). The second one is “a work of fiction in which a prevailing social problem, such as gender, race, or class prejudice, is dramatized through its effect on the characters of a novel” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). While these dictionary definitions may prove functional in a hermeneutical tradition, they fail to work with distant reading endeavours.

The primary instrument used for the distant reading of the Romanian novel remains *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 1989*] (DCRR), a dictionary that has indexed numerous novels as social ones. This lexicographic tool, however, was not designed with quantitative studies in mind. Although this instrument gives a comprehensive bird’s-eye-view of the novelistic production in Romania since its very origins, indexing most useful data about each novel, it lacks the generation of a relevant thematic categorization of the novel. Every entry contains the whole bibliographical reference pertaining to the novel (author, full title, publishing house or periodical issue, year) completed by a set of critical references and a sometimes very short, sometimes very detailed, description of the novel’s subject, setting, characters, themes etc. In a genre-centric approach, the subgenre of each novel can only be extrapolated from the information available in the narrative section. This segment however is rather heterogeneous. While canonical novels receive more attention, minor novels are treated superficially in what concerns the plot or formal aspects. While some subgenres seem to be more

stable (like romance/ sentimental novels or crime fiction), others seem to be lost in translation. This is the case of the social novel. Approximately one hundred novels are indexed as social in DCRR between 1845 (origins) and 1939. Forty-seven are to be found in the inter-war period. Fourteen other novels are indexed as novels “of social observation”. Other fourteen have “social novel” in the title. Similar numbers, in the same time frame, are registered when searching for “novel of manners”. The latter are also around a hundred in total, forty-nine in the inter-war period, eighteen indexed as “novels with moralistic intentions/aims” and fourteen containing the phrase “novel of manners” in their title. Sixteen other novels are indexed as “social novel of manners”. From a distant reading perspective, the lack of coherence is easily noticeable.

Here are just a few simplified examples:

1. V. Urechia, *Coliba Măriucăi* [*Măriuca's Cabin*] (an imitation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) – a novel about slavery in Moldavia;
2. Constanța Dunca-Schiau, *O familie din București. Iezuiții României* [*A Family from Bucharest. Romania's Jesuits*] – a family drama filled with sensational elements;
3. I. Fundescu, *Scarlat. Roman original* [*Scarlat. An Original Novel*] – a sensational novel set in a bourgeois décor;
4. G. Baronzi, *Confidențele unui om de inimă* [*The Secrets of a Good Man*] – a love story with melodramatic elements;
5. Eugenia de Reuss, *Spre desrobire* [*Towards Emancipation*] – a novel that militates for women's emancipation;
6. Ludovic Daus, *Dușmani ai neamului* [*Nation's Enemies*] – a novel with nationalistic tendencies;
7. Mateiu Caragiale, *Craii de Curtea-Veche* [*Gallants of the Old Court*] – a Proustian novel

I have reproduced what I think is a representative selection that accommodates the main topics that the authors of DCRR considered worth labelling as *social*. The same paradox arises: almost every novel can be a social novel.

Where critical assessments fail, the authors may provide some answers. The following novels were meant to be written as social novels:

1. N. Rădulescu-Niger, *Tribunul poporului. Roman social* [*The People's Tribune. A Social Novel*] – a novel with nationalistic tendencies that presents a conflict between a schoolteacher and a politician;
2. Petru Vulcan, *Armâna. Roman social din epoca renașterii poporului român la Pind* [*The Armenian Girl. A Social Novel of the Renaissance of Romanian's People of Pind*] – a historical novel presenting a conflict between the Romanians and the Greeks.
3. N. Rădulescu-Niger, *Măria sa Ogorul. Roman social* [*His Highness, the Land. A Social Novel*] – a rural novel following the conflicts between peasant families.

4. Petru Vulcan, *Mizerabilii noștri. Mare roman social* [Our Miserable. A Great Social Novel] – unconsulted.
5. Olimpia Teodoro, *Iubire fatală. Roman social* [Fatal Love. A Social Novel] – a tragic love story, aiming to be a feminist novel.
6. Olimpia Teodoro, *Un proces pierdut. Roman social* [A Lost Trial. A Social Novel] – a tragic love story, aiming to be a feminist novel.
7. F. R. Atila, *Ion Negan. Roman social* [Ion Negan. A Social Novel] – a confusing peroration about social change.
8. Dumitru Moruzzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită. Roman social basarabean* [Wanderers in a Lost Country. A Bessarabian Social Novel] – a historical novel, presenting political and ethnic conflicts in a rural setting.
9. Dumitru Moruzzi, *Moartea lui Cain. Roman social* [The Death of Cain. A Social Novel] – a historical novel, following political and ethnical conflicts in a rural setting.
10. Aida Vrioni, *Rătăcire. Roman social* – a biographical novel about a young Jewish girl, presenting ethnical conflicts and trying to make an instructive point about tolerance.
11. Ștefan Popescu, *Răzbunarea. Roman social* [The Revenge. A Social Novel] – a rural novel with sensational elements (love triangles, infidelity, revenge plots).
12. George Raicu-Delahuși, *Suflete predestinate. Roman social cu mici spicuri de actualitate* [Fated Souls. A Social Novel with Contemporary Excerpts] – a love story with sensational and melodramatic elements.
13. Petre C. Georgescu-Delafras, *Micul sacrificiu. Roman social* [The Small Sacrifice. A Social Novel] – set in Bucharest, it presents the conflicts arising in some Romanian trade unions as a direct consequence of the war.
14. Vasile Burlacu, *Zorile trandafirii. Roman social* [Rose-Coloured Daybreak. A Social Novel] – a love story set in a rural décor, with melodramatic elements.

The motivations behind these choices remain unknown and the spectrum of plots and settings is as heterogeneous as in the previous list of novels. Yet we can extrapolate, for the first time, a recurrent element: conflict – usually generated by race or class or gender or other type of social inequality. This list seems to be the closest to the dictionary definition of the social novel. Nevertheless, it still fails to generate a stable subgenre.

A Desirable Candidate

What, then, is a *social novel*? Moreover, what are its relations with *the novel of manners*? There are multiple occurrences where they are interchangeable, both as conceptual entities in theoretical inquiries and in terms of novelistic plots in the actual literary production, as shown by DCRR. Although their use in quantitative

endeavours is a difficult task, it is not an impossible one. I will further advance two possibilities.

1. Judging by all the definitions briefly retraced in this article, the safest way to keep this label as a subgenre in quantitative analyses while targeting Romanian modernity is to follow the two most stable recurrences: realism – in terms of formula and the presence of a social conflict based on race, gender, or class inequalities, that is, in terms of plot.

2. Following the modernist way of understanding the social novel, the second possibility revolves around the following idea: in order to be a social novel, a novel must not only be built around a social or historical event (revolution, war, or any other traceable events like the changing of a political regime), but it must also register a socially recognizable conflict generated by such an event. Albeit this would be more functional in an extended research that targets literary corpuses beyond modernity and beyond the Romanian space, this application could be problematic due to its lack of formal imperative. A novel that delves into the aftermath of war in order to make sense of what traumatized humanity feels could be both Proustian and realist, it could focus on private spaces, like the family or couples or, au contraire, on communities or work environments. The selection would need a greater degree of subjective interpretation and it could overlap once again with other subgenres such as romance or rural novels.

My inquiry did not aim to be exhaustive or to propose categorical definitions; it aimed to be a small contribution to a dynamic process of renegotiations of literary and critical terminologies. There are numerous methodological artefacts in literary history that cannot fit into a quantitative inquiry. In the case of the social novel however, some clarifications can help not only to backtrack the regionalisation of certain critical concepts in a peripheral cultural space, but also to mark a new beginning for the adaptation of old terms to new uses.

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DISTANT READING THE SOCIAL NOVEL IN ROMANIA. THEORETICAL
AND TAXONOMICAL CHALLENGES
(Abstract)

The most recent theoretical projects dedicated to comparative and literary studies challenge the very critical vocabulary that we have inherited from the more traditional theoretical discourses such as hermeneutics. Transnational studies, World Literature, quantitative and digital formalism are, at the moment, some of the most methodologically meticulous subdomains in contemporary research, striving to simplify the academic language in order to achieve scientific specialization. Following this general direction, the present article aims to re-evaluate one of the most frequently misrepresented novelistic subgenre that poses many difficulties to any quantitative approach. As a typology, the social novel has been invoked without ever being discussed theoretically. The purpose of this paper is to retrace the many uses and meanings of this typology in critical discourse and to propose the specialization of this subgenre for the sake of further quantitative and digital investigations.

Keywords: social novel, subgenre, genre theory, quantitative studies, digital formalism.

CITIND DE LA DISTANȚĂ ROMANUL SOCIAL ÎN ROMÂNIA.
PROVOCĂRI TEORETICE ȘI TAXONOMICE
(Rezumat)

Cele mai recente proiecte teoretice aparținând domeniului studiilor literare și comparatiste provoacă o revizitare a vocabularului critic moștenit de la demersurile hermeneutice, fenomenologice, sau postmoderniste. Studiile transnaționale, *World Literature*, formalismul

digital și studiile cantitative reprezintă, la ora actuală, una dintre cele mai bine dotate metodologic subdomenii de cercetare a producției literare și artistice, concentrându-și eforturile, în speță, asupra simplificării limbajului academic, prin eliminarea încărcăturii metaforice, în virtutea unei specializări a discursului despre literatură. Răspunzând la acest apel, lucrarea de față are drept obiect de cercetare unul dintre subgenurile românești care ridică numeroase dificultăți la orice intenție de panoramare cantitativă. *Romanul social* a fost instrumentat, ca tipologie, de cele mai multe ori în absența unei definiții. Intenția acestei lucrări este de a retrasa multiplele instrumentări și semnificații primite de această tipologie și de a propune o specializare a acestui subgen, funcțională în demersuri cantitative și digitale.

Cuvinte-cheie: roman social, subgen, teoria genurilor, studii cantitative, formalism digital.

ANGELO MITCHIEVICI

THE POSITION OF THE DECADENT NOVEL WITHIN ROMANIAN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* LITERATURE

The Late 19th-Century Romanian Novel

In 1903 Th. Cornel produced an inventory of Romanian literature in general and of the Romanian novel in particular in his French-language book-length study *La Roumanie littéraire d'aujourd'hui*. There were precious few such surveys, not due to the abundance of the literary material to be surveyed, but, on the contrary, due to its paucity. This is also what three decades before had been noted by one of the founders of Romanian literary criticism and the father of the first Romanian literary canon, Titu Maiorescu, both leader of Junimea, the important literary movement with a well-defined programme, and a towering politician as a member of the Conservative Party. Titu Maiorescu first published a survey of Romanian poetry, *O cercetare critică asupra poeziei române* [*A Critical Study of Romanian Poetry*], in 1867, with a new edition in 1892. Then, in 1872, he shifted his attention to Romanian prose in his *Direcția nouă în poezia și proza română* [*The New Direction of Romanian Poetry and Prose*]. It is striking that Maiorescu noted the *absence* of a literary genre, the novel, alongside the short story, seemingly compensated for by translations: “We have no literary activity and – characteristically – no novels and short stories are written, but only translated”¹. His radical statement thus dismissed all Romanian novels written earlier, among which Nicolae Filimon’s *Ciocoii vechi și noi* [*Fleecers Old and New*] (1863), Dimitrie Bolintineanu’s *Manoil* (1855) and *Elena* (1862), Radu Ionescu’s *Catastihul amoriului și La gura sobei* [*Love’s Books and By the Fireplace*] (1865) – to mention only novels proper and leaving aside romances.

We might object that such production is meagre enough, yet such paucity becomes truly significant if we regard its background, the process of rapid edification of a national literature almost *ex nihilo* since the latter half of the 19th century, when new literary genres were introduced and when the playwrights, novelists and essayists first started publishing in the Romanian language. Could Titu Maiorescu have missed the debut of the novel, however modest, in Romanian literature? May the respective novelists have been dismissed because they were not Junimea members? Anyway, beyond any bias on Maiorescu’s part, it should be mentioned that the novel of the time lacked both the coagulating generative force and the prestige of poetry to make much of an impression on Maiorescu and therefore be included in any “direction” contemplated by the Junimea critic, so as

¹ Titu Maiorescu, *Critice* [*Critical Studies*], București – Chișinău, Litera, [s.a.], p. 160.

to be able to foster emulation within the fin-de-siècle literary movement. For Titu Maiorescu, prose can be either non-fictional – wherein he included literary criticism and thus the writings of Alexandru Odobescu, Ion Strat, Ioan Slavici, Alexandru D. Xenopol, Vasile Burlă, Teodor Vârgolici, Constantin Negruzzi, Gheorghe Panu, Alexandru Lambrior, Petre P.Carp, Theodor Rosetti – or aesthetic. The latter encompassed very few works: *The Imitations of Nature* [*Copiile de pe natură*] by Jacob Negruzzi, the *Historical Short Stories* [*Nuvelele istorice*] by A. Odobescu, the studies of Messrs Vârgolici and Lambrior, the *Short Stories* [*Nuvelele*] by Mr Nicu Gane². While Titu Maiorescu was hardly inclined to analyse prose, he would dedicate separate studies, however, to an outstanding poet, Mihai Eminescu, to a major playwright, I.L. Caragiale, and to a promising prose writer, Mihail Sadoveanu. At stake was not literature proper, but literary language in relation to the Romanian language at one point in time during its formalization process, which explains Maiorescu's intense polemic with the Transylvanian philological school – Junimea's adversary – which had its own project of reforming the Romanian language. To state it otherwise, literature became the arena of a confrontation regarding the edification of the Romanian language – a major argument in this *querelle* within the ranks of the Romanian literati at the end of the 19th century. The aesthetic assessment of literature concerned at this point the assessment of the Romanian language it used and thus disseminated as a model, of the neological load which it locked in and metabolised. One further detail: Titu Maiorescu published his studies in Romanian because he did not aim at a foreign readership, as the highly polemical character of his studies also indicates.

By contrast, for Th. Cornel, what was at stake was to produce a picture of Romanian literature, of its aesthetic accomplishments, for an educated Romanian readership – at a time when education entailed knowing French – as well as for foreign readers interested in exotic literatures. Jules Michelet had been drawn to our folk literature thanks to the French translations produced by Vasile Alecsandri.

Yet, with regard to the Romanian novel, there was little to commend it even in 1903, when Th. Cornel highlighted what he considered noteworthy. Yet, not a word did he mention about the mystery novels of Ioan M. Bujoreanu, George Baronzi, C.D. Aricescu, I.P. Valerianu, nor about the hajduk novels penned mostly by the indefatigable N.D. Popescu³, or about the historical romances of Al. Pelimon. 19th-century Romanian paraliterature was to a great extent its literature too and engendered wide consensus among its readership. Writers encoded in the “original novel” phrase appended to the title which was at stake at the time, namely the introduction of the new literary genre with a Romanian topic, within a Romanian context. Th. Cornel mentioned a few accomplishments such as

² *Ibidem*, p.176.

³ On the hajduk novel as a subgenre see Roxana Patraş, “Hajduk Novels in Nineteenth-Century Romanian Culture: Notes on a Sub-Genre”, *Swedish Journal of Romanian Studies*, 2, 2019, 1, <http://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/A30120/pdf>. Accessed December 15, 2020.

Vlahuță's *Dan* (1894), which he commended for its "pages de fine psychologie", Duiliu Zamfirescu's *Viața la țară* [*Life in the Countryside*] (1898), which depicts a scene of the dissolution of local gentry, V. Crășescu's *Ovreiul* [*The Yid*] (1893), Const. Mille's *Dinu Millian* (1887), Traian Demetrescu's *Iubita* [*The Beloved*] (1895), which Th. Cornel somewhat dismissed by employing "plutôt en amateur de sensations nouvelles" as a taste differential too, Spiru Prasin's *Calea robilor* [*The Way of Slavery*] (1903), as well as I. Adam's novels of 1902, *Rătăcire* [*Lost*] and *Sybaris*, which Th. Cornel described as "deux romans à thèse, victimes d'une phraséologie accablante"⁴. Th. Cornel's was a fine survey of the Romanian novel scene; it nevertheless excluded the fashionable mystery novel and hajduk novel, but also, in part, the decadent novel, which depicted the fin-de-siècle issues in a modernist key.

This new modernist sensibility was already apparent in the symbolist poetry which poet and prose-writer Alexandru Macedonski introduced to the circle and literary magazine *Literatorul*, which he chaired himself. Th. Cornel himself noted this selfsame sensibility in both Traian Demetrescu and Ion Adam, which he labelled rather derisively as "sensations nouvelles", and the style of "phraséologie accablante". Nonetheless, insofar as he was familiar with French literature, Th. Cornel may have known the plentiful French literary output with decadent topics, however minor, yet highly praised by a public thirsty for "novel sensations". The decadent novel was immensely popular in France around 1900, particularly thanks to J.-K. Huysmans' emblematic novel *À Rebours* (1884), but also to a minor, if tremendously prolific and popular novelist, Joséphin Péladan. The latter had visited Romania at the invitation of Alexandru Bogdan-Pitești, an outstanding Maecenas favourable to modernity, whose "face" (in Matei Calinescu's terms) in the age was represented equally by decadence and symbolism. Joséphin Péladan's conference at the Athenee on 30 January 1898, which had raised a public scandal with a few provoking remarks, was a seminal influence on both Macedonski's symbolist circle and on the Romanian Secessionist artists involved with the *Tinerimea artistică*⁵.

We must note here a similarity with symbolist poetry, namely the fact that the reception of symbolist-decadent poetry began with minor poets such as Maurice Rollinat or Albert Samain, whose work allowed the subsequent adaptation of taste to a superior aesthetic canon such as that represented by Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine or Mallarmé. Nonetheless, both these aesthetic levels – the decadent masterpiece and the numberless decadent novels that share thematic concerns – were familiar to an exclusivist public at the end of the 19th century. Quite tellingly, Joséphin Péladan's first novel, *Le vice suprême*, illustrated by the symbolist

⁴ Th. Cornel, *La Roumanie littéraire d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, E. Sansot et Cie, 1903, pp. 24, 25.

⁵ For details see Angelo Mitchievici, "Joséphin Péladan și decadența latină" ["Joséphin Péladan and Latin Decadence"], in *Decadență și decadentism în contextul modernității române și europene* [*Decadence and Decadentism within Romanian and European Modernity*], București, Curtea-Veche, 2011, pp. 321-337.

Belgian painter Félicien Rops, was published in the same year – 1884 – as K.-J. Huysmans' *À Rebours*, and the author intended nothing more or less – in fact, he published as many as nineteen novels – than to create a human comedy of decadent sensibility and thus rival Balzac himself: “C’est le titre de la grande entreprise romanesque de Péladan (*La Décadence Latine*), qui voulait être pour la France de 1880 ce que la *Comédie Humaine* fut pour celle de 1830”⁶.

Decadence and Modernism: the Dynamics of Transition

Despite its popularity, the decadent novel is far from being popular, as Jean de Palacio aptly remarks in his *Figures et formes de la décadence*, due to its erudition – the recourse to the cultural metatext being the earmark of decadence –, its cultivation of style, its artistic writing, its transgression of sexual taboos, in what Krafft-Ebing famously inventoried in his 1886 study as *psychopathia sexualis*⁷:

La Décadence est une littérature d’abord difficile. L’espérer jamais populaire serait commettre un non-sens. Elle oppose au lecteur le barrage de son érudition, de son écriture et des ses silences. Pour être porteuse de scandale et dénuée de reconfort, elle inspire toujours la méfiance et la gêne⁸.

Late 19th-century French literature produced a genuine “bibliothèque décadente”, as Jean de Palacio names the collection he supervises, which rescues from oblivion writers such as Jean Lorrain, Félicien Champsaur, Catulle Mendès, Camille Lemonnier, Jules Bois, Pierre Louÿs, Jean Richepin, Jane de la Vaudère, Leon Bloy, Paul Adam, Paul Alexis, Adolphe Belot, René Maizeroy, Michel Corday, Edmond Deschaumes, Fortuné du Boigobey, Jean Rameau, Maxime Formont, etc. The French comparatist argues, with regard to the aesthetic relevance of decadent literature, that (1) it was highly popular with the readers in its heyday; though now forgotten, its highly fashionable practitioners influenced public taste, thereby also modelling lifestyles in the age; (2) it represents a “precieux magasin d’images et de signes”⁹, or, in other words, it depicts a number of features of fin-de-siècle French culture; and (3) it has made a significant aesthetic contribution not only to style, but also to literary ideas in terms of experimentation rendered as *hybridity*, a feature which premodernity shared with modernity. Furthermore, certain symbolist, naturalist and realist writers such as Mallarmé, Verlaine, Huysmans, Mirbeau and Flaubert, according to Jean de Palacio, shared a decadent sensibility apparent in their works.

⁶ Jean de Palacio, *Figures et formes de la décadence*, Paris, Séguier, 1994, p. 19.

⁷ See Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Translated by René Lobstein. Preface by Pierre Janet, Paris, Payot, 1931.

⁸ Jean de Palacio, *Figures et formes de la décadence*, p. 11.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

At the beginning of the 20th century, including during the interwar period, some of these decadent writers who enjoyed wide popularity would also be translated into Romanian. Some such cases are quite telling¹⁰: Jean Lorrain, *Aventuri princiare* [*Princely Adventures*], Pierre Louÿs, *Aphrodita. Roman de moravuri antice* (1928, a translation of *Aphrodite: mœurs antiques*, 1896) in two editions, *Femeia și paița. Roman din viața spaniolă* (1931, a translation of *La Femme et le pantin*, 1898), a novel emblematic of decadent fiction, in two editions, *O voluptate nouă* (1923, a translation of *Une volupté nouvelle*, 1899); Oscar Wilde, *Crimă și conștiință* (1920, a translation of *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*, whose Romanian title freely adapts the original)¹¹; Catulle Mendès, *Frumoasa cu inema de zăpadă. Copilul găsit, Nuvele* [*The Frozen Heart Beauty. The Found Child. Short Stories*](1913), *Romanul roșu* (1912, a translation of *Le Roman rouge*, around 1880), *Tânăra căsătorită* (a translation of *Monstres Parisiens*), second edition, again emblematic of decadence; Alfred Delvau, *La poarta raiului* (1899, a translation of *À la porte du paradis*, 1867); Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Cartea fecioarelor. Nuvele* [*Short Stories*] (1911, a translation of *Il libro delle vergini*, 1884), *În lipsa lui Valer, Martirul*, short stories (1910, a likely translation of *Nell'assenza di Lanciotto*, 1892, and *Il martirio di San Sebastiano*, written between 1910 and 1911), *Nuvele* [*Short Stories*] (1909), *Pământ virgin. Nuvele și schițe* (1914, a translation of *Terra vergine*), *Tragedia a două fecioare*; Félicien Champsaur, *Mesalina. Orgia latină. Pentalogie biblical ilustrată* (1921, a translation of *Mesalina; L'Orgie latine*), in three editions, virtually a best seller in the age; Prosper Castanier, *Nuvele antice. Moravuri din timpul decadenței romane* (1899, probably a translation of *L'Orgie Romaine*, 1897).

In his *Influența franceză asupra spiritului public în România. Originile. Studiu asupra stării societății românești în vremea domniilor fanariote* [*The French Influence on the Public Spirit in Romania – the Origins: A Study of the Condition of Romanian Society under the Phanariot Rulers*], Pompiliu Eliade¹² has documented an ample phenomenon of acculturation, of voluntary assimilation of French culture and civilisation, first by the Romanian elites and subsequently by various groups (as a function of educational background) in the second half of the 19th century. Thus, we can see that the yardstick of average education in the latter

¹⁰ I have selected exclusively prose texts; however, among the translated texts are also poetry or drama by certain representative decadent prose writers such as Belgian poet and dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck, very fashionable in Romania in the interwar period. Where I have failed to mention the publication year of the Romanian translation, this is due to the data available in print. Many of these translations circulated as broadsheets without much editorial lustre, which also indicates their popular character and their wide dissemination in the form of instalments.

¹¹ Virtually all Oscar Wilde's works are translated into Romanian.

¹² Pompiliu Eliade, *Influența franceză asupra spiritului public în România. Originile. Studiu asupra stării societății românești în vremea domniilor fanariote* [*The French Influence on the Public Spirit in Romania – the Origins: A Study of the Condition of Romanian Society under the Phanariot Rulers*], București, Editura Institutului Cultural Român, 2006.

half of the 19th century entailed mandatory knowledge of French. Many works of the decadent writers were read in the French original, as can be glimpsed from the quotations in the cultural magazines, as well as from the intertextuality of various literary works, which traces not only a complex network of affinities, but also one regarding the circulation and dissemination of literary ideas and models. Mateiu I. Caragiale, one of the decadent novelists of the interwar period, provides evidence of the Romanian taste for decadence. His correspondence with N. A. Boicescu at a crucial time for the former's cultural formation includes references to his youth readings, where pride of place is enjoyed by decadent novels and short stories by Barbey d'Aurevilly, Remy de Gourmont, Jean Lorrain, Félicien Champsaur, Paul Hervieu, Maurice Maindron and others. In effect, a decadent novel is often identifiable also by its focus on its elective affinity, as its characters pride themselves on their literary and aesthetic tastes in a symbolic gesture of coordinating their tastes with what they read or admire in the arts. Romanian literature would be strewn with decadent pieces as late as 1947, when all "decadent" writers were prohibited and any aestheticism in literature was stigmatised ideologically as decadent.

Echoes of Huysmans's novel can be found everywhere in Europe: in the UK, in Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, as the intertext, allusions and affinities demonstrate; in Italy, in Gabriele D'Annunzio's decadent novel *Il Piacere* (1889), where the systematic use of pastiche has raised the spectre of plagiarism accusations; and in Romania, in the novel *Suflete oboseite* [*Exhausted Souls*] (1898) by Constantin I.A. Nottara, a writer whom Th. Cornel never mentions. Another novel, *De vânzare* [*For Sale*] (1896), anticipated the new decadent sensibility through its preoccupation with the major themes of decadence.

What is noteworthy with regard to Romanian novels before 1900¹³ is the presence of this new sensibility encoded aesthetically not as an obscure element, a curiosity, an eccentricity, but as a formative element, which demonstrates the modernity of the novel at a time of assimilation-fixation of the very genre in Romanian culture; at the time, the novelistic genre was still indebted to the romance, while tentatively fashioning itself into the novel proper, to use the terminology of novelistic history given currency by Paul Cornea in a seminal study¹⁴. The decadent novel became the turning-point of this change thanks to the

¹³ Muzeul Digital al Literaturii Române [The Digital Museum of Romanian Literature], a project of *Transilvania* magazine, Sibiu, permits online search of all novels published by 1900: <https://revistatransilvania.ro/mdr/>. Furthermore, open access to all these novels is available thanks to another large-scale online project, the ELTeC: European Literary Text Collection (Distant Reading for European Literary History), set up on the Romanian side by Roxana Patraș: [Zenodo.org](https://zenodo.org) [online ELTeC](#) [online ELTeC release 1.0.0](#) [online ELTeC-rom](#) [online ELTeC-rom release 0.7.0](#).

¹⁴ Paul Cornea, *Regula jocului* [*The Rule of the Game*], București, Eminescu, 1980.

pre-eminently modern sensibility which it promoted, thus profoundly altering the familiar novelistic genre from the novel of manners, or the “social” novel.

At the end of the 19th-century, the novelistic genre in Romania included a number of romances and precious few novels; the writers stuck closely to their model through pastiche, as is the case of the novels of Const. I.A. Nottara, as well as of Ion Adam, if we go beyond the year 1900. Apart from the very few novels properly decadent, there were also novels such as those by Traian Demetrescu, which partook of this aesthetic sensibility at the level of style and character construction, yet without fully articulating decadent concerns. This is what Th. Cornel regarded, in Vlahuță’s novel *Dan*, as “psychological finesse”, where character psychology transgresses typology, in a process of individualisation characteristic of modernity as analysed by Matei Calinescu in his *Five Faces of Modernity*¹⁵.

Arguably, the fin-de-siècle Romanian novel evinces the same trait that David Weir, in *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, has identified in European culture with respect to the relationship between decadence and Modernism. Investigating the difficulty of defining decadence, David Weir contends that the notion names not only a literary movement that never crystallised, never forged a conceptual form and an individuality through elimination of ambiguity, hence it is “a drama of unsettled aesthetics”; it also names an overall literary phenomenon, a part of modernity or, in Weir’s own terms, “a dynamics of transition”¹⁶: “Decadence is transition, a drama of unsettled aesthetics, and the mixture of literary tendencies constituting that transition is at once within and without tradition and convention”¹⁷. In other words, we witness here a double move: one concerns the edification of a literary movement with its own aesthetics (its poetics), with its own representative authors and with its own corpus, especially large in French literature; the other concerns the edification of Modernism from Romanticism via decadence.

I have argued, in *Decadență și decadentism în contextul modernității românești și europene*, that decadence is a mutagen insofar as it alters the aesthetic DNA of conceptually clearly identified literary movements such as Romanticism, Naturalism, Symbolism or, in the UK, Aestheticism (the Aesthetic Movement). I have also argued that decadent aesthetics permeates, among others, the modernist novel¹⁸. In fact, looking at the phenomenon from the perspective of subsequent

¹⁵ Matei Călinescu, *Cinci fețe ale modernității. Modernism, avangardă, kitsch, decadență, Postmodernism* [*Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-garde, Kitsch, Decadence, Postmodernism*]. Translated by Tatiana Pătrulescu and Radu Țurcanu, Iași, Polirom, 2017.

¹⁶ David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996, p. 15.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁸ There are countless examples of postmodern novels which recycle elements of decadent aesthetics in the spirit of a literary game. A case in point in Romania is Mircea Cărtărescu.

movements, we notice that the Avant-garde, not only Modernism, took up in part the decadent legacy, or rather integrated it within its own makeup, as Avant-garde theorist Renato Poggioli¹⁹ argues, which is a way of fleshing out one of its own theses, namely its panaestheticism.

David Weir contends:

My position is that decadence is the common denominator underlying the extremely complex and diverse literary activities in the mid- to late nineteenth century and that this substratum of decadence is crucial to the development of the modern novel²⁰.

To state it otherwise:

...a number of literary movements and tendencies developed through decadence, either by reacting against its characteristic styles and terms, or by extending them in some way. The second point is that decadence itself developed as an independent movement at the same time that other, better known movements were developing through it. The dynamics of decadence as the medium of cultural transition between Romanticism and Modernism is complicated by this double movement²¹.

When he analyses the relationship between decadence and Modernism with respect to the novel, Weir gives the double example of James Joyce and André Gide²². This is to say that there are novels which, far from being decadent thematically, are nevertheless permeated by a decadent sensibility, for instance through the maladive refinement of characters such that they themselves are sickly, through their aestheticism in deportment and affinities, through a culturally informed and deformed eroticism and the erudite cultivation of sensation, or through the inclusion within the horizon of existence of that of books which reflect the characters' decadent affinities. The two types of novel, the properly decadent one and the one with decadent affinities and modernist inclination, were produced by the Romanian writers first blazing the novelistic trail. What I have shown about the Romanian interwar novel²³ was already manifestedly at work in this early stage of the edification of the novelistic genre in Romanian literature in the latter half of the 19th century.

¹⁹ Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated from the Italian by Gerald Fitzgerald, Cambridge, Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 1968.

²⁰ David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, p. xvii.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. xix.

²² See the relationships between decadence and Romanticism especially in Flaubert's novel *Salammbô*, between decadence and Naturalism in the Goncourt brothers' novel *Germinie Lacerteux*, between decadence and aestheticism in Walter Pater's novel *Marius the Epicurean*, between decadence and *décadisme*, the movement started by Anatole Baju, in K.-J. Huysmans's novel *À Rebours*.

²³ See Angelo Mitchievici, *Decadență și decadentism*, pp. 498-585.

Faces of Modernity: Suflete obosite [Exhausted Souls] and Intim [Intimate]

Suflete obosite, the novel of Const. I.A. Nottara, the one who compared himself to Octave Mirbeau, makes the model apparent, according to a contemporary of the author, the symbolist-decadent poet Dimitrie Karnabatt: “the novel oozed the influence of Huysmans, for its protagonist, an elevated spirit thanks to his hereditary exhaustion, resembled Des Esseintes in *À Rebours*”²⁴. Decadent themes underpin this *fin de l'époque* novel, from its focus on the last scion of a prestigious aristocratic Byzantine family, Alexe Villara Comneanu, to the devitalisation, the “exhaustion” typical of the extinguishing of a family, from the erudition and aesthetic refinement of the family, the quintessence of its cultural-civilisational legacy, to the sterility and incapacity of investing all this genealogical capital. Individual decline parallels family decline, and the latter, in turn, reflects the larger decline of local aristocracy vis-à-vis the barbarism of upstart bourgeoisie, with its intrepid, transactional spirit honed for financial speculation, yet lacking intellectual finesse, fine manners, nobility and virtues. This kind of conflict would undergird Sadoveanu’s prose writings and generally the texts written by authors associated with *Sămănătorism*, the early 20th–century literary-cultural movement that idealised the traditional village vis-à-vis the “corrupt” city. The decadent character, as this Byzantine-Wallachian des Esseintes is, is associated with a large library, often doubled by a pinacotheca, as in Huysmans’s novel, whose selection criteria correspond to a particular taste, namely decadent sensibility. Alexe Villara Comneanu boasts such a library, which includes Huysmans, Flaubert with the novel *Salammbô* and the prose poem *La tentation de Saint-Antoine*, the Goncourt brothers with *La Faustine*, Paul Adam with *Princesses Byzantines*, as well as the complete works of Edgar Allan Poe and William Shakespeare. The family’s pinacotheca includes Salvator Rosa, Tintoretto, Fuseli, Anibal Caraccio and Van Dyck, as well as a copy of *Herodias et Salomé* by Gustave Moreau, a painter affiliated with decadence both thematically and stylistically. Another character, the solicitor Zamfir Voilă, the virile-voluntary counterpart of the “exhausted” aristocratic protagonist, publishes, in French, a study on Nero, a fashionable subject for the Roman imperial decadence it evokes, and has the same book references as all decadent works – Baudelaire, Huysmans and Edgar Allan Poe:

His aesthetic observations on Nerone, compared to Beaudelaire (*sic*), Huysmans, Edgard Pöe (*sic*), in relation to all literary movements in France, had been lively debated in foreign magazines. Erotomaniac aesthetics, Neronism, Sapphism, the artistic life of Roman and Greek courtesans, the most important chapters of the aesthetic analysis by Zamfir Voilă, where the author had sought to establish the rapport between the orgiastic, artistic debauchery of ancient Rome and that of modern

²⁴ Dimitrie Karnabatt, *Bohema de altădată [Bygone Bohemians]*, București, Vremea, 1944, pp. 194, 195.

France, had kindled endless debate among the contributors to literary magazines in France and had made him famous abroad²⁵.

That the novel mentions the character's study raises the topic to the level of literary ideas and the history of ideas, of debates current in the age, which sheds light on the cultural context within which the decadent novel is set.

Here too the exemplary Huysmans model is crucial, for the last scion of a family of Byzantine emperors caters to his tastes such that they establish a literary genealogy. In literature, such genealogy is rooted in a playwright recovered by the Romantics as their precursor, Shakespeare, via Edgar Allan Poe, in an already aesthetically mutant formula which blends the Gothic with a decadent sensibility, with a work by Flaubert which David Weir finds illustrative of how decadence altered the Romantic formula, and likewise with the aesthetically altered Naturalism of the Goncourt brothers. As regards painting, Gustave Moreau fully illustrates the decadent taste both thematically and stylistically, Henry Fuseli is the master of nightmarish supernatural themes, the baroque painter Salvator Rosa, a protoromantic, evokes a sensibility for ruin-strewn landscapes of stately devastation, and Van Dyck is famous for his portraiture, with dandy-looking aristocratic sitters. By depicting such closed-circuit libraries and pinacothecas, decadence set up its own tradition and genealogy, with its secret affinities, and thus related writers and painters belonging to different cultural ages. In effect, the cultural intertext is crucial for understanding a work whose decadence constitutes one of the "faces of modernity" as Matei Calinescu describes it. Like Huysmans' protagonist, with his interest in exotic horticulture and synaesthetic experiments, Alexe Villara Comneanu owns a greenhouse and manufactures his own scents, whose oneiric narcosis projects episodes of orgiastic Roman decadence, a favourite topic of fin-de-siècle decadent novels. Nottara's decadent novel features decadence as the bridge between Romanticism and Modernism. Yet, the praise of medievalism, with its outstanding historical personages and the romantic passion for the past, receives here a touch of alterity. Any interest expressed in generalizable ideality is doubled by an interest in the intimate life of the ancestors, the history of private life, the intimate detail, the anecdotal, the trivia and their own *petite histoire*, the kind of exotic details that Mateiu I. Caragiale's *Agenda. Acta. Memoranda* abounds in. Or, the protagonists of Roman decadence prefer precisely this kind of boudoir histories, with their spicy details and crude narratives, rather than heroism and patriotic devotion.

Intim, Traian Demetrescu's novella, sparked a lively polemic on its publication in 1892. Its novelty, like that of Vlahuță's novel *Dan*, was received with harsh criticism by many. The critic signing under the name Rion in *Evenimentul literar* [*The Literary Event*], for instance, started a debate on the problematic novelty of

²⁵ Const. I.A. Nottara, *Suflete obosite* [*Exhausted Souls*], Craiova, Institutul de Editură Ralian și Ignat Samitca, 1898, pp. 113-114.

these texts; a year later, which indicates that the interest in Traian Demetrescu's novel was hardly dormant, E.D.F. associated the author, depreciatively, with the Parnasian poet and prolific decadent novelist Armand Sylvestre, hugely popular at the time²⁶. Th. Cornel was rather reserved about *Iubita* [*Beloved*] (1895), an interesting sentimental novel, and mentioned no other novels by Demetrescu. Actually, the first challenge posed by Traian Demetrescu's novel is its diary format with its characteristic dated entries, which here span the period from 5 May to 5 July. A young man retires "within sublime Nature" – in the countryside – to partake of the melancholy of solitude, to return to his own interiority which provides him an opportunity for contemplation too. The novel best illustrates David Weir's thesis about the transition from Romanticism to modernity, with decadent sensibility as a go-between. The young man's sensibility appears to be romantic, for it follows the regressive drive in search for an idyllic micro-harmony, to use Virgil Nemoianu's notion. Nonetheless, there is something fundamentally different about the way in which the character lives his melancholy. The idyllic background is often transmogrified into a painting.

Furthermore, there is an active aesthetic consciousness which transcends romantic experience and thereby generates an aesthetic sublimation of the natural landscape as a manifest painterly or readerly reference. Even spontaneous emotion is converted into aesthetic emotion, although this occurs thanks to the vast referential potential of the work of art which bridges the reception of elements of nature, or, in other words, permanently processes landscape data as relevant only insofar as they correspond to a literary or painterly reference: "It's a painting: cattle moving slowly, heavily, followed by a peasant woman who displays her naked body under the moonshine. It is an idyll, a pastel of classical daintiness..."²⁷; "I returned home gazing upwards to the sky the miserable Tasso loved so much and often described as skilfully as the brilliant Dante"²⁸. Silence too evokes readerly references: "It's such a deep, perfect silence that you can hear the echo of a sigh, as the great Flaubert says so poetically"²⁹ and "inspires a sentimental education" – in other words, generates not ataraxy or elegiac remembrance, but an analytic drive. Nor is this technique of readerly or painterly associations occasional; rather, it becomes the rule, so that virtually every page includes at least one, if not two or more, such references. The moonshine is "like the touch of thin fingers, like a breeze 'that is blonde', as François Coppé would say"³⁰; the human soul best unveils its nature through the work of art, of nature turned into an aesthetic artefact. Carl Maria von Weber's *The Storm* recalls "the nice, sickly figure" of the German

²⁶ E.D.F., "O tocmeală" ["A Bargain"], *Evenimentul literar*, 1894, 6.

²⁷ Traian Demetrescu, *Intim* [*Intimate*]. Edited with an introduction by Ileana Manole, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc, 1983, p. 51.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 47-48.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

lady who had played it on the piano, unless the storm refers to Dostoevsky in straightforward fashion: “This storm still retains its evocative power, which the brilliant writings of Dostoevsky are filled with”³¹; alongside the consumption of spirits, smoking, which lulls awareness to sleep, evokes its condemnation by Tolstoy, as well as its defence by Dumas fils. Most readerly references include the romantics such as Mihai Eminescu, Heinrich Heine, Alfred de Musset (with his poem *Nuit de décembre*), Alfred de Vigny, Goethe (with his *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* / *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) and Rousseau (with his *Confessions*), as well as Sully Prudhomme, the Parnasian of Romantic bent (whose *Stances et Poèmes* is often quoted in the diary entries), and writers whose works mark the transition from Romanticism to decadence, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant, or niche writers, like the very minor cabaret poet Raoul Ponchon (misspelled Raul Panchon), Edmond Haraucourt, the writer of “poèmes hystériques”, or the lustreless “Junimea” writer Theodor Șerbănescu.

Thus, the young man puts up the airs of the member of a decadent family when he declares himself, if in interrogative format, as blasé: “Could I have been born blasé, ‘with my soul wounded’?”³². Anyway, his analytic spirit works in tandem with a sense of defeat, of detachment: “Of course: this analysis is much too personal to yield to generalisation. Yet, what if it sums up the psychology of isolated cases which make up the family of those vanquished early?”³³. The only decidedly decadent episode concerns the fleeting affair with a Danish woman who has all the characteristic traits of a *femme fatale*: she flaunts the perverse, sickly – namely, hysterical and culturally informed – eroticism symptomatic of incipient modernity. The Danish erotomaniac is also a collector of rare scents, which she “breathes in with a sickly voluptuousness”³⁴; she likes spirits, which intoxicate her senses with an intensity that evokes the “artificial paradises” of the opiates and of Baudelaire: “They give her a bizarre voluptuousness, which engenders lubricious ecstasy or something akin to the slumber of drinkers of hashish”³⁵. “Bizarreness”, “refinement”, “hysteria”, “mysticism” and “vice” are traits that at the time belonged to the aesthetic code of decadence, all the more so as they were circumscribed by eroticism: “From mad kissing she suddenly switches to bitter disgust; at other times she speaks about mystical love. And in between the caresses of a refined woman and hysterical, brutal spasms, she recounts her adolescence – an awfully vicious adolescence”³⁶. The protagonist undertakes his sentimental education with Antoine François Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut*, another emblematic novel recovered by decadent tradition, first read during his undergraduate studies,

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 39.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

from which he learns the following word of wisdom: “To a certain extent, every man is a ‘des Grieux’ and every woman a ‘Manon Lescaut’”³⁷.

The novelty concerns psychologising illness in relation to eroticism as perversion, via Baudelairean decadence, as Mario Praz aptly puts it: “It was the Romantics, profiting from the theories of the Divine Marquis, and especially of Baudelaire, who gave a psychological turn to the refinements of perversity”³⁸. The author of *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* regards decadence as crepuscular Romanticism whose erotic sensibility bears the impression of the Divine Marquis – in other words, he suggests this transition from Romanticism to Modernism via decadence which the fin-de-siècle Romanian novel also illustrates.

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THE POSITION OF THE DECADENT NOVEL WITHIN ROMANIAN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* LITERATURE*(Abstract)*

My approach considers the beginnings of establishing the novel as a literary genre in the context of Romanian literature and the critical reviews of the new genre and its specialization in a series of relevant subgenres from the novel with outlaws (Hajduks) to the decadent novel. We followed the evolution of the latter at the end of the 19th century and the growth of the first germs of modernity. Relying on David Weir's theory in *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* that decadentism is "a dynamics of transition" to Avant-garde and modernity and the mutagenic character of decadentism highlighted by many theorists from Marion Praz and A.E. Carter to Koenraad W. Swart and Renato Poggioli, I envisaged two case studies. In this regard, we analyzed by comparison the novel *Exhausted Souls* (1893) by Const. I.A. Notarra, partly a pastiche after a decadent-model novel, *À rebours* by K.-J. Huysmans, and the novel *Intimate* (1892) by Traian Demetrescu to underline this transition to modernity beyond common themes and an aestheticizing perspective on emotions.

Keywords: novel, decadence, modernism, fin de siècle, sensibility.

POZIȚIA ROMANULUI DECADENT ÎN CADRUL LITERATURII ROMÂNE
*FIN-DE-SIÈCLE**(Rezumat)*

Abordarea mea are în vedere începuturile constituirii romanului ca gen literar în contextul literaturii române și al receptării critice a noului gen și specializarea acestuia într-o serie de subgenuri relevante de la romanul cu haiduci la romanul decadent. Am urmărit evoluția acestuia din urmă la sfârșitul secolului XIX și apariția primilor germeni ai modernității. Bazându-mă pe teoria lui David Weir din *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* cum că decadentismul reprezintă „o dinamică a tranziției” către avangarde și modernitate și pe caracterul mutagen al decadentismului evidențiat de numeroși teoreticieni de la Marion Praz și A.E. Carter la Koenraad W. Swart și Renato Poggioli, mi-am propus două studii de caz. În acest sens, am analizat prin comparație romanul *Suflete obosite* (1893) al lui Const. I.A. Notarra, în parte o pastişă după un roman decadent-model, *À rebours* al lui K.-J. Huysmans, și romanul *Intim* (1892) al lui Traian Demetrescu pentru a evidenția această tranziție către modernitate dincolo de teme comune și de o perspectivă estetizantă asupra emoțiilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: roman, decadență, modernism, fin de siècle, sensibilitate.

ELENA CRAȘOVAN

MAGICAL REALISM AVATARS IN THE ROMANIAN NOVEL

Phases of Magical Realist Literature and the Distribution of Romanian Novels Therein

Almost one century after magical realism made its way into literary criticism debates and in “the world republic of letters” (to use Pascale Cassanova’s groundbreaking 2007 term), it is still a phenomenon of interest for researchers. For it proves to be malleable enough, always ready to mutate and associate with no matter what topically new directions (modernism, postmodernism, postcolonialism), capable to cross a great variety of geographical and cultural spaces ranging from interwar Europe to Latin America, subsequently exported to postcolonial Asia and Africa after the Latin-American *boom*, and sweeping the stage in many a Western capital city, as well as in the countries of the former communist bloc. It is one of the most productive critical concepts to date; the success with literary critics and readers alike of such emblematic writers as Márquez, Rushdie, Morrison has granted its presence in brilliant world literature volumes of the last decades¹: it features as an exemplary world literature genre, always ready for new attachments and interconnections at every turn, conducive to fresh “constellations of texts whose identity is defined in accordance with new needs and new critical and aesthetic desires translated into new organizing principles”². Naturally, the resulting genre attracts a distinct poetics, cross-culturally recognizable in a significant part of the fictional creations ranging from the twentieth century to the present. We can consequently propose that there are three magical realism phases in world literature, each with distinct theoretical premises of its own, as well as with specific historical, regional, and stylistic features. Early magical realism appeared in Europe in the period following the First World War; it was followed by the Latin-American *boom*, and, thirdly, by the postcolonial and post-communist expansion.

In what follows, we alternate the chronological and typological perspectives with a view to grouping the magical realist accents which appeared in the Romanian novel, making our way through some re-readings, in this key, of fiction

¹ Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, vol. I: *History, Geography and Culture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006; Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, Djelal Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, London – New York, Routledge, 2012; Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (eds.), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, vol. I, Amsterdam – Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004.

² Mariano Siskind, “The Genres of World Literature. The Case of Magical Realism”, in Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, Djelal Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, p. 347.

written in the previous century, and connecting the publications in our country with the global tendencies that configure the history of the genre.

Although the theoretical approaches to magical realism in Romanian literature cannot possibly match the wide range of the Anglo-Saxon discussions of this subject³, we can safely assimilate to this trend a number of fictional titles by Mihail Sadoveanu and Vasile Voiculescu, whose fascination for the archaic and esotericism and whose re-writing of history in the light of myth may well be placed side by side with the novels by Massimo Bontempelli or Ernst Jünger.

Though interwar literature examples of magical realism are present as rather isolated flashes, Romanian fiction of this type features as a distinct direction in the 1960s and 1970s – under the direct Latin-American influence. But there is more than mimesis in the novels published by Ștefan Bănuțescu, D.R. Popescu, George Bălăiță or Sorin Titel; they are primarily reactions to the communist domination of socialist realism. It is worth noting that after their initial evasionist tendencies, the magical realist novels of these writers acquired subversive notes, which caused distinct ironical and grotesque accents and brought Romanian literature close to a lot of the Central-European literature of the period in reaction to the communist regime's oppression⁴. Next, the members of the Romanian 1980s generation, Ștefan Agopian, Mircea Nedelciu, Ioan Groșan, stand out through the symbiosis of their new formula of magical realism with textualist techniques and their tendency to adopt postmodernist techniques: historiographic metafiction, covert and unstable irony, multiple narrative threads.

The novels published in post-communism represent a third distinct phase. Just as in the West the association of magical realism with postcolonial studies has had a favourable effect on the reception of writers from the former Commonwealth, in Central European, and especially in Romanian culture we can speak, in novels by Mircea Cărtărescu, Doina Ruști, Bogdan Popescu, Radu Pavel Gheo, Tudor Ganea, of certain characteristic magical realist themes and motifs: historical atrocities are re-inscribed at the juncture of official discourse and individual experience; the outlook of the marginals predominates; irony and grotesque presentations abound.

³ Among the fundamental titles in the vast literature that document the phenomenon are: Amaryll Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic. Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*, New York, Routledge, 1985; Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, Durham – London, Duke University Press, 1995; Roberto Gonzáles Echevarría, *Myth and Archive. A Theory of Latin American Narrative*, Durham – London, Duke University Press 1998; Jean Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Postcolonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 1998; Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2004; Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: between Faith and Irreverence*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009; Eugene L. Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction*, Amherst, Cambria, 2011.

⁴ E.g., Mihail Bulgakov, Milan Kundera, Bohumil Hrabal, Danilo Kiš, Ismail Kadare, Ivan Klíma, Milorad Pavič.

Finally, to register the present study as part of world literature research, it can be added that the appearance of the novels mentioned is not only a matter of genealogy or of limited, national causality justifiable by the internal evolution of Romanian literature, but belongs instead to an extensively drawn map of the global phenomenon.

Incipient Typological Frames and Correspondences

The first forms of magical realism have been connected to the new geo-political configurations that appeared “in this border-zone of Europe, where it functions either as a compensatory, or as an illuminating, vision of brutal and unaccountable historical circumstances (mainly before and immediately after World War II)”⁵.

Indeed, the term had been used with regard to particular tendencies in German-Austrian and Central European fiction as early as the 1930s. It is worth recalling that most theorists associate the birth of magical realism as a syntagm with Franz Roh’s 1925 essay, as applied to the fine arts domain. Roh highlights, on the one hand, the return of painters to realism, in line with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* trend, yet representing a “new realism” marked by the passage through expressionism, this merger of grotesque reality and a metaphysical perspective⁶. On the other hand, magical realism uncovers the mystery that “does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it”⁷. Thus, magical realism ends up absorbing aspects of what Russian Formalists designated as “defamiliarization”. The European novelists theorizing about magical realism, starting from Roh, while also writing fiction in this manner, were Ernst Jünger and Massimo Bontempelli. The German writer is known for the commitment to retrieving the magic that hides in things, aiming, therefore, at the reconciliation of German romanticism with modern technology. Meanwhile, the Italian writer⁸ embraces “the other dimension” which opens mythical and magical perspectives on reality, seeking a consciously entertained primitivism capable of reconciling the everyday and the miraculous. In the novels of the first phase of European magical realism, spatial dislocations structure the narrative in accordance with initiatory experiences. Plots contain several epiphanies and potent symbolically charged events. Thus, the magical

⁵ Cristina Șandru, *Worlds Apart? A postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East-Central European Literature*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, pp. 148-149.

⁶ Kenneth Reeds, *What Is Magical Realism? An Explanation of a Literary Style*, New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 2012, p. 47.

⁷ Franz Roh, in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, Durham – London, Duke University Press, 1995, p. 16.

⁸ Massimo Bontempelli’s best known novel containing clear magical realist elements is *Gente nel tempo* (1937), translated into Romanian as *Oameni în timp*, in 1968.

realist aesthetic programme aims at inventing fresh myths capable of renewing the cultural atmosphere.

In the same period, Romanian literature was bent on synchronizing with the artistic modernism of Europe, while writers engaged in a prolific debate arising from the question of “why we fail to have novels”. By launching new fictional formulae, they tried to fill in the existing gaps with texts that deviated from traditional realism. Consequently, it becomes impossible to label clearly, as either realistic or fantastic, Mihail Sadoveanu’s or Vasile Voiculescu’s short stories, because the typical fantastic hesitation is missing, and the narrative glides imperceptibly between diverse levels, retrieving mythical and archaic aspects of old civilizations.

Here are the principles enunciated in Mihail Sadoveanu’s novel *Creanga de aur* [*The Golden Bough*] (1933) through the mouthpiece of the intradiegetic narrator, Stamat: the professor is a scholar lost in lyrical effusions and comes from “the nether world”, acting as the guide of “the unknown world”, a pristine region “steeped in persistent signs of yore” that “overcome him with a primitive’s emotions”. Though he is “a scientist”, i.e. a geologist, Stamat opposes to reason “the ability of reaching right into the heart of things” – by what is termed “spiritual cognition”⁹. The author returns to an age overlooked by chronicles (the eighth century) in order to write its mythical history. Mihail Sadoveanu weaves into his story of Kesarion Breb landmarks of attested history (the Byzantine Empire in the age of Empress Irina and her son, Constantine, the outcome of the iconoclasts’ defeat, the last Nicean Ecumenical Council). The passage from the religion of Zamolxis to Christianity and the esoteric lore belong to another, archaic world and to an alternative world-view that is quite naturally inserted in the overall narrative of the chronicle species. Through its philosophical meditation about world history, the novel ranks – thematically – among the magical realist texts. The blurring of frontiers between history, legend, myth and fantasy, which prevents readers from knowing where they are unless they constantly confront the text of the novel with historical sources, recommends this narrative both as miraculously realistic (i.e. tantamount to the ontological species of Latin-American magical realism, in whose view reality is magical in itself) and as epistemological (according to the European brand of magical realism, for which magic derives from the intensity of the outlook that “alters” reality)¹⁰. Although the narrative is interspersed with fabulous elements (the Prince, the charmed slippers, Cinderella)¹¹ and with overlapping identities (Old Woman Teosva/ the future empress Maria), the fairytale frame

⁹ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Creanga de aur* [*The Golden Bough*] (1933), București, Minerva, 1976, pp. 5-10 *passim*. When not specified otherwise, the English translations from Romanian are mine.

¹⁰ The classification was proposed by Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism*.

¹¹ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [*Noah’s Ark. An Essay about Romanian Novel*], București, 1000+1 Gramar, 2001, p. 607.

gradually turns into a novelistic structure, as the hero, Kesarion Breb, gets to experience regret, impasse and tragedy.

Romanian Magical Realist Novels of the Communist Period

Unfortunately, the natural interwar dynamic and diversity of fictional formulae, which included experiments at the periphery of canonical realism, were cut short by the political upheaval and the official proletcultist ideology – with socialist realism as the literary expression of what was envisaged as the role of fiction in the service of the new regime, a satellite of the USSR. It was therefore only in the 1960s that a new generation, later to be assimilated to neo-modernism, took the stage. Taking advantage of the cultural effects of partial liberalization, the new themes and codes of the fiction writers in the 1960s and 1970s (Ștefan Bănulescu, George Bălăiță, D.R. Popescu) allowed revisiting traditional realism through transfigured reality representations “with fantastic and mythical reflexes”¹². We beg to differ from Denning’s interpretation of global magical realism as the direct heir of the twenties’ and thirties’ proletcultist literature¹³: the new Romanian realism of the 1960s represents instead an evasive reaction to the dominant discourse of socialist realism, alongside fantastic, allegorical and experimental-parabolic fiction¹⁴.

In a totalitarian society that censured realistic representation and manipulated “realism” to make it illustrate the socialist utopia – in ridiculous contrast with the actual realities – literature sought a new code capable of avoiding the stale official commonplaces, one that was dedicated to marginality and exceptions instead of exemplariness, while the language used was metaphorical, refusing clichés, as in the fiction of Ștefan Bănulescu, Sorin Titel, D.R. Popescu, Fănuș Neagu and Nicolae Velea. This prepared the vernacular ground for absorbing the new magical realist influences from Latin America. What does justice to Denning’s thesis, however, is the (paradoxical) fact that the influences which contributed to reshaping Romanian fiction in this period derived from the same sources which had imposed socialist realism. Because it wished “to create an alternative space, in contradistinction to the Western world, the Soviet Union encouraged, in the minor cultures annexed by it, the creation of an alternative literature, whose names

¹² Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism [Romanian Literature under Communism]*, 3rd edition, Iași, Polirom, 2019, p. 309.

¹³ Michael Denning, “The Novelists’ International”, in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, p. 706.

¹⁴ Marcel Corniș-Pope (“From Alternative Forms of Realism to Post-Realism: Transitional Literature in the East-Central European Region in the 19th and 20th Century”, *Serbian Studies Research*, 3, 2012, 1, p. 43) maintains that, alongside canonical realism in Central Europe, alternative forms of realism emerge, connected to the regional needs; for Romanian literature, he selects the magical realism of the 1960s, after the psychological realism of the 1930s and preceding the lyrical realism of 1970 women-writers, the hyper-realism of the 1980s and its postcolonial version of the 1990s.

reshaped the common background previously present in the area”¹⁵. While renouncing ideological literary criticism and gobbledygook, the program of translating peripheral literatures dictated by Moscow introduced Romanian literature, as early as the end of the 1950s, to fiction created by foreign writers in various decades, which caused a species of synchronous levelling¹⁶. As noted by Ilinca Ilian, “the main Latin-American *boom* writers had been present in Romanian literature ever since the period when they attained popularity in their countries of origin or in the West”¹⁷.

Starting with 1967 and well into the beginning of the 1980s, Gabriel García Márquez’s short stories and novels continued to be translated, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1979); in Ángel Rama’s view, this was “*the symbol-book* which gave the *boom* consistence while it was still fluid, shaping it definitively but also freezing it, to a certain extent, and allowing it to begin waning”¹⁸. Naturally, the simultaneous reception of the Latin-American *boom* in Romania involved an influence on the auctorial vision, on major themes and specific narrative techniques. This caused a genre scarcely present in our country in the interwar period to be successfully appropriated by “the new wave of writers who were themselves derived, from indigenous barbarian communities”¹⁹.

Romanian magical realism acquired subversive accents as it evolved from the short fiction debuts to the novels of the 1970s. Unable to represent in the realistic code the horrors of totalitarianism, magical realism described the world obliquely, allusively twisting history – in narratives that “naturalized the marvelous interwoven with historical trauma”²⁰. This evolution can be followed in the chronological reading of Sorin Titel’s work, for example: from the innocent look of the child discovering the world in the short stories of his debut, the author veered

¹⁵ Ștefan Baghiu, “Traducerea romanului în România realismului socialist. De la centrul ideologic la marginile geografice” [“Translating the Novel in Realist Socialist Romania. From the Ideological Centre to the Geographic Limes”], *Vatra*, 41, 2016, 3-4, pp. 89-114. For the English version see Ștefan Baghiu, “Translating Novels in Romania: The Age of Socialist Realism. From an Ideological Center to Geographical Margins”, *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Philologia*, 61, 2016, 1, pp. 5-18.

¹⁶ Ángel Rama, apud Ilinca Ilian, “Destinul literaturii latino-americane în România regimului comunist (1948–1989)” [“The Destiny of Latin-American Literature in Communist Romania”], *Philologica Jassyensia*, 15, 2019, 1, p. 168.

¹⁷ Ilinca Ilian, “Destinul literaturii latino-americane în România”, p. 175. This article chronicles in detail the translations of this period; we encounter prominent names present in today’s magical realism anthologies: Arturo Uslar Pietri, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, alongside writers of the *proto-boom* – as they were termed by Donoso – Borges, Saramago, Cortázar.

¹⁸ Ángel Rama, apud Ilinca Ilian, “Destinul literaturii latino-americane în România”, p. 173.

¹⁹ Eugen Negrici (*Literatura română*, p. 310) offers a double explanation: firstly, a socio-political one (liberalization; a way of giving a sharp retort to socialist realism; the recovery of the autochthonous background, which amounted to a return to national identity, after the previous decade’s Stalinization); secondly, a cultural explanation: filling in the unoccupied interwar slots.

²⁰ Mariano Siskind, “The Genres of World Literature”, p. 353.

towards creating a fabulous domesticity: Eva Nada's world in *Țara îndepărtată* [*The Remote Country*] (1974), subsequently writing experimental fiction, very much in the Kafkaian absurd vein in *Noaptea inocenților* [*The Innocents' Night*] (1970) and in *Lunga călătorie a prizonierului* [*The Prisoner's Long Journey*] (1971). Magical realism resorted to specific defamiliarization techniques (e.g. repetitions, literalization of metaphors) in order to emphasize the non-representable at the heart of reality – which lent a grotesque nuance to the genre²¹. Totalitarian regime carnivalization in Latin-American novels had its counterpart in Central-Europe, where:

...magical realism can best be described as a *mode* of aesthetic interrogation arising in cultural and ideological contexts variously marked by political and epistemic violence. It speaks in the forked tongue of ebullience and restraint, involvement and detachment, nostalgia and irony²².

In this second phase, magical realism did not differ from miraculous realism as defined by Carpentier (presupposing a magical reality *per se*); it acted as a genre representative of liminal spaces, haunted by political violence, characteristic of transitional periods and critical moments. We feel we can propose that ontological and epistemological perspectives merged in autochthonous magical realism in the 1960s. Mythical coherence attempted to make absurd contemporary history meaningful, drawing on archaic elements in the background, while defamiliarization and neo-modernist fiction techniques served to secure the literary representability of what lay at the heart of a delirious totalitarian reality impossible to represent.

Although there are hardly any new local definitions of magical realism, we can identify quite numerous and differing illustrations of the genre in Romanian literature under communism, which have been actively received and commented upon as such by specialised literary criticism. Apart from exegeses dedicated to Latin-American literature, literary reviews increasingly often resorted to associations of local voices with Latin-American writers, though sometimes retroactively. The inclination to read literary creations in these terms highlighted the fascination exerted by the genre upon writers and critics alike.

After the publication of his short stories in the 1965 volume, *Iarna bărbaților* [*Men's Winter*], *Cartea de la Metopolis* [*The Book of Metopolis*] (1977) constitutes the confirmation of Ștefan Bănuțescu's genuine fictional talent and his capacity to create autonomous fictive worlds. At the time, and directly after it was published, his novel was regarded as emblematic for vernacular magical realism – a position consolidated by subsequent reprints of the book. The leading critic Nicolae

²¹ See Cristina Șandru's analysis (*Worlds Apart?*, pp. 146-168) for Central-Europe, and, for postcolonial literatures, David Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1995.

²² Cristina Șandru, *Worlds Apart?*, p. 154.

Manolescu traced the novelist's affinities with Faulkner, and Cornis-Pope considered it "a Danube saga à la Márquez" – though it is worth noting that the Columbian writer's masterpiece appeared in Romanian translation later, in 1979. Professor Paul Cernat regards this book as "a local variant of magic realism that foregrounds spatial and temporal dislocation and gives narrative expression to a world divided between rural and urban, modern and archaic characteristics spanning between two world wars, or losing its identity after 1945, in the first years of Romanian communism"²³. Bănulescu's fiction has recognizable mythical and fantastic traces inherited from Mihail Sadoveanu, Mircea Eliade, and Vasile Voiculescu; it restores the connections with earlier, interwar literature – in the teeth of the proletcultist hiatus²⁴. These recurrences represent the (postromantic) reprocessing of myths and folk beliefs as modern fiction. Also, in response to the strictures of communist history, "Romanian literature tended to make its way into an archetypal space, imbuing the daily scene with subtextual significance of (Biblical, ancestral, historical) myths and symbols, wrapping the historical or social reality in the enchanting aura of another world"²⁵.

Bănulescu himself maintained that his fiction described a real world because it resuscitates, in Romanian society, one species of historical memory. But the realistic observation is screened by a mythical-archaic distortion, "a mist that any book badly needs"²⁶. This auctorial view of history represents, of course, the major theme which unites magical realist novels. Also, just as Faulkner or Márquez, Bănulescu engenders a mythical geography, represented, in his case, by the "post-Byzantine South-Eastern province" whose utopian and parodic projection confers "to a chimeric, a-temporal realm [...] the stability of palpable reality"²⁷. It is a world seemingly beyond conventional time and space, in spite of the numerous historical landmarks (the first Balkan War, King Ferdinand's land reform), and though the novel is set in the period following the Second World War, there is no trace of communism in the social realities described. Surprisingly enough, the most precise references are to the history of Byzantium, an already effete empire more than 500 years ago (This goes to prove or rehearse the above notation about the

²³ Paul Cernat, "The Imaginary Kingdom of Ștefan Bănulescu". Translated by Kevin McCarthy and Jean Harris, in *The Observer Translation Project*, 2008, http://translations.observatorcultural.ro/The-Imaginary-Kingdom-of-%C4%B9%C5%BEEtefan-Banulescu*articleID_21-articles_details.html. Accessed December 10, 2020.

²⁴ This is echoed by the debate, in Germany or Austria, around the importance of magical realism as a literary history concept capable of bridging the discontinuity produced by the war and the holocaust and of supporting an alternative literary history that no longer considers the year 1945 as a landmark, as "the zero year", or *Nullpunkt, Stunde Null*, but offers instead a continuity paradigm.

²⁵ Vali Dogaru, "Utopia controversată sau trăită a cotidianului" ["Controversial or Experiential Everyday Utopia"], *Vatra*, 35, 2005, 5-6, pp. 105-108.

²⁶ Ștefan Bănulescu, *Cartea de la Metopolis* [*The Book of Metopolis*], 3rd edition, București, Allfa, 1999, p. 26.

²⁷ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română*, p. 465.

mythical or archetypal modulations as escapes from the terribly humiliating, dehumanizing everyday life under communism). Actually, history is constantly given a mythical turn, being ascribed to “a dishevelled old time, with mane and hoof besmirched with mud”²⁸. Because it is parodied, altered by event and character reduplications and returns, until it becomes impossible to tell what is truth and what is mere fabling, one is justified in understanding that the narrated events belong to a downgraded mythical time, similar to the post-apocalyptic time rendered by the future in the past in the masterpiece of Márquez.

Notably and paradoxically, the fact that immediate history is overlooked leads to the hypertrophy of “historical consciousness”: the inhabitants of Metopolis are obsessed with historical certification meant to make them memorable; they run away with the idea that “they genuinely are direct heirs of the imperial Byzantine Romans”²⁹. Because they keep spinning micro-narratives that oppose a spurious proto-history to real history, Metopolisians are the diminutive reflection of a national compulsion to lie, especially detectable in the real protochronistic delirium or personality cult of the state leader in the last decades of communism, paralleled by the grotesque carnivalization of the past in Bănulescu’s novel.

The mythical doubling of “historical consciousness” makes the *Book of Metopolis* reflect the Good Book in presenting the outlines of a world from Genesis to the Apocalypse, as do most magical realist novels; but, much like in Márquez’s universe, one can already discern terminal signs in the dawning world which announces a pattern of double destruction: in the underground, the hill is blown up to quarry for marble – which transforms the city into a catacomb (“Metopolis lived on eating up its hills”³⁰); at the surface, “trading in years” makes old women sell their remaining lives for the improbable help of some opportunist strangers.

The narrator stages a devouring, grotesque double: firstly, at the surface, the historical parody that opposes “a Byzantine fairyland” to real history, and secondly, underneath, the (economic, as well as moral) „siege” infects the city from below, from the city catacombs (“The inhabitants underneath got wind of everything that happened above and besmirched it all”³¹). This corresponds to the Janus Bifrons nature of the carnivalesque singled out by Danow as a major feature of global magic realism³².

If the novel is given a subversive reading, as suggested by Cristina Șandru, its hypercoded discourse would signal the return of the repressed to an externally normalized and realistically anchored society. This is signalled by the presence of the miraculous event at the heart of tumultuous history and by the looped projection of the normally linear historical flow. Quite similar to what happens in

²⁸ Ștefan Bănulescu, *Cartea*, p. 147.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 31

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

³² David Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival*.

Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (1967), miraculous epiphanies bring to light "the intrusion of the unexplainable [which] reveals the irrational at the heart of socialist hyperrationality, its profoundly destructive nature, and the layer of totalitarian madness under the skin of normality"³³. Just as Bulgakov or Márquez, Bănulescu invites a stratified reading, simultaneously historical and symbolic, political and metaphysical, mimetic and self-referential³⁴.

Similarly to Bănulescu or the Latin-American writers, D.R. Popescu sets up a spiritual territory in Romanian fiction, "a world with a magmatic collective memory at its centre"³⁵. Bent on describing the atrocities of the communist regime in his novels of the *F* cycle (1969–1976), he resorts to temporal discontinuities, polyphony, multiple perspectives, the erosion of causality and succession. We can identify in all these the typical insertion point of magical realist fiction in the real-historical setting, where reality is abnormal and its representation becomes problematic and pressing at the same time, blocking a realistic type of reading. Stories about small communities uncover the farce of history and its destructive play, with character and discourse buffoonery³⁶; the result is grotesque, bearing pale traces of magic in the appearance of unusual, often monstrous, or pathological, characters. Perched high up in a poplar, walking on stilts, literally rotting on two legs, former circus performers masquerading as political leaders – D.R. Popescu's characters make up a vast bestiary, a world held captive behind the cruel lens of a disenchanting look³⁷.

In the same large category of novels seeking an alternative code to canonical realism with interspersed magical realist epiphanies we can place *Lumea în două zile* [*The World in Two Days*] (1975), by George Bălăiță. This author also creates fiction informed by the ambiguation and obfuscation of the message. Life seems presented from the standpoint of a realistic observer, but it actually hides enigmas and symbols at every turn. There is a remarkably easy alternation of sombre and burlesque registers, rendering the implausible natural and the miraculous domestic, or "causing the demonic to burst forth from soothing, ritualized everyday life"³⁸. We identify here the casual oscillation between extremes of magical realism, with the author's style in the background "seeking with morbid voluptuousness to experience the sensitive detail with vicious intensity and project it next as fantasy, thus forcing it to become an enormity and a farce"³⁹; by a reverse effect, the resulting hyper-realism can become implausible for the reader, despite being cast in the discursive form of a judicial inquiry. Absorbed into a mythical dimension never

³³ Cristina Șandru, *Worlds Apart?*, p. 159.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

³⁵ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română*, p. 471.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 470–471.

³⁷ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca*, p. 653.

³⁸ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română*, p. 474.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 475.

absent from magical realist fiction, George Bălăiță's universe is inwardly divided between two simultaneously banal and densely symbolic days (the winter and summer solstice), two spaces (Albala and Dealu Ocna) with two distinct world-order configurations (the domestic paradise and Moiselini's hellish pub). The novel's diminutive world, mirroring the large scale one, becomes ludicrous, manned by banal bureaucrats and larva-like creatures – a world completely unprepared for miracles; here, the outburst of magic, if anything, causes suspicion, and tragic fears are treated as burlesque. "Parabolically, the novel constructs the human soul as double and contradictory, banal and extraordinary, submissive and rebellious, this-worldly and diabolical"⁴⁰; Antipa, the protagonist, illustrates all this as "the clerk of nothingness"⁴¹. Quite faithful to the magic-realist code, with its conjoined contraries and the incompatibility between the *what* and the *how* of narrating, the domestic is here conveyed with solemnity while death is grotesquely dawdled away with. Fairytale elements and mythical remainders are revived – though usually on a parodic note, in keeping with the typical magical realist irreverence, and associated later, in the immediately following period, with postmodernism.

Indeed, the nineteen-eighties stand out because of the overlap of postmodernism with the last decade of communism. It is the age of textualist games overlying subversively allusive language. "The assertion of the hubristically assumed right to override official history"⁴² recurs in statements of the self-styled postmodern fiction writers. They write alternative histories which deconstruct "unrepresentative" moments, after parodying or rendering them ambiguous as the strategy for ignoring History – manipulated in official parlance by the party's ideological harnessing of national myths. In contrast with the resulting mythography intended to pass for historical truth, the novels of the 1980 generation openly acknowledge their fictitiousness and engage in a subtextual dialogue with official discourses. Just as Bănulescu avoided post-war realities by subversively superimposing on them his "Byzantine miracles", the 1980 generation novelists symptomatically choose the drab and the peripheral. In Ioan Groșan's novel *O sută de ani de zile la porțile Orientului* [*One Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient*] (1992), ridiculous incidents replace the expected chronicle of Voivode Stephen the Great's valiant deeds by immensely funny allusions to Nicolae Ceaușescu's so-called Golden Age. Such repeated instances of gliding between past and present (facilitated by metafictional editing), the heroization of banality, the literalization

⁴⁰ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca*, p. 659.

⁴¹ George Bălăiță, *Lumea în două zile* [*The World in Two days*] (1975), 6th edition, București, Cartea Românească, 2002, p. 347.

⁴² Adrian Oțoiu, *Ochiul bifurcat, limba sașie. Strategii transgresive în proza Generației 80* [*The Bifocal Look, the Squinting Tongue. Transgressive Strategies in the Fiction of the Eighties*], Pitești, Paralela 45, 2003, p. 34.

of national-socialist clichés in the gobbledygook of the Ceausescu-age⁴³ illustrate a new facet of autochthonous magic realism.

Ștefan Agopian is a writer hard to classify as he exhibits, in a number of novels with magical- realist elements⁴⁴, “the gap between documentary pretexts and fictive formations”⁴⁵, in other words, precisely what traditional historical fiction withholds. In his novels, the realistic illusion misfires due to copious anachronisms; historical information “melts down” into fabulous stories that follow mythical patterns and feature both plausible and Biblical characters (e.g. Tobit, Sara) engaged in actions alongside supernatural apparitions. “Cruel historical happenings are narrated distractedly, with no variations, absent-mindedly, as if already experienced beforehand [...], seen from a distant vantage point”⁴⁶. The magical realist joining of opposites is associated in his discourse with oxymorons, lyricism, stylistic sumptuousness, while “the grotesque is fused with the sublime, the spiritual with the visceral, the angelic with the demonic, the real with dreams, appearance with essence, death with life, fiction with history”⁴⁷.

Mircea Nedelciu’s second novel⁴⁸ stands out due to its subversive approach to the official and utopian socialist realism discourse and it has been read as a therapeutic “fabling treatment applied to reality – a sort of counter-utopia with respect to the Orwell-like dystopian actuality of the year nineteen eighty-four in Romania”⁴⁹. Besides the presence of the typically postmodernist myth of irony and irreverence, this “baroque fantasy” (in the author’s own description) confronts readers with apocalyptic scenes resembling those of Bănuțescu, D.R. Popescu or Bălăiță, which disrupt and transform utopia into carnival. The gipsy band, along with the ruin of the utopian society, recalls Marquez’s nomads, showing up to mark the downgrading of urban Macondo. As in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the present is overlooked in order to take refuge in the past, as individual time withdraws from historical time. What defines autochthonous magical realism is “the desire to survive in fiction and die in reality”⁵⁰. Șandru sees this as conducive

⁴³ Similar to the magic-realist effects in Milan Kundera’s *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) or *The Joke* (1967).

⁴⁴ *Tache de catifea [Velvet Taki]* (1981), *Tobit* (1983), *Manualul întâmplărilor [The Textbook of Happenings]* (1984), *Sara* (1987).

⁴⁵ Adrian Oțoiu, *Ochiul*, p. 34.

⁴⁶ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română*, p. 483.

⁴⁷ Radu G. Țeposu, *Istoria tragică & grotescă a întunecatului deceniu literar nouă [The Tragic & Grotesque History of the Dark Eighties in Romanian Literature]*, 3rd edition, București, Cartea Românească, 2006, p. 222.

⁴⁸ Mircea Nedelciu, *Opere IV. Tratament fabulatoriu [Fabling Treatment]* (1984), 4th edition, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2016.

⁴⁹ Adina Dinițoiu, *Proza lui Mircea Nedelciu. Puterile literaturii în fața politicului și a morții [Mircea Nedelciu’s Fiction. The Powers of Literature Facing Politics and Death]*, București, Tracus Arte, 2011, p. 396.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 405.

to “the implosion of the self-contained mythical universe”⁵¹ and announcing the later implosions of the mythical universe in Bogdan Popescu’s or Mircea Cărtărescu’s fiction of the years 2000.

Such grotesquely realistic, deviant forms which responded to socialist realism created irreverent symbolic spaces in a social context opposed to laughter, irony and satire and which, at best, regarded them suspiciously. Irreverence and revolt, together with parodic, baroque hyperbolizations and subversive, polyphonic and eccentric language, place the generic repertoire of Romanian magic realism in line with the global repertoire. Moreover, this points to the way magical realism, in totalitarian societies such as those of Central Europe and Latin America, was expressive of a subversive sensibility which

...operated an enlargement of vision, including in its discourse those elements occulted by the official truth. It thus acted as a virtual corrective to the limited or censored vision of reality most often imposed by authoritarian regimes and constraining worldviews. Its filiations with the counter-tradition of the carnivalesque and its constant subversion of boundaries (whether generic, ontological, or ideological) make it particularly well suited for the expression of a resilient, sceptical form of imagination⁵².

Magical Realist Novels in Post-communism

Whereas in the first, European modernist phase of magical realism, defamiliarization ranked high, and in the second, Latin-American phase, high modernism and mass culture were reconciled⁵³ in combinations of magical realism with postmodern narrative play forms, after 1990, in the third phase, the genre reached its maximum global expansion. The formula was exported by the *boom* writers to become “the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world”⁵⁴, whether praised or decried for its Western exoticization of the former colonies on the global book market⁵⁵. Magical realism spread its central themes in the newly established culture zones, rewriting local history in opposition to the discourse of Power and in the mythical spirit, resorting to historiographical meta-fiction and carnivalization, with both grotesque and nostalgic expressions.

Romanian culture has fixed its attention upon international debates so as to adopt and adapt them, producing consistent studies that inquire into the post-colonialism-post-communism parallels and the ways postcolonial theory interacts with the complexities generated by the communist experience. The postcolonial outlook has made manifest certain common aspects to be found in Central-

⁵¹ Cristina Sandru, *Worlds Apart*, p. 165.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 167-168.

⁵³ Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic. The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, New York, Verso, 1996, p. 235.

⁵⁴ Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 7.

⁵⁵ David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 106-107.

European and postcolonial novels: liminality, ambiguous cultural identities, textual ambivalence, cultural fragmentation and discursive violence⁵⁶. Cornis-Pope notes that

...much of the post-1989 literature has been concerned with the breakdown of people's sense of the "real" – already badly compromised by the communist propaganda but subsequently diluted even further by the "hysteria of the production and reproduction of the real" (Baudrillard) pursued by some transitional post-communist governments⁵⁷.

This is what lies behind the sensation that characters in postcolonial and post-communist novels are unreal, as is the case with Rushdie's or Mircea Cărtărescu's protagonists. To these should be added the generic hybridity – realism, anti-realism, surrealism –, the distinctive mark of literature in the new millennium in bestsellers that pose provocation to *mimesis* and its limits.

As with the evolution of postcolonial literatures, the literature created in ex-communist countries gives priority to fictional representations that counter official History with differing individual versions. Substituting to world-history the history of micro-communities centred around protagonists at the same time pivotal and peripheral has been a theme common to novels by Mircea Cărtărescu (*Orbitor* [*Blinding*], I–III, 1996–2007), Bogdan Popescu (*Cine adoarme ultimul* [*Whoever Falls Asleep Last*], 2007), Doina Ruști (*Fantoma din moară* [*The Phantom in the Mill*], 2008), Radu Pavel Gheo (*Noapte bună, copii!* [*Good Night, Children!*], 2010), Tudor Ganea (*Cazemata* [*The Casemate*], 2016). Having spent their childhood under communism, the authors write, after 1990, novels depicting an age, at the same time exorcising historical trauma and writing down their autobiographies by self-reflexive fiction. Speaking from a fairly comprehensive community perspective, they are in a position to tell the truth about this age, though they feel torn between two worlds and need to acknowledge both the cruelty of historical fact and the aura of nostalgia, something that makes them oscillate between horror and fascination, hopefulness and powerlessness, compelling them to speak in double language, to alternate wondrous and grotesque expressiveness, irony and sarcasm. Their thematic repertoire and narrative techniques rank these novels among exemplary titles that represent the postcolonial expansion of magical realism: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992).

⁵⁶ Dumitru Tucan, "The Adaptability of Theory: Postcolonialism vs. Postcommunism in Romanian Literary Studies", *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2015, 2, p. 112.

⁵⁷ Marcel Cornis-Pope, "From Alternative Forms", p. 51.

Far from presenting “utopian worlds” that imply exiting history through the front door⁵⁸ as claimed by critic Florin Oprescu, these novels enter history by “forcing the back door” with discursive subversiveness and non-realistic representations; they seek an alternative code to compensate the inability of “historical heterotopias” to reach the essential. To explain the heyday of the magical realist genre in ages and at times of crisis (in the communist decades or the post-1989 society), we must turn to the mythical thought performing the transformation of social change into magic and employing returning archetypes to read and understand the contemporary world. It is possible to extend to the post-1989 Romanian context Franco Moretti’s belief that the success of magical realism in the great Western metropolises was due to the desire of making sense of modern societies and to their fascination with retelling actual History as an adventure seasoned with miracles⁵⁹: superimposed on the conflicting official discourse variants, Romanian magical realist novelistic discourse re-writes a *re-enchanted* history of communism.

Different generations and social classes propose contradictory representations of a supposedly common history in the above-mentioned novels. We witness, in the reproduction of these clashing variants, what Eugene Arva has regarded as the *therapeutic* staging of memory⁶⁰. Magical realism does not, of course, copy, but naturalizes the marvellous interwoven with estranged social domination, massacres, wars and other historical traumas⁶¹; the same happens with the Romanian fairytale motifs that show God and Saint Peter lost in the post-1989 transition; they are interwoven with the personal drama of “frontiersmen” failing in their attempt to cross the communist frontier illegally⁶². Magical realism transforms and makes legible a reality that cannot be represented by regarding traumatic imagination aesthetically; it ends up normalizing what cannot be represented⁶³.

The approach that simultaneously “undertakes intellectual elucidation and imaginative reconstruction of a contradictory and often violent historical reality”⁶⁴ is situated between history and personal memory, trying to bridge, with the magical realist *écriture*, the divide between the present writing ego and the past one⁶⁵. Contemplative nostalgia, which Svetlana Boym sees as the defence mechanism to

⁵⁸ Florin Oprescu, *Romanul românesc și morfologia puterii* [*The Romanian Novel and the Morphology of Power*], Iași, Institutul European, 2018, pp. 215-218.

⁵⁹ Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic*, pp. 249-250.

⁶⁰ Eugene Arva, “Writing Trauma: Magical Realism and the Traumatic Imagination”, *Interférences littéraires*, 2014, 14, p. 7.

⁶¹ Mariano Siskind, *The Genres*, p. 353.

⁶² Radu Pavel Gheo, *Noapte bună, copii!* [*Good Night, Children*], Iași, Polirom, 2010.

⁶³ Ato Quayson, “Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative and History”, in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, p. 734.

⁶⁴ Cristina Șandru, *Words Apart?*, p. 154.

⁶⁵ Denis Walder, “Writing, Representation, and Postcolonial Nostalgia”, *Textual Practice*, 23, 2009, 6, p. 941.

face historical upheavals in intensely changing ages following revolutions⁶⁶, explains why literary characters, just as members of actual societies in transition, reconstruct their world fictively, while still yearning for the unfulfilled dreams of the past and the obsolete futuristic visions that cause the equally uncertain past and future to haunt the post-communist present. This is precisely what happens when various time segments drift into the fictional universe via the recurring phantom-motif (in *The Phantom in the Mill* by Ruști), via the malefic double (in *Blinding* by Cărtărescu) or via the sleeping God (in *Whoever Falls Asleep Last* by Bogdan Popescu). Just as the past haunts – and at times dislocates – the present, the phantom in the above-mentioned novels depersonalizes the characters when penetrating their bodies, blurring the boundary between a human and an alien identity. The persistent phantom-motif embodies the alienating traumatic history effect and ends up exorcising the horrific, guilt-ridden past.

Here are some of the mythical scenario elements in the novels of this magic-realist phase: the foundational moment of archaic communities is set in simultaneously real and fabulous, excellent and abominable locations (Cărtărescu's Tântava and Bucharest; Ruști's Comoșteni, with the mill at the centre, Bogdan Popescu's Saints Village); the end of the world, caused by the totalitarian upheaval, culminates in the apocalyptic downfall – but without the salvation of the Biblical Book of Revelation (though the fall of communism might have been expected to make the post-communist world meaningful): instead, the identity fracture between the two epochs is anarchotypically augmented. The events in the marginal community of the Saints Village⁶⁷ before and after 1989 are completely chaotic and there is no mythical narrative capable of ordering them; foundational myths are presented in downgraded, implausible forms, while in general cultural myths are tainted with (self)irony⁶⁸; the alternative (fabulous or archaic) discourse keeps paradoxically aloof from the protochronistic official uses of “local” or “national” themes⁶⁹.

Romanian Generic Repertoire Correspondences with Global Magical Realism

After placing in a global network of magical realist affinities some canonical Romanian novels of the previous century which we have re-read here, it has become possible to group them together chronologically and typologically into three classes or phases of fictional literary works. The first one includes the Romanian fiction by Mihail Sadoveanu and Vasile Voiculescu, corresponding to

⁶⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001.

⁶⁷ Bogdan Popescu, *Cine adoarme ultimul [Whoever Falls Asleep Last]*, Iași, Polirom, 2007.

⁶⁸ See, in Cărtărescu's *Blinding* (III), the ridiculed personification of revolutionary Romania in Rosenthal's painting.

⁶⁹ The foundational story about the male and female Ancestors who built the Saints Village is told to an empty classroom by a constantly drunken schoolmaster purporting to deliver a scientific account.

the magical realist novels by Jünger and Bontempelli. These writers share a taste for strong symbolism, “primitivism”, the blurring of boundaries between history, legend, myth and fantasy. We have subsequently grouped together into a second class the novels written under communism by Ștefan Bănuțescu, D.R. Popescu, George Bălăiță, Sorin Titel or Ștefan Agopian, directly influenced by the synchronous translations of Latin-American writers. The creation of imaginary kingdoms in the heart of reality, the rewriting of history following mythical patterns from Genesis to the Apocalypse, the use of hypercoded discourse subversively confronting Power, the magical and grotesque carnivalization of the world are some of the landmarks of this phase or class. To them were added in the 1980s, from the postmodernist repertory, the use of metafictional *écriture*, of (self)irony, polyphony and the multiplication of narrative threads – features to be retained by magical realist novels of post-communism. The books of the Romanian members of the third phase (comprising Mircea Cărtărescu’s, Bogdan Popescu’s or Doina Ruști’s novels) compare favourably with the ones by canonical postcolonial authors’ (i.e. Rushdie, Morrison or Ben Okri), as they are written in response to a socio-cultural background similar to the postcolonial. The narrators-characters in these novels, posited as metaphysical chroniclers of the fictional world, confront readers with the macro-themes of history and memory, exacerbate grotesqueness to exorcise the phantoms of a traumatic past and exploit mythical structures anarchetypally, while actually hiding behind their ironically distancing, nostalgic retrievals.

Finally, a number of family resemblances can be mentioned that are shared by all these novels and justifying the world-literary status of the magical realist genre: conjoined wonderment and grotesqueness; the profusely baroque use of oxymorons and hyperbolism; the literalization of metaphors. Features of this kind integrate such novels in the counter-tradition of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque whose “cultural exorcism” renders problematic all traditional representations, facilitating a fresh outlook that defamiliarizes a present equally haunted by spectres of the past and by demons of the future.

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MAGICAL REALISM AVATARS IN THE ROMANIAN NOVEL

(Abstract)

To inscribe Romanian magical realist fiction onto the map of what has turned, from a regional Latin-American literary code, into a world literature (sub)genre, we trace the connection of autochthonous novels of the interwar period (marked by the affinities of myth-informed fiction with European literary movements) with the ones of the 1970s and 1980s (featuring direct influences of magical realism from Latin America) and with novels of the 1990s and the years 2000, when the genre came into full bloom globally. Given the novel's remarkably porous fabric, we begin by discussing the uptake and processing of mythical and archaic motifs by Mihail Sadoveanu. To illustrate the fully established genre flourishing in the mid-communist cultural and political context due to ample vernacular translations from the Latin-American *boom*, we focus on fiction by Sorin Titel, Ștefan Bănuțescu, George Bălăiță and Ștefan Agopian, whose writings adapted major magical realist themes in subversively narrative stylistic formats. Four novels by Mircea Cărtărescu, Bogdan Popescu, Doina Ruști and Radu Pavel Gheo are invoked to argue in favour of the post-communist synchronization of Romanian magical realism with postcolonial fiction's postmodernist aesthetics and socio-political accents. Through the importance attached to the topic of memory, to re-writing the past and the problematic positing of recent history seeping into personal histories, the Romanian novels discussed become inscribable in the world literary horizon of magical realism, illuminating its generic repertoire.

Keywords: magical realism, post-communism, subversion, myth, memory.

AVATARURILE ROMANULUI REALIST-MAGIC ÎN LITERATURA
ROMÂNĂ
(Rezumat)

Pentru a urmări integrarea romanului realist-magic autohton în ceea ce a devenit, dintr-un cod regional al literaturii din America Latină, un (sub)gen literar global, propunem construirea unui posibil traseu care conectează, în literatura română, momentul interbelic (al afinităților cu mișcările europene, detectabile în ficțiunile mitice) cu deceniile șapte-opt ale secolului al XX-lea (marcate de influențele directe ale realismului magic sud-american), continuând până în anii 1990–2000, în perioada de expansiune mondială a genului. Întrucât romanul are o porozitate generică accentuată, vom cerceta felul în care anumite proze ale lui Mihail Sadoveanu preiau și modulează atracția pentru mitic și arhaic. Vom urmări apoi, în climatul cultural-politic din deceniile de mijloc ale comunismului românesc, marcate de traducerile ample din literaturile latino-americane, constituirea propriu-zisă a genului, în multiple registre, la prozatori precum Sorin Titel, Ștefan Bănuțescu, George Bălăiță, Ștefan Agopian, în romane care dezvoltă, subversiv, prin mărci stilistico-narative specifice, temele majore ale realismului magic. Pentru a argumenta, în postcomunism, sincronizarea romanului autohton cu tendințele din spațiul postcolonial, unde estetica postmodernă a realismului magic se înscrie, de regulă, într-un cadru social-politic, vom analiza patru romane de Mircea Cărtărescu, Bogdan Popescu, Doina Ruști și Radu Pavel Gheo. Prin amplexarea temei memoriei, a rescrierii trecutului și a problematizării istoriei recente filtrate în micile istorii personale, romanele românești aduse în discuție se situează în orizontul global al realismului magic, iluminând repertoriul său generic.

Cuvinte-cheie: realism magic, grotesc, postcomunism, subversiune, mit.

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**THE SOCIALIST REALIST NOVEL IN ROMANIA
BETWEEN 1948 AND 1955.
NOVELISTIC GENRES AND SUBGENRES**

There are two reasons for my apparently exhaustive title. First of all, my intention in this article is to offer a panorama of the socialist realist novel by considering *all* the novels published in Romanian and on Romanian territory between 1948 and 1955, tracing the first stage of the socialist realist novel in Romania (with its specific rigors and cultural policies). Although the two phases of socialist realism (1948–1955 and 1956–1964) have already been identified in literary historiography², my rationale for separating them has to do with the dynamic of novel translation and the possibility to differentiate between the two stages in a concrete, affirmative way, through the translation programs discovered in the quantitative analysis of imports. Namely, between 1948 and 1955, Russian and Soviet translations dominated the Romanian landscape over Western translations, while between 1956 and 1964 the two poles of the Cold War were balanced³.

This is why I will primarily discuss the subgenres of the socialist realist novel in the period when it manifested *fully*, both in translation and local production, because this is the only time when the socialist realist novel presents no exceptions. Of course, *Proletkult*⁴ literature will continue to be a part of novel production until the end of the communist regime, but this first period is fit for *classification* because it contains almost *no other type of novel*. Secondly, I intend to map all the *subgenres* proposed under the broader umbrella of the literary current, tracking the

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2019-0946, within PNCDI III.

² See a synthesis of this periodization as put forward by Eugen Negrici and others in Andrei Terian, *Critica de export. Teorii, context, ideologii* [*Export Criticism. Theories, Contexts, Ideologies*], București, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2013, p. 172.

³ Ștefan Baghiu, “Strong Domination and Subtle Dispersion: A Distant Reading of Novel Translation in Romania”, in Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 63-84.

⁴ I use this term only as a superficial and general label, although its use in the Romanian context has been convincingly confronted by Sanda Cordoș and others. See Sanda Cordoș, *Literatura între revoluție și reacțiune. Problema crizei în literatura română și rusă a secolului XX* [*Literature between Revolution and Reaction. The Issue of Crisis in Romanian and Russian Literature of the 20th Century*], second edition, Cluj-Napoca, Biblioteca Apostrof, 2002. See also Cosmin Borza, “Trei concepte ‘socialiste’: realismul, postmodernismul, estetismul” [“Three ‘Socialist’ Concepts: Realism, Postmodernism, Aestheticism”], *Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, 2015, 2, pp. 535-541.

same logic I had outlined regarding translation: namely that, far from being defined by *mono* production in terms of theme and genre, socialist realism is as diverse as it is ideologically rigid. Therefore, I will consider the concept of *socialist realism* to be sufficiently broad for the entire production of the period, characterised by *its programmatically progress-oriented literature*, but not coherent enough to serve as a *novelistic genre* or *subgenre*, since socialist realism – in my reading – is rather an attitude for writers to aspire, rather than a formula.

Internal Contradictions and Problematic Definitions

This paper aims to survey some of the key elements of the socialist realist novel and to explain why it is, in fact, an umbrella term for multiple subgenres, seeking uniformity only in its desire to connect literature with a more or less coherent ideological programme. More or less coherent because, in spite of the theses formulated in literary historiography, according to which socialist realism represents the brutal standardization of creative principles, many recent studies have shown that this standardization was primarily accomplished *along the way*, through various mechanisms of verification and critique and in accordance with often changeable strategies.

In this sense, perhaps the most interesting case analyzed by recent literary criticism – and the best example for the theory of dogmatic instability in socialist realism – is Marin Preda's novella *Ana Roșculeț*. As shown by Alex Goldiș, even certain attempts at compliance with the new writing regime of the socialist realist period met with strong criticism within the literary field⁵. The situation is extremely interesting for the exposure of the creative process in socialist realism, a process which implied the complicity of authors and literary critics even in the first stages of conceiving the episodes of the story (as I will prove in this article) and which actually abolished the "finite" nature of the socialist realist literary work. In short, in Goldiș's words, "although the story condenses almost all of the socialist realist clichés, seeming to respond to the deepest desires of party politics, it has been, however, criticized from strong ideological viewpoints". Horia Bratu, one of its critics, objects to the depiction of the protagonist's enjoyment of her holiday even after her 'enlightenment': "how can the worker enjoy her holiday as free, personal time, when she has already begun her radical transformation through work and communion with the others?"⁶ Goldiș asks ironically, noticing the subtlety of the criticism against a text meant to be perfectly congruent with the official ideological view. The case is not singular and, as shown by Goldiș, the phenomenon is symptomatic for the local (and, perhaps, transnational) profile of the current: "those who tried to apply the norms of socialist realism to literature

⁵ See Alex Goldiș, "Din clasicii realismului nostru socialist. Marin Preda, *Ana Roșculeț*" ["Reading the Classics of our Socialist Realism. Marin Preda, *Ana Roșculeț*"], *Vatra*, 2008, 5, pp. 36-38.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

didn't come up against ideology, as most would believe, but against literature itself, which almost always tells a very different story from what its authors meant to say"⁷. In short, in spite of all the casual descriptions of the specificity of the socialist realist novel, its main profile was actually given by a set of conventions which required ample debates and real-time tuning.

A second problem stems from the first: even if they were governed by a literary 'recipe' or a 'thesis', the socialist realist works which remain valid until today and which were published or proposed for publication in the socialist realist period are now viewed as subversive. These works were not designed as such from the beginning, but literary historiography has seen most of them as forms of escapism or as reactions to the official ideology. However, more often than not, they were not reactions against the dogmatic style and were actually interpreted in this manner later on. Initially, most literary works complied with the logic of socialist realism and became incompatible with the ideological filter only upon publication.

Therefore, Eugen Negrici's theory that opens the famous series *Literatura română sub comunism* [*Romanian Literature under Communism*] which states that "directly or indirectly [in the process of a developing literature under a totalitarian regime], everything is a response, a reaction, a rebuff, a defensive, a desperate or inventive form of adaptation, a strategy for survival"⁸ requires revisions like the ones discussed above. Not everything is "a response, a reaction, a rebuff" in socialist realism, because such a rebuff would have no value without a coherent programme of diverse forms of opportunism. It is true that the entire literature of the period is *done* (written, rewritten, eventually published) with the approval of political authority, but this does not mean that the mechanisms of approval were not complex ones. Here, of course, the problem is broader, going beyond Stalinism and including all the artistic pursuits that were perceived as acts of heroism after 1989, although in the context of their emergence they were easily acceptable officially.

In fact, after formulating his thesis about literature as reaction – that is, a few paragraphs later – Negrici himself describes "the writers whose conscience was not difficult to seduce and manipulate" and "the eternal intellectual opportunism". This nuance is also important, precisely because most of our contemporary critical bibliography depicts the socialist realist writer as either "manipulated" or "subversive". Post-communist anticommunism preferred a romantic, victimizing game in which the regime was one of occupation and found no local collaborators, only subtle dissidents. Otherwise, the emergence of certain masterpieces in the midst of socialist realism – Marin Preda's 1955 *Moromeții* [*The Morometes*] is the

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism* [*Romanian Literature under Communism*], București, Editura Fundației Pro, 2006, p. 11.

strongest example⁹ – would be inexplicable. Without further insistence on the matter, I think that reading the socialist realist novel merely for its subversive potential, or as a “survival” technique, is a major error which grants us no insight into the morphology of novelistic genres and subgenres and their function, into the dynamic of translation or into the internal geography and interferences within the Romanian literary polysystem of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods. Although it is comfortable (i.e. lazy) to describe a two-decade period using the same correlative, the reality in the field is completely different, which is noticeable even from a survey of the DCRR¹⁰: socialist realism is as general a term as *socialist novel* or *authoritarian fiction*.

Another major issue in defining the current (and a possible “socialist realist” genre) has to do with an internal paradox of Soviet communism itself, explained by Hannah Arendt when discussing the nature of totalitarian regimes: while pleading for transformation, they actually need stability¹¹ (or predictability, in the words of Evgeny Dobrenko and Natalia Jonsson-Skradol¹²). Thus, we are once again faced with the various problems related to placing socialist realism in its contemporaneity, since literary criticism has often pleaded that the term “realism” be replaced with “classicism”, due to the rigors imposed on the depiction of reality. Although socialist realism coexists peacefully with the realism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (both in terms of translation and the revalorization of the canon of local critical realism), the central literary products of this period seem more rudimentary and excessively formalized¹³. In *Critica în tranșee* [*Criticism in the Trenches*], Alex Goldiș discusses this aporia of the current in the subchapter “Between modernism and socialist classicism”, where he presents the recovery of a

⁹ See more in Alex Goldiș, “The Ideology of Ruralism in the Thaw Prose: The Case of Marin Preda’s *Moromeții*”, in Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, and Maria Sass (eds.), *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2019, pp. 95-105; Alex Goldiș, “Literary Interferences in Subversive East-European Prose under Communism”, in Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania*, pp. 85-97.

¹⁰ I use a tool put forward by the Romanian Academy, a complete dictionary of the Romanian novel: *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its origins to 1989*] (DCRR), București, Editura Academiei Române, 2004.

¹¹ See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London, Harvest Brace and Company, 1973.

¹² See Evgeny Dobrenko and Natallia Jonsson-Skradol (eds.), *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures under Stalin. Institutions, Dynamics, Discourses*, London, Anthem Press, 2018, p. 343: “Hannah Arendt remarked that one of the paradoxes inherent in totalitarian states is that, on the one hand, their professed veneration of transformations induces in them a deep-seated fear of stability and permanence, but on the other hand, for these regimes to function, their institutions require a certain degree of predictability and continuity”.

¹³ Alex Goldiș, “Reading the Classics of our Socialist Realism”, p. 37: “In fact, The Soviet critic Andrei Siniavski had noticed as early as the 1950s that the true name of socialist realism is ‘socialist classicism’, since Stalinist aestheticism, far from representing life as it really is, builds a utopia in the fashion of seventeenth century literature”.

“modern orientation” as a “value criterion” by the end of the 1950s¹⁴. Thus, far from attempting to classify the novels of socialist realism according to their dogmatic value, which evidently turns the novelistic production into a monolithic one, I will map their thematic universe, i.e. their differences.

The Rehabilitation of Serialized Publishing as a Form of Control

The complete control that literary criticism must have over literary production determines certain technical aspects of the production process. First, the need to control the content of literary works generates an interesting phenomenon on the international stage, namely the complete publication of novels as fragments, prior to their emergence as printed books. This “habit” is recommended by the official press precisely so that the fragments can be perfected or purged of ideological “mistakes” before they become a finite product, that is before they become *socialist realist*. From this point of view, the creative process of socialist realist prose is similar to that of a production line with various quality checkpoints¹⁵.

This is why it is important to notice that socialist realism is based on the complicity between the writer and the literary critic as early as the production/creation phase. And it is not only the official production of Romanian socialist realism that underwent this process, but also the well-known “exceptions”: fragments from Marin Preda’s *Moromeții* [*The Morometes*] were published in 1955 in *Revista literară* [*The Literary Magazine*], *Contemporanul* [*The Contemporary*] and *Flacăra* [*The Flame*]¹⁶. The history of serialized publishing before the issue of the respective novel actually begins with the famous *Desculț* [*Barefoot*] by Zaharia Stancu (of which more than six fragments appeared in *Contemporanul* and *Flacăra* in 1947 and 1948). It continues with *Negura* [*The Mist*] by Eusebiu Camilar (published in *Viața românească* [*Romanian Life*], *Contemporanul*, *Scânteia* [*The Spark*] or *Flacăra* in 1948 and 1949). *Evadare* [*The Escape*] by Alexandru Jar, a 1949 novel about the struggles of illegalists, had a first piece published in *Flacăra* in 1948, and *Sfârșitul jalbelor* [*The End of Grievance*], by the same author, appeared in 1950 in *Viața românească*, *Flacăra*, *Contemporanul* and *Albina* [*The*

¹⁴ Alex Goldiș, *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [*Criticism in the Trenches. From Socialist Realism to Aesthetic Autonomy*], București, Cartea Românească, 2011, p. 57.

¹⁵ In this regard, see the Eugen Luca quote, given by Alex Goldiș (*Critica în tranșee*, p. 12) from „Cu privire la sarcinile criticii literare” [On the duties of literary criticism] (*Contemporanul*, 1950, 185): “A. Fadeev argues that it is the responsibility of the critic to interfere even in the writer’s creative process, providing the necessary suggestions when it is possible to undo certain faults and to develop positive aspects ‘as he goes’. For this purpose, making a habit out of the serialized publishing of novels in literary magazines would be beneficial”.

¹⁶ See the most interesting case of the translation of *The Morometes* and other novels in this period to add to the process itself in Anca-Simina Martin, “The English Translation of Romanian Rural Novels in Communist Romania: Skopos Theory in Action”, in Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, and Maria Sass (eds.), *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, pp. 81-95.

Bee]. Fragments from *Mitrea Cocor* and *Nada Florilor. Amintirile unui pescar cu undița* [*The Flower Bait. Memories of an Angler*] by Mihail Sadoveanu (published in 1949 and 1950) appeared in *Contemporanul* and *Adevărul literar și artistic* [*The Literary and Artistic Truth*]. Similarly, *Drum fără pulbere* [*Dustless Road*] by Petru Dumitriu (1951), which presents the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, was serialized in *Viața românească* and *Femeia* [*The Woman*].

One of the interesting cases, whose reception should be closely tracked right from their beginning as feuilleton prose, is Cella Serghi's *Cad zidurile* [*The Walls are Falling*] from 1950 (with fragments in *Viața românească* in 1938 and *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* [*The Royal Foundations Magazine*] in 1945), precisely because it was "verified" in the interwar period and published in the midst of socialist realism, focusing on the theme of "the universal Parisian Bohemia, with its cosmopolitan manner" (see "1950" in the DCRR).

Subgenres

As for the novel, it must be said from the start that the socialist realist novel is not always realist and, paradoxically, not even socialist realist. It is true that certain representational rules imposed as soon as 1932 in the Soviet Union and 1948 in Romania were used as compositional grids for the central productions of the period, but socialist realism constitutes, above anything else, an attempt at the ideological systematization of a diverse thematic area.

It is this systematization that is the cause of the apparent uniformity of socialist realist prose, not the fact that the literature itself had the characteristics of a self-sufficient subgenre. In fact, a few preliminary aspects must be discussed before the categorization of novelistic subgenres in socialist realism. First, the fact that the thematic diversity of the socialist realist novel produced on Romanian territory after WWII is indebted to the thematic diversity of the Soviet socialist realist novel and of other literatures annexed by the socialist realist programme. According to Rossen Djagalov, this programme "tried to organize 'the progressive forces' of world literature through international writers' organizations, writers' congresses, frequent bilateral visits, multilingual literary magazines and massive translation initiatives"¹⁷. By means of "literary monopolists", the Soviet Union created a link between global literature and Moscow and inevitably diversified the thematic content of socialist realism¹⁸. I have recently discussed this phenomenon with a

¹⁷ Rossen Djagalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post-World War II People's Republic of Letters", in Evgeny Dobrenko, Natalia Jonsson-Skradol (eds.), *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures*, p. 25.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 26: "What, more than anything, held the post-war People's Republic of Letters together – besides the unevenly practiced doctrine of socialist realism or the relatively homologous structures of writers' unions and publishers subordinated to Party authorities of each Soviet-bloc state – was a very small number of representative writers, or monopolists, as we shall call them, such as Ilya

focus on fantasy and SF novel translations, so I will not reiterate the argument¹⁹. Especially when it comes to “conditional employment” (using Mihai Iovănel’s terminology), *genre fiction* was a real and important presence in the literary field of socialist realism²⁰.

Besides this institutional dynamic, however, there is the concrete problem of novelistic subgenres in the age of socialist realism. I will move beyond Susan Rubin Suleiman’s useful analysis in *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, which coins *authoritarian fiction* as a descriptive concept – “novels with a clear ideological message – novels that seek, through the vehicle of fiction, to persuade their readers of the ‘correctness’ of a particular way of interpreting the world”²¹. Suleiman puts forward the famous concept of the *roman à thèse*, which “proclaims its own status as both overtly ideological *and* as fictional”. Eventually, this concept could apply to almost *all* the novels produced during socialist realism, so it is of no use here, since it can be found *anywhere*. A novelistic genre cannot be established solely through its *theses*. It requires that we take its *world/ universe* into consideration as well. To create coherent categories for *authoritarian fiction* and its novelistic genres and subgenres during Romanian socialist realism, we need a *more didactic* approach than is usually recommended, so that my classification may further be found reductionist.

But this is where we find ourselves at the moment: far from requiring *more* theory, there is an urgent need for *classification*. In the following, I propose a classification of the Romanian socialist realist novel, based on the analysis of the “archive”: **the industrial novel, the rural novel, the novel for children and the youth, the historical and the adventure novel, the war novel, the fantasy/ SF novel**. Of course, I have eliminated superstructure categories (the social novel, the psychological novel, etc.) precisely because all socialist realist novels are social through their emphasis on progress, and none is psychological (with the exception of minor psychological *slips*, promptly disciplined in the literary press of the time). Besides these, there are also some sentimental and autobiographical novels.

In short, this is the landscape of the Romanian socialist realist novel between 1948 and 1955, beyond its general *roman à thèse* label.

Ehrenburg, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Anna Seghers, Mihail Sadoveanu, György Lukács, Nâzim Hikmet, Louis Aragon, Pablo Neruda, Jorge Amado, Go Mo Zho, and Howard Fast, who served as the liaisons between their national literatures and the Moscow centre”.

¹⁹ Ștefan Baghiu, “The Functions of Socialist Realism: Translation of Genre Fiction in Communist Romania”, *Primerjalna književnost*, 42, 2019, 1, pp. 119-132.

²⁰ Mihai Iovănel, “Mobile Frontiers: Instrumentations of Paraliterature in Modern Romanian Literature (1878–2018)”, *Transylvanian Review*, 28, 2019, 1, pp. 73-82.

²¹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 1.

The Industrial Novel

In the wake of the communist national industrialization, the socialist realist Romanian novel often turns into a constant plea for automation and begins to look at life in a factory or a plant. The first industrial novel published during socialist realism was written by Cella Serghi and appeared in 1950: *Cântecul uzinei* [*The Plant Song*]. However, it was merely a novel “heading towards socialist realism”, even from the point of view of its contemporary literary critics. It is essential to note that, although the author had been present in *Femeia* [*The Woman*] (edited by the Romanian Democratic Women’s Union), she had been described as a representative of “the formalist-cosmopolitan formula” by Cornel Regman in his famous 1949 article, „Naționalism și cosmopolitism în cultura română” [“Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Romanian Culture”]²² and later rehabilitated by Petru Comarnescu in 1950, after the issue of *Cad Zidurile* [*The Walls are Falling*], seen as a representation of “the transformative process of a heroine within the fictional world, as well as of Cella Serghi herself, who goes from a bourgeois psychologism to critical realism and, eventually, even progressive realism, which will help her achieve socialist realism in future works”²³.

There is, thus, a progression (critical realism, progressive realism, socialist realism) noticeable in the *allowed* evolution of the genre. The industrial novel had had sporadic precedents on Romanian territory, especially due to Bovaric literary projects like *Americana îndrăgostită* [*The American in Love*] by Vasile Pop (1920), about work migration in American factories²⁴.

Moreover, as shown by Andrei Terian, there is a whole set of novels on the subject of oil exploitation and deforestation (Mihail Sadoveanu with *Noaptea de*

²² Cornel Regman, “Naționalism și cosmopolitism în cultura română” [Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Romanian Culture], *Almanahul literar* [*The Literary Almanac*], 1949, 1, in Eugen Simion (ed.), *Cronologia vieții literare românești. Perioada postbelică: 1944–1969* [The Chronology of the Literary Life. The Postwar Period: 1944–1969], vol. IV (1949–1950), București, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2011, p. 210: “The aestheticist-formalists of bourgeois criticism, shaped by French culture, become ecstatic in the face of all such innovations, theorizing the classics’ lack of actuality (E. Lovinescu), the necessity of ‘urbanization’, the need for Western themes in art – the formalist-cosmopolitan formula whose results can be witnessed in the novels of the ‘Romanian city’ (the authoresses in Lovinescu’s literary circle: Cella Serghi, Ioana Postelnicu, Sorana)”.

²³ Petru Comarnescu, “Romanul clarificării unor conștiințe, Cad zidurile” [“A Novel of Clarified Consciences, The Walls are Falling”], *Universul* [*The Universe*], 1950, 7, in Eugen Simion (ed.), *Cronologia vieții literare*, vol. IV (1949–1950), p. 253.

²⁴ Vasile Pop, *Americana îndrăgostită* [*The American in Love*], București, Editura Librăriei Sococ, 1920. See Ștefan Baghiu et alii, *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: 1900–1932*, Sibiu, Complexul Național Muzeal ASTRA, 2020, <http://revistatransilvania.ro/mdrr1900-1932>. See more on the genres of the interwar period in Andrei Terian, Daiana Gârdan, Emanuel Modoc, Cosmin Borza, Dragoș Varga, Ovio Olaru, and David Morariu, “Genurile romanului românesc (1900–1932). O analiză cantitativă” [“The Genres of the Romanian Novel (1900–1932). A Quantitative Analysis”], *Transilvania*, 2020, 10, pp. 53–64.

sânziene [*Midsummer Nights*] and Cezar Petrescu with *Aurul negru* [*Black Gold*]), which connect the social mining novel with postwar magical realism²⁵. Of course, although novels like *De două mii de ani* [*For Two Thousand Years*] by Mihail Sebastian include scenes set on oil sites, they cannot be seen as industrial novels, since the theme is only episodic. As for the depiction of mining in the pre-communist industrial novel, there are a few examples, such as Carol Ardeleanu's 1933 *Viermii pământului* [*Earth Worms*], rediscussed as "popular" achievements during socialist realism²⁶. The specificity of the socialist realist industrial novel lies with the prior documentation of the analyzed subject. Although often ideologically directed, the reality within the novel must conform to the reality "in the field", given the fact that the boundaries between fiction and reality were erased in this period. In short, the industrial novel both documents and reckons up the regime's achievements.

As for **plants, factories and hydropower stations**, *Oțel și pâine* [*Steel and Bread*] (1951) by Ion Călugăru describes the Iron and Steel Enterprise in Hunedoara, *Cumpăna luminilor* [*Balance of Lights*] (1952) by Nicolae Jianu describes the activity of the Semenice hydropower station, *În orașul de pe Mureș* [*In a city upon Mureș*] (1954) by Francisc Munteanu – that of the lathe factory in Arad, and *Rădăcinile bucuriei* [*The Roots of Joy*] (1954) by Ieronim Șerbu – the „Laminorul roșu” [“Red Rolling Mill”] factory. We could also add *Pavel Dogaru* (1955) by Dan Costescu. The category also includes *Pădurea Poienari* [*The Poienari Forest*] by Ioana Postelnicu, still interesting today especially due to its leading “female driller” protagonists, as well as **mining** novels (*Nepoții lui Horea* [*Horea's Grandchildren*] by Petru Vintilă, from 1951, Dragoș Viscol's 1953 *Valea fierului* [*The Iron Valley*]), Nicolae Deleannu's 1955 *Nedeia din Poiana Miresei* [*The Bride's Glade*], and Nicolae Jianu's 1955 *Izvorul roșu* [*The Red Spring*]).

Then, novels centred on **infrastructure and construction** can be added to the list. Ștefan Andrei wrote about the construction of a new residential neighborhood in Brașov in his 1952 *Noul oraș* [*The New City*]. Here, the most important subcategory is represented by novels about the **Danube-Black Sea Canal construction**, such as Petru Dumitriu's *Drum fără pulbere* [*Dustless Road*] (1951). Regarding this specific novel, Silviu Burcan's intervention is most interesting, as it mentioned “certain drawbacks in its reflection of the truth of life”, which were later exposed by “the party press and the readers”²⁷ (true power-masses)²⁸.

²⁵ Andrei Terian, “Extractivism, or the Birth of Magical Realism as World Literature”, *Textual Practice*, 2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1886710>. Accessed March 2, 2021.

²⁶ H. Zalis, “Clasa muncitoare în literatura dintre cele două războaie” [“The Working Class in Interwar Literature“], I–II, *Tribuna*, 1959, 28-29, p. 3.

²⁷ See Eugen Simion (ed.), *Cronologia vieții literare*, vol. V (1951–1953), p. 378.

²⁸ Evgeny Dobrenko, “The Disaster of Middlebrow Taste, or, Who ‘Invented’ Socialist Realism?”, in Thomas Lahuesn and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 135-165.

The Rural Novel

As for the rural novel, it took only two decades for socialist realism to reach the production of the entire interwar period. According to Cosmin Borza, between 1945 and 1964 the same number of novels was published as between 1919 and 1944 (and four times as many in both intervals than between 1896 and 1918)²⁹. However, the best period by far for the production of rural novels is 1965-1989, when twice as many are published than in the first socialist realist phase. Borza shows that “the first socialist-realist novel is published already in 1945 (Marin Iorda’s *Oameni în cătușe de aur* [*People in Golden Handcuffs*]), whereas the series of novels treating collectivization opens with Ion Istrati’s *Grâu înfrățit* [*Brotherly Wheat*] (1950) and Eusebiu Camilar’s *Temelia* [*The Foundation*] (1951, published one year previously as a feuilleton). This marks the period of the genre’s birth, either through the novelists’ shift towards it or as absolute debut”³⁰. I would propose a different approach than Borza’s (which focuses on the canonical figures of the socialist realist rural novel). First, there are the **collectivization novels**. The theme emerges in poetry even before historical collectivization (it is the leitmotif of the famous 1947 *Lazăr dela Rusca* [*Lazăr of Rusca*] by Dan Deșliu), and it generates significant works in 1950 (*Grâu înfrățit* by Ion Istrati), and 1951 (*Temelia* by Eusebiu Camilar, the first *great novel* of collectivization). Marin Preda’s 1952 short story, *Desfășurarea* [*The Unfolding*] is also worth mentioning. A whole series follows, tackling the same themes: *Trandafir de la Moldova* [*Moldavian Rose*] by Ion Istrati (1952), *Pâine albă* [*White Bread*] by Dumitru Mircea (1952), *Ogoare noi* [*New Fields*] by Aurel Mihale (1953), and the 1954 *Bărăgan* by V. Em. Galan. The **uprising novel** is reactivated in autochthonous literature in *Zorii robilor* [*The Slaves’ Dawn*] by V. Em. Galan (1950), *Desculț* [*Barefoot*] by Zaharia Stancu (1948), *Bijuterii de familie* [*Family Jewels*] by Petru Dumitriu (1949), and *Niculai Călărășul* by C. Ignătescu (1953). The rural novel subgenre can also include *Puntea din vale* [*The Valley Footbridge*] by Al. Raicu (1948), *Zilele vieții tale* [*The days of your life*] – I, II, by Ion Pas (1949), *Mitrea Cocor* by Mihail Sadoveanu (1949), *Orbecanii* by Tiberiu Vornic (1950), *Judecata* [*The Judgment*] by Aurel Mihale (1952), *Dulăii* [*The Hounds*] by Zaharia Stancu, *Ana Nucului* by Remus Luca (1953), *Mlaștina* [*The Marshland*] by Silviu Podină (1953), *Cronică de câmpie* [*Plain Chronicle*] (1955) by Petru Dumitriu and *Marșul miresei* [*Bride’s March*] (1955) by C. Ignătescu.

²⁹ Cosmin Borza, “How to Populate a Country. A Quantitative Analysis of the Rural Novel from Romania (1900-2000)”, in Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, and Maria Sass (eds.), *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, pp. 21-40. For the larger picture of the production of the Romanian novel see Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers. A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Review*, 28, 2019, 1, pp. 55-71.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

By the end of the period, a new type of rural novel is devised where realism doesn't generate consciousness within the rural world, but outside of it, and the technicians and engineers who enter this space become central characters: *Floarea vieții* [*The Flower of Life*] by Aurel Mihale or *Aventură în Lunca Dunării* [*Adventure in the Danube Delta*] by Mihail Sadoveanu (both from 1954). In the latter, the intellectual protagonist visits an "agricultural state household" and "takes part in the capture of a criminal, Mustăcilă, a corrupt administrator in charge of the household's piglets and a friend of the enterprise director, thus getting to know the new realities of the village" ("1954" in the DCCR). The **Danube fishermen novel** is also extremely important within the rural genre, as it exposes the poverty and backwardness of Romania's southern regions³¹: *Soarele răsare în Deltă* [*The Sun Rises over the Delta*] by Vladimir Colin (1951), *La malul apelor* [*By the Water*] by Florin Petrescu (1953) or *Aventură în Lunca Dunării* by Mihail Sadoveanu (1954) are such critical narratives. Besides these rural novels and those concerning Danube fishermen, some **archaic civilization novels** also emerge during the socialist realist phase, such as Mihail Sadoveanu's 1948 *Păuna Mică* and his 1950 *Nada Florilor* [*The Flower Bait*], or *În valea Marelui Fluviu* [*The Valley of the Great River*] by Felix Aderca, from 1955. The novels reproduce the dominant ideas of the period within agricultural and harvest communities, either directly in the Neolithic Age (Aderca) or in isolated communities that discover socialism instinctively, by withdrawing from society.

The Historical Novel, the War Novel, the Social Fresco

These subgenres are often difficult to distinguish from the industrial, rural or children and youth novels because their characteristics often overlap. What sets them apart, however, is an obsession with the past or contemporaneity as seen in the process of exposing current historical events.

Thus, in terms of **actuality-based political novels** we have examples like *Veneau de pretutindeni* [*From High and Low*] by Mihail Florescu (1948) (about the battles between the Germans and the French during the Occupation) and *Negura* [*The Mist*] by Eusebiu Camilar (1949) (which uses the example of Cezar Petrescu's *Întunecare* [*Gathering Clouds*] about Romania's involvement in WWI, describing events from WWII).

Along these, there are **novels about the war and illegalist struggles** such as *Inimă de tânăr* [*A Young Heart*] (1948) by A. Stancu, about the Spanish civil war of 1936, *Evadare* [*The Escape*] (1949) by Alexandru Jar, about the illegalist fight against the Germans, *Vițelul de aur* [*The Golden Calf*] (1949) by Ieronim Șerbu,

³¹ I tried to draw a parallel between these novels about the poor Romanian South and other narratives about the Global South through the lens of translation in Ștefan Baghiu, "Translating Hemispheres: Eastern Europe and the Global South Connection through Translationscapes of Poverty", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 56, 2019, 3, pp. 487-503.

about business opportunism during the war, condemning the exploitation of military conflict for personal financial gain, *Scântei în beznă* [*Sparks in the Dark*] (1950), *Clocote* [*Tumult*] (1954) by A.G. Vaida, *O poveste simplă* [*A Simple Story*] (1955) by Alexandru Jar, once again about illegalists. Another interesting case is that of *Sfârșitul jalbelor* [*The End of Grievance*] (1950) and *Marea pregătire* [*Great Preparations*] (1952) by Alexandru Jar, both of which present the Grivița strikers and the 1933 uprisings.

As for the **historical novel about past events**, the genre abounds in local figures meant to reorganize the existent heroic heritage: in 1953, C. Ghiban publishes *Flăcăul din Bințiți* [*The Bințiți Lad*] about Aurel Vlaicu; in 1951 I.D. Mușat writes *Răscoala iobagilor* [*The Serf Uprising*] about Gheorghe Doja; likewise, Camil Petrescu publishes *Un om între oameni* [*A man among men*] (1953) about Nicolae Bălcescu, Dumitru Almaș – *Neculai Milescu spătarul* [*Nicolae Milescu, the sword bearer*] (1954) (which can also be seen as children or youth literature, as most of Almaș's writing), Cezar Petrescu – *Ajun de revoluție 1848* [*Revolutionary Eve, 1848*] (1954) about the 1848 revolutionary figures, Radu Theodoru – *Brazdă și paloș* [*Plough and Sword*] (1954) about Mihai Viteazul, and Mihnea Gheorghiu's *Două ambasade* [*Two Embassies*] (1955) about Dimitrie Cantemir. Then the list goes on with novels about WWI, like *Pe văile Argeșului* [*Down the Argeș*] by Sanda Movilă (1950) and *Starea de asediu* [*The Curfew*] by I. Ludo (1955). Social frescoes generally present the interwar and mid-war society, inter-party political conflicts and capitalist life (the latter especially as satire). Such social frescoes of bourgeois society include *Pâinea inimii* [*Bread for the Heart*] (1949) by Mihail Șerban, *Cad zidurile* [*The Walls are Falling*] (1950) by Cella Serghi (we have already discussed her evolution during socialist realism; the novel is not completely devoid of the psychological implications previously tested by the author), *O alegere de pomină* [*The Infamous Choice*] (1952) by Ioan Dorin, *Bietul Ioanide* [*Poor Ioanide*] (1953) by G. Călinescu, *Domnul general guvernează* [*The General's Command*] (1954), *Gura de lup* [*Wolf Jaws*] (1954) by I. Ludo, and *Oameni de ieri, oameni de azi, oameni de mâine* [*People of Yesterday, People of Today, People of Tomorrow*] (1955) by Cezar Petrescu.

The Children and Youth Novel, the Fantasy/SF Novel

In its efforts to integrate socialist propaganda in the educational process, the Party considers children's literature to be a fundamental instrument for instilling scientific materialism in young minds. Thus, the socialist realist novel aimed at the youth pleads for two convergent elements: communitarianism/ socialism and science. As I have already analyzed these aspects in relation to novel translation during socialist realism, I will include a passage here: "A process of incorporation that was also visible in the communist states of Eastern Europe applied this time to their own literatures which were struggling to establish their local socialist literary canon. A good example in this regard is the debate over Ion Creangă, one of the

most important Romanian nineteenth-century fiction writers. His alleged class struggle was put forward by socialist realist critic Al. N. Trestieni in 1946, who argues that his children's prose, drawing on folktales and fantasy, has depicted "under the guise of fantasy [...], genuine exploiter typologies"³².

Moreover, as shown by Mihai Iovănel in the case of fantasy and SF literature, "socialist realism, in a manner similar to its predecessor, Marxism, was based on a secular scientific foundation, and took much interest in positive disciplines such as physics, astronomy, and medicine, which serve as basis for science-fiction literature. Included in the program and supported by the system, by means of the then-highly popular "Colecția Povestiri științifico-fantastice" ["The Science-fiction Stories Series"], SF was one of the most efficient instruments for scientific promotion and ideological education in the 1950s"³³. Besides these arguments explaining the relationship between fantasy or SF and socialist realism, one can also consider Darko Suvin's excellent analyses regarding the fact that "Soviet SF of the 1920s had [...] established a tradition ranging sociologically from facile subliterate to some of the most interesting works of 'highbrow' fiction"³⁴. This is why the socialist realist period produced **SF novels** like *Drum printre aștri* [*A Path among the Stars*] (1954) by I.M. Ștefan and Radu Nor.

Among educational **children and youth novels**, a few notable examples are the imitative *Pinocchio detectiv. Roman pentru copii* [*Pinocchio the Detective. A children's novel*] (1948) by Mihai Axente (it must be said that the character Buratino initially belonged to the Soviet writer A.N. Tolstoy), *Cei trei voinici* [*The Three Strong Men*] (1948) by Alexandru Corodar, *Chimiță R. Ilie, școlar și hoinar* [*Chimiță R. Ilie, Schoolboy and Wanderer*] (1948) by Damian Stănoiu, which depicts the evolution of a peasant's son through education, *Nodul pământului. Roman pentru tineret* [*The Centre of the Earth. A Novel for Youth*] (1949) by Elena Mătase, *Neghiniță* (1949) by Cezar Petrescu, about an orphan in the wake of WWII bombing in Bucharest, *Inimășii* [*Kind People*] (1953) by G. Iuteș, and even *Tabăra din munți* [*The Mountain Camp*] (1953) by Gellu Naum. The latter inaugurates a series of novels about juvenile vigilantes who capture criminals, which includes *Marea bătălie de la Iazul Mic* [*The Great Battle of the Small Pond*] (1953) by Octav Pancu-Iași or *Cantemiriștii* [*The Cantemir Students*] (1954) by Cella Serghi.

Travel (adventure) novels are also published, such as *M-am făcut băiat mare* [*Becoming a Grown-up Boy*] (1954) by Nicuță Tănase and *Toate pânzele sus!* [*All*

³² See Eugen Simion (ed.), *Cronologia vieții literare*, vol. V (1951–1953), p. 186.

³³ Mihai Iovănel, *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* [*Literary Ideologies in Romanian Postcommunism*], București, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2014, pp. 165-166. See Iovănel's explanation of the link between "robots"/ "intelligent machines" and the rural novel in Mihai Iovănel, "Peasants and Intelligent Machines", in Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, and Maria Sass (eds.), *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, pp. 117-128.

³⁴ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction. On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 262.

on Board!]) (1954) by Radu Tudoran, as well as **autobiographical novels**: *Lumina primăverii* [*Spring Light*] (1948) by Ion Călugăru, about the coming of age of a socialist adolescent. Finally, Nicolae Minei writes a novel on **racial segregation in the USA**, *Prietenul nostru Allan* [*Our Friend Allan*] (1951), joining the general discourse of the period and the critique of colonialism and segregation.

The Simultaneous Mutation

At the end of this classification, I would like to briefly point out one aspect which has caught my attention regarding the novel of the first socialist realist stage. A sort of *particular feeling* can be noticed in novels published in 1954 and 1955 (that is, in the last year of the period), which has to do with the emergence of exceptions within each of the categories outlined above. With rural novels, the exception is *Moromeții* [*The Morometes*] by Marin Preda – I would also add *Cronică de familie* [*Family Chronicle*] by Petru Dumitriu. Here, the *exception* is ideological: this is the first novel where you don't find a concrete oppressor, but rather a suggested abstract *oppression*. In the same year, a film adaption appears, drawing on an *office/ corporate novel* (the terminology is exaggerated, of course, but this case was not far from the general *corporate novel* formula) and harshly criticising bureaucracy and its absurdities (*Directorul nostru* [*Our Director*]). Among novels set during WWII (war novels) we can count *Străinul* [*The Stranger*] by Titus Popovici, which represents a new level of the social fresco. In principle, all of these constitute a milestone, the moment when the first stage of socialist realism had come to an end.

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THE SOCIALIST REALIST NOVEL IN ROMANIA BETWEEN 1948 AND 1955. NOVELISTIC GENRES AND SUBGENRES

(Abstract)

This paper aims to survey some of the key elements of the socialist realist novel and to explain why it is, in fact, an umbrella term for more subgenres, seeking uniformity only in its desire to connect literature with a more or less coherent ideological programme. More, or rather, less coherent because, in spite of the theses formulated in literary historiography according to which socialist realism represents the brutal standardization of creative principles, many recent studies have shown that this standardization was primarily accomplished "along the way", through various mechanisms of verification and critique and in accordance with often changeable strategies. In the following, I propose a classification of the Romanian socialist realist novel based on the analysis of the "archive", into: the industrial novel, the rural novel, novels for children and the youth, the historical and adventure novel, the war novel and the fantasy/ SF novel. Besides these, there are also some sentimental, autobiographical or social fresco novels but, since their production was limited, I will discuss them very succinctly. In short, this is the landscape of the Romanian socialist realist novel between 1948 and 1955, beyond its general *roman à thèse* label.

Keywords: socialist realism 1948–1955, roman à thèse, ideology, Romanian novel, subgenres.

ROMANUL REALIST-SOCIALIT DIN ROMÂNIA ÎNTRE 1948 ȘI 1955. GENURI ȘI SUBGENURI ROMANEȘTI

(Rezumat)

Articolul își propune să urmărească câteva dintre trăsăturile centrale ale așa-numitului roman realist-socialist și să explice de ce noțiunea reprezintă, în fapt, un termen-umbrelă pentru mai multe subgenuri. Efectul utilizării sale este uniformizarea, de vreme ce singurul său scop este de a conecta literatura la un program ideologic mai mult sau mai puțin coerent. În ciuda tezelor formulate constant de istoriografia literară că realismul socialist reprezintă standardizarea brutală a principiilor creatoare, multe studii recente au demonstrat că respectiva standardizare a fost dobândită „pe parcurs”, prin intermediul unor mecanisme de control diverse și urmând strategii adeseori variabile. În consecință, articolul propune următoarea clasificare a romanului realist-socialist din România, bazată de analiza „arhivei” genului: romanul industrial, romanul rural, romanul pentru copii și tineret, romanul istoric și romanul de aventuri, romanul de război, respectiv fantasy/romanul științifico-fantastic. Dincolo de aceste tipologii, studiul ia în considerare și romanele sentimentale, autobiografice ori pe cele care implică fresce sociale, dar, având în vedere că productivitatea lor a fost restrânsă, analiza care le va viza va fi succintă. Pe scurt, acesta este tabloul sinoptic al romanului realist-socialist românesc dintre 1948 și 1955 problematizat în acest studiu, care va lua în considerare și componenta tezistă a literaturii realist-socialiste.

Cuvinte-cheie: realism socialist 1948–1955, roman cu teză, ideologie, romanul românesc, subgenurile romanului.

MIHAELA MUDURE

THREE INSTANCES OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMIC NOVEL

The “campus/ academic novel” entered literary taxonomy in the United States and United Kingdom of Great Britain, in the seventies and the eighties of the twentieth century. The appearance of this new literary form is not without connection with the new evolutions in the educational policies of the First World countries. The number of universities increased. The gates of the universities were open wider and wider giving young people false hopes that a university degree will give them respectability, wealth and a middle class status. This was certainly true for the Victorian Age and afterwards, up to World War II. Nowadays the universities are rather social tools in order to maintain a social *status quo* and postpone social crises as much as possible. What is the recipe? Firstly, high school is more and more lenient. Both high schools and universities are more and more assembly lines which offer the buyer (the student) a degree which is no longer the social opener it used to be. The entrance of the young generation into the labour market is delayed more and more by prolonging schooling, the youngsters’ energies are contained as they must continue to yield to the authorities and the gate keepers extant. Therefore, students are being deprived of economic independence and held mesmerized by the mirage of the miraculous university degree that will bring them ever lasting fulfilment and the assurance that they will live happily ever after... Ever after graduation, of course.

In other words, the proliferation of the campus novel must be connected to the changes in the structure and the expected scope of the university in society. The university is no longer a place only for restricted and restrictive elites. More and more youngsters whose ancestors did not have more than elementary schooling are admitted to the university. Not only the studentship changed but also the teachers’ condition. Many novelists teach in universities and are inspired by academic life. Remember the old adage: write what you know, write what you know about! Much more than before World War II writers became members of the academic staff. The appearance of the creative writing classes brought many writers into the academia.

In the past the literary circles and societies¹ offered, for free, young or not so young writers the support, the guidance, the encouragement that creative writing classes are now offering within the universities, but not for free. Of course, writers have to live and the mercantile contemporary capitalism does not offer too many chances to someone interested in art. The solution? Turn writers (but not all of them, only the famous ones) into teachers of literary art.

¹ Junimea, Sburătorul, or Cenaclul de Luni are such literary circles in the Romanian literary history.

On the other hand, truth is that writers used universities as fictional sites long before the appearance of the campus novel. In François *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1534), the famous French university, la Sorbonne, was a favourite target for the laughter of the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais. Oxford appears in several eighteenth-century English novels. Education and learning were not a priority for many Oxonian students. Eliza Haywood wrote in *The Adventures of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) about the erotic preoccupations of the students in Oxford and the dangers modest ladies could encounter in this academic town:

The ladies of Oxford are commonly more than ordinarily circumspect in their behaviour; as indeed, it behoves them to be, in a place where there are such a number of young gentlemen, many of whom pursue pleasure more than study, and scruple nothing for the gratification of their desires. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that being from their infancy trained up in the most strict reserve, and accustomed to be upon their guard against even the most distant approaches of the other sex, they should be apt to pass the severest censures on a conduct, which they had been always taught to look upon as the sure destruction of reputation, and frequently fatal to innocence and virtue².

In Tobias Smollett's epistolary novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), there are two Oxonians: Jerry Melford and Sir Watkin Phillips. Their letters talk mostly about amorous escapades and consequences that must be hidden or dealt with in other discreet ways and not so much about exams or severe professors. Here is for instance, a fragment from one of Jerry Melford's letters. The epistle talks about the Oxonians' interest in Miss Blackerby and the unwanted results of that interest:

DEAR PHILLIPS,

You have, indeed, reason to be surprised, that I should have concealed my correspondence with miss Blackerby from you, to whom I disclosed all my other connexions of that nature; but the truth is, I never dreamed of any such commerce, till your last informed me, that it had produced something which could not be much longer concealed. It is a lucky circumstance, however, that her reputation will not suffer any detriment, but rather derive advantage from the discovery; which will prove, at least, that it is not quite so rotten as most people imagined – For my own part, I declare to you, in all the sincerity of friendship, that, far from having any amorous intercourse with the object in question, I never had the least acquaintance with her person; but, if she is really in the condition you describe, I suspect Mansel to be at the bottom of the whole³.

² See Eliza Haywood, *The Adventures of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, in *Project Gutenberg*, 2014, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46346/46346-h/46346-h.htm>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

³ See Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, in *Project Gutenberg*, 2016, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2160/2160-h/2160-h.htm>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

As critic Joseph Bottum notices in his seminal article dedicated to the academic novel, “[t]o some extent, the modern academic novel simply takes tropes and stock figures from the very beginnings of Western literature and places them on the contemporary college campus. The absent-minded professor and the stuffy pedant were comic staples before the birth of Christ”⁴. Bottum offers a concise history of the academic novel⁵ and also makes a differentiation between the British and the American form of this genre:

The British form of the academic novel has always tended to the traditionalist complaint of a lost collegiate Eden [...], while the American form tends more to the radical charge of an old-fashioned institution undone by its corrupt ways [...]. But the most curious thing about the entire contemporary genre is that it is produced exclusively by college professors who, whether from the right or the left, attack the intellectual world with a remorselessness and irony never seen before⁶.

The conclusion is that the academic/ campus novel is a depleted genre, an exhausted resource for writing, at least in the Anglo-Saxon countries. In her article on the twentieth century British novel, Angela Hague notices the importance of the campus as a literary *topos* and also the feeling of anger which announces the Angry Young Men of the Albion⁷. The campus novel has been analysed and/ or inventoried by several critics among whom mention must be made of Mortimer Robinson Proctor, John O. Lyons, John E. Kramer, David Bevan, Ian Carter, Robert F. Scott, Kenneth Womack, Elaine Showalter, Moseley Merritt, or Janice Rossen⁸. The ever increasing erosion of the academic prestige is emphasised by Martin Paul Eve who

⁴ Joseph Bottum, “The End of the Academic Novel”, *Washington Examiner*, 9 August 1997, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/the-end-of-the-academic-novel>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

⁵ *Ibidem*: “The notion of writing a novel entirely about university faculty never occurred to anyone before 1950. When it did appear, however, the idea seemed to dawn on everyone all at once, and the ’50s and early ’60s saw a spate of stories about academic life”.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Angela Hague, “Picaresque Structure and the Angry Young Novel”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 32, 1968, 2, pp. 209-220.

⁸ Mortimer Robinson Proctor, *The English University Novel*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957; John O. Lyons, *The College Novel in America*. Preface by Harry T. Moore, Chicago, Southern Illinois University Press, 1962; John E. Kramer, *The American College Novel. An Annotated Bibliography*, Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 2003; David Bevan, *University Fiction*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1993; Ian Carter, *Ancient Cultures of Conceit. British University Fiction in the Post War Years*. London, Routledge, 1990; Robert F. Scott, “It’s a Small World, after All: Assessing the Contemporary Campus Novel”, *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 37, 2004, 1, pp. 81-87; Kenneth Womack, *Postwar Academic Fiction. Satire, Ethics, Community*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005; Moseley Merritt (ed.), *The Academic Novel: New and Classic Essays*, Chester, Chester Academic Press, 2007; Janice Rossen, *The University in Modern Fiction. When Power Is Academic*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1993.

admits that the contemporary novels he dealt with “exhibit an anxiety of academia”⁹ and discuss the “challenges of legitimation”¹⁰ of this social subsystem.

The increasing number of universities which are viewed as a solution to many social problems and the way to the long dreamed status of middle class explains the popularity of the genre. Both readers and writers focus more and more on the academic milieus:

The most pragmatic reason for this attraction is rooted in the maxim ‘write what you know.’ With rise of MFAs, English departments, and labyrinthine literary theory in the twentieth century, many novelists have seized the opportunity and retreated into the ivory tower, where they can still manage to pay the rent in a technology-addled and paper-averse society¹¹.

The scholarship on the campus novel is richer and richer. Robert F. Scott presents the state of the art in the criticism dedicated to the campus novel, while Jeffrey J. Williams tells the story of the campus novel and how it became a mainstream genre. After being “thought to be a marginal genre, perhaps with some exceptional moments like Mary McCarthy’s *Groves of Academe* (1952), Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954), and David Lodge’s *Small World* (1984), but otherwise quaint and eccentric, depicting the peculiar world of academics and appealing to a coterie audience”¹², by the century’s end the campus novel “had stepped out of the confines of so-called genre fiction by cross-pollinating with mainstream literary modes”¹³, such as satire, the thriller, the detective story or the *Bildungsroman*. David Lodge explains the campus novelists’ proclivity towards satire and humour by the very peculiarities of the academic situations. The university professor is not some kind of godly servant offering sacrifices on the altar of “the disinterested pursuit of truth and the preservation of high culture”¹⁴.

On the contrary, the campus novel shows that higher education institutions are “staffed by human beings with ordinary human weaknesses and often more than ordinary eccentricities”¹⁵. Lodge’s insistence on satire as a very suitable mode of the campus novel is not singular. John Kenny¹⁶, Mike Fischer¹⁷, the scholarly

⁹ Martin Paul Eve, *Literature against Criticism: University English and Contemporary Fiction in Conflict*, Cambridge, Open Book Publisher, 2016, p. 46.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹¹ Taylor Burgess, “A Genre in Discord: The Ubiquity of the Campus Novel”, *Wide Angle. A Journal of Literature and Film*, 3, 2013, 1, p. 60.

¹² Jeffrey J. Williams, “The Rise of the Academic Novel”, *American Literary History*, 24, 2012, 3, p. 561.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 580.

¹⁴ David Lodge, “Nabokov and the Campus Novel”, 24, *Cycnos*, 2008, 1, <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1081>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ John Kenny, “Lamponing Academia in the Campus Novel”, *The Irish Times*, 15 April 2006. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/lamponing-academia-in-the-campus-novel-1.1038980>. Accessed December 20, 2021.

couple Mark Bosco and Kimberley Rae Connor¹⁸ follow suit. For instance, in “Fear and Laughing in Campus Literature: Contemporary Messages from a Comedic Tradition”. the article authored by Katherine Reynolds, Robert Schwartz, and Beverly Bower, the campus novel is appreciated because “it acts more as a wake-up call than a call to arms concerning the peculiarities, sometimes absurdities of academic life”¹⁹.

Sally Dalton-Brown offers interesting consideration about the literary representation of the academic scholar:

Homo academicus is rarely a leader or inspirational teacher, as one might expect, but is very often depicted as a fool, fraud or philanderer imprisoned within a politically claustrophobic institution, and environment that almost appears to encourage foolishness, fakery, and philandering. The university... is something from which egress should, in fact, be sought if today’s academic is to recover his ideals, but the academic who has fought for his place in that world understandably regards such an egress with ambiguity²⁰.

One of the most ample studies on the campus novel is authored by Petr Anténe who has studied a large pool of campus novels published from the 1950’s to the beginning of the 21st century. The prevalence of satire in the campus novel shows awareness of the problems faced by the academia as well as optimism because the university “is both capable and worthy of reform”²¹. Taylor Burgess explains the campus novelists’ appeal for satire by the importance of the flawed professor archetype. The academic is “a man or woman at the world’s intellectual peak – but an impotent loser elsewhere”²².

Terminology hesitates between “academic novel” and “campus novel”. According to Leuschner, the academic novel is an “offshoot of the campus novel”²³ which moved from the undergraduate student to the academics and the novel of tenure. New themes appear in the campus novel. The articles from the collection edited by Moseley Merritt discuss the appearance of new characters in the campus

¹⁷ Mike Fischer, “Adventures in Academia”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 2010, <https://archive.jsonline.com/entertainment/arts/101658423.html>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

¹⁸ Mark Bosco, Kimberley Rae Connor, *Academic Novels as Satire: Critical Studies as an Emerging Genre*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2007.

¹⁹ Katherine Reynolds, Robert Schwartz, Beverly Bower, “Fear and Laughing in Campus Literature: Contemporary Messages from a Comedic Tradition”, *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 34, 2000, 1, p. 29.

²⁰ Sally Dalton-Brown, “Is There Life Outside of (the Genre of) the Campus Novel? The Academic Struggles to Find a Place in Today’s World”, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 41, 2008, 4, p. 593.

²¹ Petr Anténe, *Campus Novel Variations: A Comparative Study of an Anglo-American Genre*, Olomouc, Palacky University Olomouc, 2015, p. 144.

²² Taylor Burgess, “A Genre in Discord”, p. 61.

²³ Eric Leuschner, “Body Damage: Dis-figuring the Academic in Academic Fiction”, *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 28, 2006, 3-4, p. 339.

novels (the administrators, the cleaners), the marginalization of white males in the American academia, and the influence of political correctness upon academic life.

Syuzanna Poghosyan sums up several perspectives on the campus novel in a seminal article. She mentions that David Lodge distinguishes “two variations of academic novel. American university novel becomes known as a Campus novel, while the British variant is known as a Varsity novel”²⁴. The former is mostly about the student-professor relationship, the latter is mainly about the student-student relationships. The interesting point is that in some campus novels “the university itself is described in detail and becomes a novel character”²⁵. Poghosyan joins the numerous group of critics who talk about the importance of satire, irony, and laughter in this genre and she remarks that at present, “we see a tight mixture of satire and tragedy”²⁶ in campus novels. The characters are not very numerous and they are organized in opposing teams. Poghosyan considers that the main character is usually an intellectual who cannot adapt to society, the university being viewed as a haven and a protective space:

The hero is a very highly intellectual person and therefore finds it very difficult to fit into the uni-versity sphere. This is the reason why these characters are totally unable of co-exist-ing with the rest of the campus society. This hero does not see that he has chosen a wrong life path and it wears out his mental and physical strength²⁷.

There is, however, in my opinion, an excess of anti-capitalist ideology in Poghosyan’s evaluation of the academic as the main character. A much more convincing observation refers to the ever present ball or evening academic party

...which seems to be the peak when the tension tightens most. It makes possible to gather all the characters of the novel together and create all kinds of bonds among them. It is during this party that all the professional and personal conflicts reach their highest point²⁸.

In spite of some slight ideological slippage, Poghosyan’s article sums up very well the characteristics of the campus novel:

As a literary genre the academic novel has already got several concrete features, namely: the university as the corner stone of the novel; an evening party or ball which brings the novel to its climax; the unique type of hero; the opposing couples, which helps to increase the novel dynamics; ironic/ satiric mood of the narration²⁹.

²⁴ Syuzanna Poghosyan, “The Characteristic Features of the Academic Fiction Genre”, *Armenian Folia Anglistika*, 8, 2012, 1-2, p. 139.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

American critics³⁰ have also paid attention to the problem of race in the campus novel. Although apparently, the increasing numbers of university recruitments from among ethnic minority students helps level social and economic disparities in American society, in fact the academia as a system reflects the racial divisiveness and inequality that exist out there in society. Findeisen notices that racial discrimination in the American academia and in college sports is denounced even from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' novel *Donald Marcy* (published in 1893). The racial implications of the campus novel have also been discussed by Stephanie Brown³¹ and Lavelle Porter³². Both critics realize that the university campus can become a site for protest. Higher education has significantly contributed to increasing African American literary production and theoretical evaluation.

After the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal (1998)³³ sexuality on American campuses was discussed much more freely in literature, as well. As Jesse Kavadlo says, there was a "post-post-sexual revolution between male professors and female students"³⁴ in the American campus novel.

Recently the academic novel has been becoming global and by growing global it could not avoid regionalism. Significant in this respect are the articles authored by Rudolf Weiss (dealing with the academic novel in Germany and Austria)³⁵, Prasanta Kumar Padhi (about the Indian academic novel)³⁶ or Corina Selejan (about the Romanian campus novels). The problems of translating the American and the British campus novels into the languages and cultures with a different history of higher education also raise more and more academic interest. Marta Guirao, for instance, discusses the Spanish translations of David Lodge's campus novels in terms of generic and specific intertextuality. The former relies on the

³⁰ See Christopher Findeisen, "Injuries of Class: Mass Education and the American Campus Novel", *PMLA*, 130, 2015, 2, pp. 284-298.

³¹ Stephanie Brown, "J. Saunders Redding and the African American Campus Novel", in *The Postwar African American Novel: Protest and Discontent, 1945-1950*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2011, pp. 132-160.

³² Lavelle Porter, "The Overeducation of the Negro: On Reading Black Academic Fiction", in *The Blackademic Life: Academic Fiction, Higher Education, and the Black Intellectual*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2020, pp. 15-44.

³³ President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinski had a sexual relation between 1995 and 1997. The scandal broke out in 1998 and Clinton was impeached for having lied under oath about this episode in his life.

³⁴ Jesse Kavadlo, "Blue Angels Meet Dying Animals: Textual and Sexual Subversion in the Clinton-Era Academic Novel", *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 37, 2004, 2, p. 11.

³⁵ Rudolph Weiss, "From German to Austrian Academic Fiction: Regionalism Exponentiated", in Dieter Fuchs and Wojciech Klepuszewski (eds.), *The Campus Novel: Regional or Global?*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 93-108.

³⁶ Kumar Padhi Prasanta, "Indian Campus Novels: An Emerging Genre in Literary Writing", *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22, 2017, 11, pp. 1-8.

parodic discourse often encountered in this literary discourse, the latter on the revisitations of canonical texts in English literature³⁷.

This new, based-on-globalization approach insists on the political agendas, the mental dispositions, and the distinctiveness of various academic systems from all over the world. The Western academic novel tries to rehabilitate the erotic in the academia in spite of the impositions of political correctness. At the same time, Sapphic passions and queer discourses knock at the door of visibility and public recognition.

The Romanian campus novel – or rather the Romanian academic novel because few Romanian universities have a single unitary campus like the American ones – has a pretty rich history. Novels dedicated only to the academic life were published mostly after 1990. Reasons are multiple but an important factor is the relative youth of academic life in Romanian culture. Documents record the foundation and the activity of some higher education institutions founded on the territory of present-day Romania in the sixteenth century³⁸, but they only had a short and intermittent academic life. The Romanians did not have universities in the eleventh century, such as the Italians in Bologna, or the English in Oxford.

Corina Selejan made a thorough inventory of the academic novels but the pre-1990 span of time is not well represented in her research³⁹. Selejan's studies could be enriched with some novels whose plot is wholly or, at least, partly connected to the university. Mention should be made of the academic novels presenting students' life during the communist regime, or more precisely the confrontation between authentic scholarship offered by some prestigious professors and the ideological and political impositions of the time. Some of the most convincing

³⁷ Marta Guirao, *David Lodge's Campus Novels in Spanish Translation: A Comparative Study of Genre and Intertextuality*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis defended at the University of London, 2002, <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1382487/>. Accessed December 20, 2020.

³⁸ Schola Latina founded by Despot Vodă at Cotnari or the Jesuit College from Cluj.

³⁹ Corina Selejan mentions the following novels in her 2019 studies ("How to Save Difference': Contemporary Romanian, German, English and American Academic Novels" in Dieter Fuchs and Wojciech Klepuszowski, (eds.), *The Campus Novel: Regional or Global?*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 166-179; "The Romanian Academic Novel and Film through the Postcommunism/ Postcolonialism Lens", *Polish Journal of English Studies*, 2019, 2, pp. 87-102): Ion Vianu, *Amor Intellectualis. Amorul unei educații* [*Amor Intellectualis. The Love Story of Some Education*] (2010); Oana Tănase, *Filo, Meserie!* [*Faculty of Letters, Cool!*] (2005); Alexandru Mușina, *Nepotul lui Dracula* [*Dracula's Descendant*] (2012); Andrei Bodiu, *Bulevardul eroilor* [*The Heroes' Boulevard*] (2004); Caius Dobrescu, *Teza de doctorat* [*The Ph.D. Thesis*] (2007) and *Minoic* [*Minoan*] (2011); Lucian Bâgiu, *Bestiar: Salată orientală cu universitari închipuiți* [*Bestiary: Oriental Salad with Presumptuous Academics*] (2008); Gabriela Gavril, *Fiecare cu Budapesta lui* [*Everyone Has His Own Budapest*] (2007); Ovidiu Pecican, *Noaptea soarelui răsare* [*The Night of the Rising Sun*] (2014); Anton Marin, *Eu, gândacul* [*I, the Bug*] (2009); Radu Vancu, *Transparența* [*Transparency*] (2018). The only inter-war academic novel inventoried by Selejan is *Zilele și nopțile unui student întârziat* [*A Belated Student's Days and Nights*] (1930) by Gib I. Mihăescu and the only novel, mentioned by Selejan, which also describes academic life under the communist regime is *Cearta* [*The Squabble*] (1969) by Al. Piru.

novels in this group are: Pop Simion's *Student la istorie* [A History Student] (1985), Teofil Bușecan's *Paranteze* [Parentheses] (1967), Constantin Cubleşan's *Licheni* [Lichens] (1974), Eugen Zehan's *Studenții* [Students] (1977).

Very few Romanian academic novels are authored by women and this is no wonder as the Romanian university widely remained a predominantly male territory up to the Communist period. Marta Rădulescu, one of the few women authoring an academic novel before 1948, announced another academic novel *Cadavre, roman din viața universitară* [Corpses. A Novel from the Academic Life] in 1933, when she published *Sînt studentă! Reportagii fanteziste* [I Am a Student! Imaginary Reportages]. Unfortunately, this project never became a reality. When they do write about the Romanian academia, female novelists⁴⁰ insist on the emotional side of academic life: the provincial female students' brutal insertion into the big city, the sexual and the emotional consequences of the female students' relationships with the gatekeepers of academic life (the male professor viewed as a mentor, a father figure, and a potential lover).

The Romanian academic novel has also been influenced by the tortuous history of the Romanian state during the twentieth century. Borders changed, territories were incorporated into the Romanian state or passed under the authority of neighbouring states. This influenced academic life: universities had to take refuge on territories allowed to remain under the authority of the Romanian state; young people from the new Romanian provinces were offered new academic options within the new Romanian borders. Examples in this respect are Ionel Brandabur's *Un student de altădată* [An Olden Times Student] (1987) and Ioan Sulacov's *Studentul din Bugeac* [The Student from Bugeac] (1935). The former presents the academic life of the University of Cluj that had to take refuge to Sibiu in 1940 when the north-western part of Transylvania entered within the boundaries of Hungary after the Vienna Award. The latter presents the story of a poor student from Bugeac, a territory that was incorporated into Romania after World War I and which previously had been part of the Tsarist Empire. The plot of the Romanian academic novel often relies on love stories that failed because of religious⁴¹, ethnic⁴², or class differences⁴³. Studentship is a period in one's life that coincides with Romantic ardour and brave challenges of societal stereotypes and prejudice.

Olga Caba, a former student of the Faculty of Letters in Cluj, who benefited from a scholarship in Scotland during the interwar period, wrote the first novel that announces a quite frequent theme in the post-1990 Romanian academic novel: the

⁴⁰ Some of the best such novels are authored by Sanda Movilă (*Desfigurații* [The Disfigured], 1935) and Lucreția Petrescu (*Mărăcini* [Thistles], 1937).

⁴¹ *Otrava* [The Poison] (1940) by Emil Dorian is the love story of a Christian student (Radu Socoliu) and a Jewish one (Frida Bălan).

⁴² *Supraviețuitorii* [Survivors] (1980) by Marta Cozmin tells the tragic romance between Fabian Vladimir, a student in Philology, and Maria, a Gypsy adolescent.

⁴³ In *Cora. Istoria unei iubiri naive* [Cora. A Naïve Love Story] (1977) by Virgil Duda.

Romanian student studying abroad and confronting different academic and societal mores⁴⁴.

For the present analysis of the Romanian academic novel, I have chosen three such fictions: Marta Rădulescu's *Sînt studentă! Reportagii fanteziste* [*I Am a Student! Imaginary Reportages*], published in 1933; Alexandru Mușina's *Nepotul lui Dracula* [*Dracula's Descendant*], published in 2012; and Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru's *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile* [*The Scriptor or the Book of Admirable Transformations*], published in 2017. Rădulescu's novel can point to the peculiarities of female authored academic novels and during the interwar period, Mușina skilfully mixed an ironical treatment of Dracula's theme with the description of the Romanian academia in the 1990s, whereas Cuțitaru's novel is a good example of a metafictional academic novel.

Marta Rădulescu's book *Sînt studentă!* [*I Am a Student!*] has a subtitle *Reportagii fanteziste* [*Imaginary Reportages*] which does not correspond to the actual form of the book, although some fragmentarism does exist. In my opinion, this subtitle is meant to protect the author from potential critiques that she dared to approach such a difficult and prestigious literary form as the novel. On the other hand, this subtitle insists on the veracity of the representation of the Romanian academic life and offers Rădulescu protection from the "sovereigns" of academic life that might recognize themselves in this book. In both cases, Rădulescu's awareness that she wrote in a patriarchal milieu is obvious. The novel presents with humour and realism the integration into the university of a young female student who has literary ambitions and is the daughter of a university professor. The fact that the title character belongs to the university elite by the very reality of her birth is of significant importance. As Lucian Nastasă pointed out in his researches⁴⁵, the Romanian academia delights in cultivating academic dynasties and meritocracy is certainly not encouraged enough.

Rădulescu's academic novel has been accused of superficiality and the author did not benefit of too much attention from Romanian critics. Aurel Sasu, the author of the entry on Rădulescu's academic novel in *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 1989*] (DCRR), considers this fiction „a very funny documentary”⁴⁶. Carmen Brăgaru, the author of the entry on Marta

⁴⁴ *Cumpăna din cetate* [*The Scale from the Fortress*] by Olga Caba.

⁴⁵ See Lucian Nastasă, *Intimitatea amfiteatrelor. Ipostaze din viața universitarilor "literari" (1864–1948)* [*The Intimacy of Amphitheatres. Faces in the Privacy of the "Literary" University Professors (1864–1948)*], Cluj-Napoca, Limes, 2010, and Lucian Nastasă, "Suveranii" universităților românești. *Mecanisme de selecție și promovare a elitei intelectuale* [*The "Sovereigns" of Romanian Universities. Intellectual Elites' Mechanisms of Selection and Promotion*], Cluj-Napoca, Limes, 2007.

⁴⁶ See *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 1989*], București, Editura Academiei Române, 2004, p. 305: "foarte amuzant documentar". The Romanian quotations have been translated by Mihaela Mudure.

Rădulescu in *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* [*The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*] considers that this novel contains only “satirical sketches and caricatures that cannot be more than mere reproductions of reality with no real attempt at artistic rendering”⁴⁷. And, finally, Mariana Vartic, the author of the entry on the same topic in the well-known Mircea Zăciu, Marian Papahagi, and Aurel Sasu’s *Dictionary* also belittles Rădulescu’s novel as a collection of “easy-going sketches”⁴⁸.

An important target of Rădulescu’s satire is the academic establishment. The author is merciless and demanding. Mercantile, narrow-minded, arrogant, most of the academics rather offer their students models of what one should not do than what one should do. Some caricature portraits retain the reader’s attention. The dean is “a scrawny gentleman, bald, with a handlebar moustache, and a brown beard like a mason’s brush eaten by moths”⁴⁹, Professor Preda Neicu-Bostan is “an old and fat gentleman looking like a huge and apocalyptic pug puppy”⁵⁰. There is quite a lot of violence on the corridors of the university. The Dean slaps a male student because he does not give up his place to the female students queuing up to pay their exam fees. In fact, the male student was queuing instead of a female student. When the situation is clarified, the Dean leaves the building as furious as he entered. Now he is angry because proven wrong. Rădulescu has a keen eye for all the actions of the academic autocracy. The university is depicted as a bureaucratic system that functions for its own sake and reproduction. The students’ interests and concerns are certainly no priority. “The schedule is mobile, incoherent like an ice floe when it melts”⁵¹. Few professors offer support materials for their courses and students have to rely on their notes which they share according to the fidelity networks they belong to: “Gina and Tina are at their desk, they are about to finish transcribing notes, copying from their notebooks and from their classmates’, compiling the valuable documents, feverishly deciphering the sibyllic texts...”⁵².

Apparently, the purpose of the higher education institution is to produce graduates that would contribute to the development of society. In fact, the

⁴⁷ See Eugen Simion (ed.), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* [*The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*], P–R, București, Univers Enciclopedic, 2006, p. 533: “schite satirice și caricaturi ce nu pot depăși nivelul de copiere a realității fără nicio tentativă de transfigurare artistică”.

⁴⁸ See Mircea Zăciu, Marian Papahagi, Aurel Sasu (eds.), *Dicționarul scriitorilor români* [*The Dictionary of the Romanian Writers*], R–Z, București, Albatros, 2002, p. 33: “schite ușoare”.

⁴⁹ Marta Rădulescu, *Sint studentă!. Reportajii fanteziste* [*I Am a Student! Imaginary Reportages*], București, Editura “Adevărul”, 1933, p. 21: “[u]n domn deșirat, chel, cu mustățile pe găleată, o bărbuță pământie ca o bidinea mâncată de molii”.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 23: “un domn bătrân și gros aducând a un uriaș făt de mops apocaliptic”.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 19: “Programul e mobil, incoerent ca un zăpor de sloiuri în vremea dezghețului. Cursurile se-ncalecă și coincid, se ciocnesc cap în cap; profesorii schimbă orele, lipsesc când se anunță și vin când nu-i aștepți”.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 187: “Gina și Tina, la birou, sfârșesc de transcris caiete de notițe, copiind din maculatoarele lor și din ale colegelor, compulsând prețioasele documente, tâlmăcind cu înfrigurare textele sibiline...”.

university is very much a mercantile institution. Some professors fail students because they receive a quota of the exam fees paid by students. In this way, the faculty provide for themselves a new source of income during the exam period. “He failed us all so that he can take the examination fees again, in the autumn”⁵³. The complaining female students form “the maenads’ choir”⁵⁴. (Charming irony showing acquaintance with classical mythology!)

Rădulescu’s approach to the academic novel combines social critique with humour and satire. The novelist insists on the hardships of poor students who fight hard to pursue academic studies and hope to improve their social status after graduation. A painful example hovering on tragedy is Valerica, an orphan student who has no scholarship and has to battle with the financial difficulties of academic life. She has no other option but to toil for Aunt Filofteia, “the wife of Pleșu, undermanager at the Treasure Bank”⁵⁵ in exchange for accommodation. Rădulescu skilfully makes tragedy alternate with humorous episodes. Students are required to audit long and boring lectures they are not interested in. The students’ final clappings are in direct proportion with their joy that the lecture is over:

The soft snoring in front of me makes me bend over my desk: the gentleman on my left is sleeping, his mouth agape, his head slightly bent sideways. He seems to be under a tree, in the shade. He is waking up only at a quarter to one during the audience’s clapping. We are slapping our palms, making the blood circulate by applauding with animalistic satisfaction⁵⁶.

Eroticism is an important component of the Romanian academic life. Rădulescu is both emotional and sarcastic when she reaches this territory. The reader is impressed by the tragic love story between two students: Mircea Sorescu and Ana Petreanu. Mircea suffers from an incurable disease but he stubbornly continues to come to school. In the end, Ana’s pure love will bring Mircea emotional comfort and he can die in peace. On the other hand, in this world dominated by the patriarchal professor who is practically accountable to no one, some students try to use old strategies that the patriarchy not only accepts but it also condones. Representative is “Venera Stoican, an attractive brunette who flirts with everybody: from the janitor to the Dean”⁵⁷. The university is intensely hierarchical. Women can be secretaries or cleaners or laboratory workers, but there are no female professors. The staff’s hierarchy is reproduced among the students.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 166: “Ne-a trântit pe toate ca să mai ia un rând de taxe la toamnă”.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 166: “corul menadelor”.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 88: “nevasta lui domnul subdirector Pleșu de la banca Comoara”.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 48: “Un sforăit lin înaintea mea mă face să mă aplec peste bancă: domnul din stânga doarme cu gura larg căscată, cu capul ușor plecat într-o parte. Parcă ar fi sub un pom, la umbră. Nu se deșteaptă decât la unu și un sfert în ropotul aplauzelor. Ne dezmoțim palmele, punem sângele în circulație aplaudând cu animalică satisfacție”.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 163: “Venera Stoican, o brunetă frumușică și care flirtează cu toată lumea: de la portar până la Decan”.

Those who have reached “the third year’s Olympus”⁵⁸ look down on their colleagues who still have to pass through the rituals of many exams. Rădulescu’s academic novel contains an interesting metaleptic note. The border between fiction and reality is sometimes crossed by the narrator who dares to describe the reality of Romanian schooling and considers truth a narratological duty: “You describe the egghead factory and stupidity sprawling like a polenta of academic life, to the extent that you know it”⁵⁹. But the narrator is about to pay a heavy price for her courage. She is considered a whistle blower that it is better to avoid: “Fink makes a wry face at me, professors do not seem to hear my greeting, most of the friends I had before my book came out, turn their back on me or pretend that they do not see me anymore. Pepi, Asineta et comp. do not visit me anymore”⁶⁰.

Rădulescu uses a students’ strike in order to point to many of the problems Romanian higher education had before the communist inspired reform of 1948. Teachers are practically not accountable and grade according to highly subjective scales, exams schedules are optional, students have no say in the academia, many students are confronted with serious economic problems and they are not supported by the university at all.

Rădulescu makes her novel end with a meeting between the narrator and two of her colleagues who are politically involved. One is a Communist, the other sympathizes with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu’s fascist movement. Published in 1933, Marta Rădulescu’s academic novel catches very well the fears of that time and foreshadows the victory of leftist totalitarianism. The students who have already made their political options put on airs and display a somehow maternal attitude towards the narrator who feels she is at an existential and political crossroads: “The two women are looking at me like two smiling sphinxes, at the gate of a new world that I do not understand and I fear”⁶¹. This conversation takes place against a background that discreetly foreshadows the course history will take. “From the hill to the barracks, the evening trumpet is sounding long and sad, as if it hesitated against the red sunset”⁶². The narrator’s reservations are evident but it is the end of a historical cycle. Blood, intransigent ideologies and red flags loom beyond the horizon.

Rădulescu’s knack for social critique is continued at a distance of several decades by Alexandru Mușina who is lucky enough to write after the reversal of

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 163: “Olimpul anului trei”.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 203: “Descrii fabrica de belferi și prostia lăbărțată ca o mămăligă a vieții universitare atâta cât o cunoști”.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 128: “Fink se uită urât, profesorii nu-mi mai răspund la salut, marea majoritate a prietenilor anterioare cărții, îmi întorc spatele sau se fac că nu mă văd. Pepi, Asineta et comp. nu mai dau pe la mine”.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 210: “Cele două femei mă privesc ca doi sfîncși zâmbitori, la poarta unei lumi noi, pe care n-o înțeleg și de care mi-e teamă”.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 210: “Din deal, de la cazarmă, goarna de seară sună prelung și trist, ezitând parcă în crepusculul roșu”.

the communist dictatorial regime. His novel *Nepotul lui Dracula* combines several literary formulas (the academic novel, the gothic novel) in a very successful parody where the new discourses imported from the West after 1990 are satirized with zest and talent. Nor does the West escape from Mușina's scathing satire. Dracula and the Gypsies (Roma) are the West's favourite tropes in the representation of Romania. Mușina offers such potential readers what they want while also mocking at their haughty limitations. The title character of Mușina's novel, Florin Angelescu Dragolea, a Proust scholar who is assistant professor at a university in Brașov, finds out that, in fact, he is a descendant of Vlad the Impaler. Dragolea suffers, like his ancestors, from a very rare medical condition which requires that he drinks a full cup of human blood every day. Because of lack of fresh human blood and the harmful influence of the environment, Dragolea's pathology becomes much more complex. He "suffers from a serious form of postmarital delirium tremens and collateral amnesia due to unhealthy food lacking blood and heavy smoking – 21-36 cigarettes per day – plus repeated Proustian semiosis, and CFL seminars"⁶³. He completely forgot his roots and his ancestors"⁶⁴.

The academic plot is spiced with Gothic elements, a subplot inspired from Romanian national history, and with critical realism when postcommunist realities are depicted. Florin's ancestors used to get their bloody drink from a family of Gypsy slaves, the Boboieri, who come to commercialize their extra-healthy blood in post-1990 Germany. Corina Selejan gives a short, but very accurate characterization of the academic plot in Mușina's *Nepotul lui Dracula*: "Academic dishonesty and corruption in the university are constant concerns in Mușina's relentlessly parodic novel"⁶⁵. Academic life is characterized by lawlessness. Regulations exist but they are not followed:

With us, the professor is royalty, he teaches what he wants and how he wants. The curriculum posted on the university site does not matter. The only problem is that nobody should complain. And nobody complains. On the one hand, because students do not read what is on the university site. On the other hand, because it is only those

⁶³ Contemporary French Language.

⁶⁴ Alexandru Mușina, *Nepotul lui Dracula [Dracula's Descendant]*, Brașov, Aula, 2012, p. 206: "suferă de o formă gravă de delirium tremens postmarital și de amnezie colaterală, datorită alimentației nesănătoase, fără sânge, dar și consumului excesiv de țigări, 21-36 pe zi, plus semioză proustiană repetată și seminarii de LFC. Și-a uitat complect rădăcinile și strămoșii".

⁶⁵ Corina Selejan, "The Romanian Academic Novel", p. 98. Selejan's article is a very careful reading of Mușina's novel, an example of good quality scholarship. There is, however, one questionable statement in this article. When referring to the secretary of the university, Enikő Trăistaru, Selejan mentions that Trăistaru is "a former *Securitate* member who is also a woman, an ethnic Hungarian and a Protestant in a predominantly Orthodox country – apparently, the quintessence of the minority status – is revealed to be the school's true director, exceeding the Dean in power". The reader can easily understand that the "quintessence of the minority status" in Romania is to be a former *Securitate* member and have some kind of secret power over the academic community from the fictional Brașov.

who do not get their degree who write complaints. But this never happens: Romanian universities need students, as many students as possible, because their public funding depends on the number of students they have enrolled⁶⁶.

The academic system is a perverse instrument that replaces authentic genuine knowledge and culture, and skills with a make-believe degree that will finally endanger the whole society. The narrator notices with bitterness: “our students do not need knowledge, but high grades and a degree”⁶⁷.

Academic discourses roll in a cascade and they are all submitted to Mușina’s satirical arrow. The terminological incontinence reminds one of Rabelais and his satire of the pedantic and useless “knowledge” bestowed by medieval Sorbonne upon its addicts. The book abounds in picturesque descriptions of the students’ bodies and interests. Most of them, samples of the male gaze:

Jenny was a real Valkyrie, one point eight metres tall, thick and curly hair, like a flame, green eyes, fair complexion, discreetly freckled and a superb body, she used to be a volleyball player [...] she was a high breed erotic panther, a sweet and permanent danger for any male aged between 15 and 75⁶⁸.

Academic rituals of passage, pilgrimages to the academic shrines of the annual or bi-annual conferences are described with a unique mixture of seriousness, scholarly competence, and indulgent smile. Dragolea goes to Sibiu to attend a colloquium on Lucian Blaga:

He paced slowly towards the Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy, Psychology and Theatre where the last section of the colloquium took place. He could not miss that as ‘the great ones’ were to read their papers: our colleague, Priest Professor Claudiu Țărmure, the star of Blaga⁶⁹ studies, Professor Wolfgang Năpristoc from Timișoara, Professor Leonida Meiroșu from Iași, Professor Flavius Constant Cotoșman from Cluj. But also the lady professors: Rustem Seitabla Ibrahim Fatih from Constanța, Ecaterina Morcov Dăbuleanu from Sibiu, and, of course, Aliona Verbinski Simionescu, a semiotician of European renown⁷⁰.

⁶⁶ Alexandru Mușina, *Nepotul lui Dracula*, p. 6: “La noi profesorul e rege, predă ce și cum vrea el. Nu contează ce scrie în programa afișată pe site-ul universității. Totul e ca nimeni să nu facă reclamații. Și nimeni nu face reclamații. Pe de o parte, fiindcă studenții nu citesc site-ul universității. Pe de altă parte, pentru că reclamații nu fac decât cei care nu reușesc să-și finalizeze studiile. Dar asta nu se întâmplă niciodată: universitățile din România au nevoie de studenți, cât mai mulți studenți, fiindcă statul le finanțează în funcție de numărul acestora”.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 351: “studenții noștri nu au nevoie de cunoștințe, ci de note mari și de o diplomă”.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 29: “Jenny era o adevărată walkirie: înaltă de un metru și optzeci, cu păr bogat și cârlionțat, ca o flacără, ochi verzi, ten alb, discret pistriuat și un corp superb, de fostă voleibalistă [...] era o panteră erotică pur sânge, o dulce și permanentă primejdie pentru orice bărbat între 15 și 75 de ani”.

⁶⁹ Lucian Blaga (1895–1961), one of the greatest Romanian poets.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 191-192: “[A] pornim încet spre Facultatea de Litere, Istorie, Filosofie, Psihologie și Artă Dramatică, unde se ținea ultima sesiune a colocviului. Nu putea în niciun caz să lipsească, mai ales că urmau să se producă ‘grii’: colegul nostru, preotul profesor Claudiu Țărmure, starul studiilor

Such academic events always end with a party where participants can socialize and build future academic networks, make or destroy alliances. A hierarchical etiquette is strictly followed. Dragolea listens with religiosity to the personalities present, then he pays some compliments on their academic achievements to the most important participants: “Professor Țărmure, our colleague from Brașov, as well as Professors Ternian, Moșmondea, and Ghițulete, the main organizers of the colloquium”⁷¹.

The academic world is populated with an interesting fauna among which the Pentagon, a group of the best professors in the Faculty, all males, of course, who meet periodically in order to have highbrow conversations and gossip at a high academic level. Here they are: “the fierce Cosiga, [...] the handsome Cruceru, the Ice Eyed, [...] scholar Darius Stroescu, or the alluring Dean Miky Banciu”⁷²; “Professor Vasile Peteanu, a comparatist and phenomenologist [...] plus Andy Cruceanu, the new rising star of the Faculty”⁷³.

Mușina is second to none in describing the arcane relations between the members of the academic community of fictional Brașov. Spying, secret alliances, harsh or mild animosities consolidate the academic pyramid. Female colleagues are either boring and hard working or intrigant and shallow intellectuals. Mention is made of: “Andrada Bergovici, the assistant and informant of Marilena Bularca Tuchilatu, the head of the English teaching faculty”⁷⁴; “Veronica Cîmpeanu, a young Blaga female scholar and Romanian literature lecturer at the University of Baia Mare”⁷⁵.

If in Rădulescu’s academic novel, the university men are re-presented as members of a privileged caste that rules, practically unchallenged, over a very important activity in any society: the formation of the future elites; communism certainly contributed to the erosion of this reality. Mușina’s academics bitterly talk about their numerous chores and the chains imposed upon them by the so-called “audit university”, an invention of the post-modernist economists in alliance with politicians responsible for public policies in post-1990 education. The university is

blagiene, profesorul Wolfgang Năpristoc de la Timișoara, profesorul Leonida Meiroșu de la Iași, profesorul Flavius Constant Cotoșman de la Cluj. Dar și doamnele Rustem Seitabla Ibrahim Fatih, de la Constanța, Ecaterina Morcov Dăbuleanu, de la Sibiu, și, desigur, Aliona Verbinski Simionescu, semiotician de renume european”.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 199: “profesorului Țărmure, colegul nostru de la Brașov, și profesorilor Ternian, Moșmondea și Ghițulete, principalii organizatori ai colocviului”.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 61: “teribilul Cosiga, [...] frumosul Cruceru, cel cu ochi de gheață, [...] savantul Darius Stroescu sau șarmantul decan Miky Banciu”.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 105-106: “profesorul Vasile Peteanu, comparatist și fenomenolog [...] plus Andy Cruceanu, noua stea în ascensiune a facultății”.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 110: “Andrada Bergovici, asistenta și informatoarea Marilenei Bularca Tuchilatu, șefa colectivului de engleză”.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 211: “Veronica Cîmpeanu, jună blagoloagă și lectoriță de literatură română la Universitatea din Baia Mare”.

no longer primarily an institution offering knowledge and education but a kind of factory whose efficient assembly line must bring financial profit. Many Romanian academics would recognize their own duties in this acerbic picture of Mușina's academics. What are their responsibilities?

Two teaching loads for a pitiful salary, checking thousands of applications for a so-called admission at the university, making documents – hundreds of pages – for the so-called evaluations and accreditations. They [the faculty] are to be blamed if students play hooky and do not study, but one cannot fail them for we run out of customers and we get no more money for our salaries⁷⁶.

A character specific to the Romanian academic world is the scholar incapable of finalizing his doctoral thesis. Procrastination combines with his incapacity to concentrate on a specific topic. On the other hand, the institution also procrastinates to fire Remus Durac and enforce the legislation extant. Once one gets into the system, he can be demoted but firing is postponed again and again. The Balkan lassitude can be easily recognized here. Initially, Remus Durac works on a thesis entitled *The Semiosis of Hoax in the Romanian Folk Stories*⁷⁷ under the competent supervision of Professor Verbinski Simionescu. Eight years have passed and Durac still does not defend his thesis. He enrolls in a new doctoral programme working on *The Semiosis of the Identity Anguish with Emil Cioran and Paul Celan*⁷⁸ at the University of Cluj, under the equally competent supervision of Professor Ernest Sîmboteanu. Still, he cannot finalize this thesis either and in 2003 he enrolled in another new doctoral program with the thesis entitled *Identity and Persecution in Zaharia Stancu's Novel "The Gypsy Tribe"*⁷⁹ under the supervision of Professor Dorian Suru. Colleagues bet whether Durac will finalize his thesis or not, but nobody thinks that he should be fired and an end should be put to this never ending story. "Everybody was looking forward to see when and if he would defend his doctoral thesis. People even made bets: would he succeed or not this third time? The only one who did not care at all was Remus himself"⁸⁰.

Eroticism bathes the whole academic atmosphere. The admiration of the students (overwhelmingly female students) for their professors hovers on physicality. The academic audience is represented as a female in heat and only humour – truly excellent quality humour – saves Mușina from misogyny. While

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 141: "De făcut norme duble, pe un salariu de răsul curcilor, de verificat mii de dosare pentru o așa-zisă admitere și de făcut alte dosare, de sute de pagini, pentru așa-zise evaluări și acreditări. Responsabili că studenții chiulesc și nu învață, dar nu-i poți pica, că rămânem fără mușterii și pierdem banii de salarii".

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 201: *Semioza păcălelii în snoavele populare românești*.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 202: *Semioza angoasei identității la Emil Cioran și Paul Celan*.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 202: *Identitate și persecuție în romanul "Șatra" de Zaharia Stancu*.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 202: "Toată lumea aștepta cu sufletul la gură să vadă când și dacă își va susține, totuși, teza. S-au făcut chiar pariuri: va reuși sau nu din a treia încercare? Singurul care nu-și făcea nicio problemă era chiar Remus".

Dragolea was lecturing, the female students “tried to pierce the ice stratum of his impeccable French, his armour of semiotic concepts, his mail shirt of masterly wordings and quotations from the titans of semiotic thought and not only⁸¹.”

Some of the male academics do respond to these efforts. An interesting sample is Remus Durac, whose constantly growing rhizomic network of female acquaintances point to his privileged position as a man who is a teacher and university professor. Adoring Durac coincides, up to a point, with climbing one or maybe even several steps of the academic hierarchy. Remus Durac “[w]as on a rhizomic quest, Woman in, from, and through women. [...] Unlike others, Remus did not attend colloquia or conferences in order to collect academic points but to begin or resume new and ever new amours”⁸².

There is, therefore, in Muşina’s novel an inherent narratorial conviction that the male perspective is one and the same with *the human perspective*. Woman is some kind of deviation from the generic human:

Women like to talk a lot, they like to verbalize, for them ‘parole’ is much more important than ‘langue’, they are not really interested in the profound semiotic structure of communication and its complex relationship to the real contingency. They do not fully realize the consequences, the meanders, and the dangers of the metaverbal concreteness. Their semiosis is always superficial and limited to the present. Wonderful and necessary, in their own way, women have another semiotic understanding of the world, which is also necessary but insufficient. Women are women. Men are men⁸³.

Partly jokingly, partly seriously Muşina’s discourse dangerously hovers on militant misogynism but satire, humour, parody combine and save the novel.

A peculiarity of the Romanian academic novel is its constant reference to foreign academia. The foreign lecturer, whether sent by DAAD, British Council, Alliance Française, or the Fulbright Commission, is the embodiment of foreign culture, foreign wealth, foreign superiority. Muşina’s novel also includes a subplot about the battle for the conquest of the foreign lecturer sent to the fictional university of Braşov. Jennifer Leontovici is the winner of this harsh competition

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62: “încercau să străpungă stratul de gheață al francezei lui impecabile, blindajul de concepte semiotice, cămașa de zale de formulări măiestre și citate din titanii gândirii semiotice, și nu numai”.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 199: “[c]ăuta rizomatic, Femeia în, din, și prin femei. [...] Remus nu participa la colocvii sau sesiuni de comunicări științifice ca alții, pentru a aduna puncte academice, ci pentru a înnoda, sau reînoda, noi și noi amoruri”.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 244: “Femeile vorbesc mult, le place să verbalizeze, pentru ele ‘parole’ e mai importantă decât ‘langue’, nu le interesează cu adevărat structura semiotică profundă a comunicării și complexitatea relației acesteia cu realul contingent. Nu gândesc până la capăt toate consecințele, meandrele și primejdiile concretului metaverbal. Semioza lor e întotdeauna superficială, limitată la prezent. Minunate și necesare, în felul lor, femeile au altă înțelegere semiotică a lumii, legitimă și ea, dar insuficientă. Femeile sunt femei. Bărbații sunt bărbați”.

and the narrator deploras, in elegiac lines, the dire fate that awaits for Mathew [sic] McDuck, the Scottish lecturer sent by the British Council:

Alas, Mathew, Mathew, poor Englishman, poor Scotsman, stingy, wandering in the twilight of your life on Mioritza's land⁸⁴, both unforeseen pleasures and reckless expenses, and unimaginable sufferings are awaiting for you! Jennifer is like a fire scorching everything around, a panther from the *selva oscura* of the mysterious East [...] Mathew, Mathew, poor Englishman, poor Scotsman, stingy, taken by the wave of Jennifer's pheromones, dire days are awaiting for you, lots of money you will spend and many tears you will shed! [...] But who and how could advise him, who should teach him what to do as he was the messenger sent by the British Council to show us, the Romanians from this edge of Europe, what and how think and do in order to get civilized?⁸⁵.

Muşina's academic humour extends to the neo-colonialism of European Union, a soft version of former imperialisms. *Plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose!* Empires come and go; laughter and humour continue to be the let-go and the revenge of the subaltern.

Muşina's novel ends in a triumph that brings satire to paroxysm. Dr. Dragolea introduces a new exam format. It is known that the exam has always been

...the synonym of terror, of the guillotine, even, when the student was driven by fear not only to learn but also to plagiarize, bribe or, *horibile dictu*, prostitute! ... the exam was a source of corruption and moral decadence, a trauma from which [the student] never recovered⁸⁶.

The traditional exam is replaced by an academic lottery where there are no grades below 7⁸⁷. In a dream-like ceremony, the aristocratic ascent of Dragolea is publicly recognized and he is proclaimed Fifi Dracula I, the constitutional voivode of Transylvania and the random king of Romania and Bessarabia (former Republic of Moldova). The academic plot is abandoned in favour of a happy-end seemingly derived from the scripts of Hollywood movies. Muşina's irony descends from academic Olympian heights to everyday politics and societal conventions.

Codrin Liviu Cuţitaru's academic novel, *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile* [*The Scriptor or the Book of Admirable Transformations*], grafts

⁸⁴ Mioritza is a famous Romanian ballad.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 277-278: "Mathew, Mathew, biet englez, biet scoţian zgârcit rătăcit în amurgul vieţii pe plaiuri mioritice, nebănuite plăceri te aşteaptă, dar şi cheltuieli nesăbuite şi suferinţe de neînchipuit! Jennifer e un foc ce pârjoleşte totul în jur, o panteră din *selva oscura* a Estului plin de mistere [...] Mathew, Mathew, biet englez, biet scoţian zgârcit, luat de valul feromonilor lui Jennifer, amare zile te aşteaptă, mulţi bani vei cheltui şi multe lacrimi vei vărsa! [...] Dar cine şi cum să-l sfătuiască, cine să-l înveţe ce să facă, din moment ce el era cel trimis de Consiliul Britanic să ne arate nouă, românaşilor de la marginea Europei, ce şi cum să gândim şi să facem, să ne civilizeze?"

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 368: "...sinonim cu teroarea, cu ghilotina chiar, în care studentul era împins de frică nu doar să înveţe, ci şi să copieze, să dea ciubuce sau, *horibile dictu*, să se prostitueze! ... examenul era o sursă a corupţiei şi decăderii morale, o trauma din care [studentul] nu-şi mai revenea toată viaţa".

⁸⁷ The equivalent of B- in the American system.

metafictional techniques on a campus plot. The novel focuses on several university professors: Boris Mercuti, Victor Olescu, or Petronel Normanu, each one with his own academic destiny and story. Cuțitaru also uses satire and humour but without Mușina's delight in the body and matter. Cuțitaru is much more conceptual. The university is a bureaucratic monster⁸⁸ and the university board is a legislative academic assembly⁸⁹. The much advertised reform of higher education is regarded with mistrust: "in fact, the reform was the magic formula that created a new typology of academic parasites"⁹⁰.

The academic novelists often have a favourite knack to which they come again and again: for Mușina, it was "semiosis"; for Cuțitaru, it is the oxymoronic "pleasure in pain". University life is garnered with long awaited for "research stages abroad". The communist past hangs over the post-communist academic present. Boris Mercuti had been a sort of "enlightened despot" of the publishing houses and cultural journals from all over the country and his pre-1990 political activity functioned as a kind of sterilizer, or inhibitor. After this experience within the Communist leadership Mercuti did not publish anything else. Cuțitaru also approaches a well-known reality of the Romanian academic system: the existence of the intellectual dynasties. For instance, "Mercuti Sr was Italian, from an important family of interwar physicians who had immigrated to Romania at the beginning of the century"⁹¹.

Cultural or literary references to the tragic flaw or to several short stories by Edgar Allan Poe spice the text and most probably make it a reading particularly agreeable to a sophisticated, well-read reader. Mercuti Sr dies not without succeeding in writing to his son about a certain box from his wardrobe. It contains, of course, a manuscript. Cuțitaru uses a new variant of the well-known found manuscript motif in order to give fuel his narrative. Upon his deathbed, Mercuti Sr "created a novel's situation"⁹².

Cuțitaru's academic novel also deals with gender issues. Firstly, a disparity in female academic promotion is noticed. Liana Olescu is way behind her husband who became the rector⁹³ of the university. Domestic duties and raising Bobo, the couple's son, prevent Liana from benefiting from all the post-1990 academic opportunities to the same extent as her husband:

Liana had not accompanied Victor to Baltimore – at the beginning of the 1990s – she stayed home in order to take care of Bobo who was at preschool age. [...] She had never succeeded in travelling too much, maternal duties prevented her from being away longer

⁸⁸ Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru, *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile [The Scriptor or the Book of Admirable Transformations]*, Iași, Polirom, 2017, p. 19: "monstru birocratic".

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 9: "legiuitori academici".

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19: "reforma reprezenta de fapt formula magică pentru crearea unei noi tipologii de paraziți academici".

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36: "Mercuti-senior era italian, provenind dintr-o importantă familie de medici interbelici, emigrată pe la începutul secolului în România".

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 51: "[a] creat o situație de roman".

⁹³ In the American system, the president of the university.

than a week (i.e. the ordinary duration of international conferences, the only academic events Liana took the luxury of participating in)⁹⁴.

On the other hand, the delicate problem of sex relations between the male professor and female students is regarded with an indulgence that hides the narrator's comfortable feeling that patriarchy – thank God! – triumphs everywhere and its end is not to be foreseen in the near future: “The unprincipled master-disciple relation? It continues to be a commonplace of the world educational system! As long as it relies on reciprocal consent, it is not worth mentioning”⁹⁵. Corruption, lack of principles, sexual dilly-dallyings, dalliances of various intensities, are the very bricks of the university fictionalized in this novel:

The rector gave a cold shoulder to the two guests: the man and the woman from his native village. Screaming, again, pleadings, again, intercessions, again, for various “hard working” scoundrels. For sure, they had brought the head secretary a hen so that she facilitates their hearing and probably schedule them before others (doomed to wait in his antechamber for hours on end!). Before them he had just got rid of another “intercession” – a graceful dame from the City Council (he couldn't remember her name any more). That female unscrupulously used her charms in order to obtain favours everywhere⁹⁶.

Cuțitaru's academic novel is built on several narrative levels. Inserted narratives – such as the narrative from Titus Mercuti's hidden manuscript entitled *Confusio* – meet and offer multiple perspectives on academic life and literary research. *Confesio* deals with the relationship between fiction and reality. The power of fiction lies in its capacity to re-invent life, lives. An article published by Petronel Normanu in a students' journal makes several academics tremble. The darkest secrets of their lives seem to have been discovered by the daring student who framed them in metaphorical and metonymical ways that seem to be crystal clear to the culprits. The succession of narrations passes from critical realism (particularly adequate for the academic plot) to a quasi science fiction story (Victor Olescu survives a terrible disease but he takes the form of an enormous eye), and to confessions and ratiocinations about solitude. The five texts authored, in turn, by Titus Mercuti (*Confusio*), Boris Mercuti (*Vigilia*), Victor Olescu (*Confusio*), Petronel Normanu (*Conversio*), and Cristofor Pigulea (*Substitutio*), could be compared with the elements of a hand fan. They are separate but also linked by the

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 54: “Liana nu-l însoțise pe Victor la Baltimore – la începutul anilor '90 – rămânând acasă pentru a avea grijă de preșcolarul Bobo. [...] Nu reușise nici să călătorească prea mult, datorită materne împiedicând-o să lipsească din oraș o perioadă mai lungă de o săptămână (adică atât cât durează, în general congresele internaționale, singurele manifestări științifice la care Liana își permisesese luxul să meargă)”.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64: “Relația neprincipială maestru-discipol(ă)? Rămâne o banalitate a sistemului educațional mondial! Atât timp cât ea se bazează pe consimțământul reciproc, nici nu merită consemnată”.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 109: “Rectorul îi trată rece pe cei doi, bărbatul și femeia din satul natal. Iarăși vaiete, iarăși rugăminți, iarăși intervenții pentru diferite pramatii ‘studioase’. Îi aduseseră, fără îndoială, o găină secretarei-șefe, ca să le faciliteze audiența și probabil să-i mai bage și peste rândul altora (condamnați astfel să aștepte în anticameră ore în șir!). Abia scăpase, înaintea lor, de o altă ‘pilă’ – madama grațioasă de la Sfatul Popular (nu-și mai amintea cum o chema). Individida își folosea nuri fără scrupule pentru a obține diverse favoruri pretutindeni.”

Scriptor, a generic name for the writing man. The suicide of Stelu Zaucă, former editor-in-chief of a literary journal, metaphorically represents the impending end of a culture, the Gutenberg culture.

Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru offers the reader an academic novel where satire, realism, and fantasy combine in a very successful way. The novelist is also an eminent literary scholar and while writing he cannot help looking at his own writing as in a mirror. But this self-reflected scholarship is not pedantic or tiring. Humour and a drop of good quality self-irony make this novel a successful contribution to the Romanian history of the academic novels. If we follow Petér Szekély's classification of metafiction⁹⁷, Cuțitaru uses, in his metafictional academic novel, authorial surrogacy. The author remains outside fiction, the narrator and the author do not coincide, but the author does play with various narrators who offer diverse perspectives and rely on several discourses. With Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru, the academic novel is implanted into a narration about the writer's condition and about the future of our contemporary writerly culture already under a very vigorous attack of the digital.

In conclusion, we can say that the three instances of the Romanian academic novel submitted to our perusal show us a multitude of forms that certainly indicates vitality. There are some lines of continuity, such as the discussion of the forms and strategies of academic power, the formation and the consolidation academic networks, the university gatekeepers' personal and the academic lives. Reality and/ or the need to be as truthful as possible made several contemporary academic novelists tackle dishonesty and plagiarism more vigorously. Sexual appetite, academic romance are also dealt with more insistence. The university mentor is more often than not a heterosexual male or a spinster full of spite. On the other hand, a knowledgeable reader, can easily notice that the Romanian academic novel still has to deal with the presence of sexual or ethnic minorities in the Romanian higher education. For the moment, such stories do not seem to exist or matter, which amounts to the same. The Romanian academic novelist is also much more comfortable with the heterosexual difference and this is all.

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⁹⁷ See Petér Szekély, *The Academic Novel in the Age of Postmodernity: The Anglo-American Metafictional Academic Novel*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis defended at ELTE in Budapest, Hungary, in 2009, <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/lit/szekelypeter/thesis.pdf>. Accessed December 20, 2020. There are three techniques in metafiction: the prefatory technique of intrusion, the occasional authorial infiltration, and the authorial surrogacy where the author remains completely outside fiction.

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THREE INSTANCES OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMIC NOVEL

(Abstract)

This article starts from a general characterization of the international campus/academic novel and the exploration of its appearance and evolution. Against this frame, the author makes an inventory of the

Romanian novels belonging to this genre and analyses three samples from various historical periods: Marta Rădulescu's 1933 novel entitled *Sînt studentă!* [*I Am a Student!*]; Alexandru Mușina's 2012 novel entitled *Nepotul lui Dracula* [*Dracula's Descendant*]; and Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru's 2017 novel *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile* [*The Scriptor or the Book of Admirable Transformations*]. Continuities and discontinuities point to the vitality of this literary form in Romanian literature, especially after 1990.

Keywords: novel, campus, genre theory, Romanian literature after 2000, university.

TREI IPOSTAZE ALE ROMANULUI UNIVERSITAR ROMÂNESC (Rezumat)

Articolul pornește de la o caracterizare generală a romanului universitar și de la cercetarea apariției și evoluției sale. Pe acest fundal, autoarea face un inventar al romanelor aparținând acestui gen în literatura română și analizează trei romane din perioade istorice diferite: romanul din 1933 al Martei Rădulescu intitulat *Sînt studentă!*; romanul din 2012 al lui Alexandru Mușina, intitulat *Nepotul lui Dracula*, și romanul *Scriptor sau Cartea transformărilor admirabile*, publicat de Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru în 2017. Continuitățile și discontinuitățile dovedesc vitalitatea acestui gen în literatura română, cu precădere după 1990.

Cuvinte-cheie: roman, campus, teoria genului, literatura română după 2000, universitate.

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THE NOVEL OF MEMORY AS WORLD GENRE. EXPLORING THE ROMANIAN CASE

The novel of memory is a subgenre with an impressive spatial and cultural range: it manifested itself in numerous countries in all parts of the world, and it emerged only some four decades ago. However, its existence remains troubling in many respects: it was theorized in the academia before being canonized in the national literary histories. Moreover, it thrived in the discourse of recent cultural studies, rather than in that of literary studies. While the phrase became commonplace in some countries such as post-Francoist Spain, where academics embraced it and numerous writers illustrated it, the novel of memory does not seem to spread from one country to another. One may speak of polygenesis, noticing how the subgenre flourishes in different countries simultaneously, indebted to a similar or related political and historical climate maybe, but not really to a decisive, towering literary influence. That is because the novel of memory springs from a concern with political identity, not with form, so it is not essentially influenced by mimetic aspirations to replicate international commercial success, but instead it is fuelled by national and local stakes and conditions. Still, this doesn't mean that the novel of memory is destined to remain a mere local phenomenon, or a branch of some local phenomena, uninteresting from the viewpoint of a systematic research of world literature or quantitative analysis on a global scale.

In this article, we set out to delineate the general traits of the subgenre in order to propose a definition that we will then use to speak of the Romanian novel of memory in the last four decades and to highlight its transformation from a subversive memory novel during the communist regime, to a traumatic, (n)ostalgic and, ultimately, agonistic memory novel in post-communism.

The Challenges of a World Genre

The novel of memory should first be acknowledged as a world genre simply because of its size. Examples of novels of memory may be found in Spain, Great Britain, Germany, Romania, the U.S.A., India, Rwanda, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and so on. It is true that the label was first coined in the 1990s for Spanish post-Franco era novels that dealt with trauma and the polyphony of

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historical narratives, but it is fully compatible and should also include other “local” sub-subgenres that otherwise fail to embrace their truly global reach. Post-dictatorship novels emerging in Eastern Europe after 1989 and in Argentina after 1983, post-genocide novels such as those written in the wake of the Rwandan Civil War of 1994, or neo-slave narratives and Native American Renaissance novels of the 1980s in the U.S.A. make up some of the national canons which should, in our opinion, be regarded as part of the same world genre. From Spain’s Luis Goytisolo and Carmen Martín Gaité to Argentina’s Laura Alcoba, and from the Americans Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko or Sherman Alexie to the British/ Indian Salman Rushdie, Germany’s Thomas Brussig, Romania’s Gabriela Adameșteanu and Norman Manea, including the Rwandan Gilbert Gatore, the novel of memory flourished starting from the late 1970s, with an understandable delay in the Argentinian case (the 1990s) and in Eastern Europe (after the fall of dictatorships) and even later in Rwanda (in the wake of the 1994 genocide). It heralds the advent of an age of ethically-driven return to history, of processing collective trauma and turning literature into a venue for debunking historical mythologies. It is not a coincidence that this happened after several of the world’s most cruel dictatorships (Francisco Franco’s in Spain, the military junta’s in 1970s–1980s Argentina, Augusto Pinochet’s in Chile) crumbled and after the chain system of socialist dictatorships in Eastern Europe broke down, prompting commentators to speak of a necessary coinage for a new cultural paradigm, cemented by ulterior technological progress, economic world crisis, political convergences and even pandemics².

The atomization of the numerous “national” brands of novels of memory should not make one overlook the fact that they have emerged rather recently, in a multiply connected world and, above all, at a time when world literature has become an institution, not just a political metaphor. Local novels of memory are being absorbed into a world genre not only by the similarity of the conditions of their appearance, but also by their shared international readership. By being read in multiple cultural spaces simultaneously, novels of memory are being metaphorically relocated, and their initial belonging to a particular novelistic sub-subgenre is renegotiated in view of the relatability of the trauma narrated.

For instance, several Romanian novels, among which Varujan Vosganian’s 2009 *Cartea șoaptelor* [*The Book of Whispers*] and Norman Manea’s 2012 *Vizuiina* [*The Lair*] (2012), singled out by Romanian critics for their inspection of the experience of Romanian communism, were advertised in their English translations as novels of genocide and, respectively, post-9/11 novels, highlighting the mutability of genre in the age of world literature. It also goes to show that, sometimes, a subgenre is a matter of perception and that “local” sub-subgenres such as the novel of Romanian communism, American neo-slave narratives and the

² Christian Moraru, *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2011, p. 3.

novel of genocide may very well function as parts of the same world literary genre. Indeed, the novel of memory may be described, following Mariano Siskind, as a “new generic formation”, a “constellation [...] of texts whose identity is defined in accordance with new needs and new critical and aesthetic desires translated into new organizing principles”³. The very fact that the subgenre was put together after the fact, by academics who ventured to group novels based on their shared concern with processing the recent past in a traumatized collective memory, is therefore not a shortcoming, but rather a consequence of their belonging to the age of world literature, of transnational literary institutions and of social activism in the academia.

Another difficulty in discussing the novel of memory from a genre-based perspective concerns the way in which Cultural Studies relate to the very concept of genre and its functions. The culturalist approach challenges the traditional aesthetic perspective which sees literature as falling into clear-cut categories defined by formal constraints and thematic lineages which are in turn subverted by the exceptional creativity of artists who, instead of breaking the generic mold, only enhance its canonical power for the generations to come. On the contrary, for cultural studies scholars, genre is to be defined and used “to examine dynamic relations between literary texts and historically situated social practices and structures”⁴, which means that (in)fidelity toward a convened set of aesthetic traits is not essential. The situation is made probably clearer by the very existence of a complex, hybrid subgenre such as the novel of memory. A culturalist approach is very appropriate for this subgenre which engages sensitive matters having to do with collective remembrance and reckoning, and has real consequences in actual policies of memory promoted and enacted in a social landscape at least partly shaped by the canonizing force of literature. Bawarshi makes it clear that culturalist approaches to genre work by “examining how genres reflect and participate in legitimizing social practices and recognizing how generic distinctions maintain hierarchies of power, value and culture”⁵.

The emergence of the memory novel in the aftermath of slavery, colonialism, dictatorship or genocide, through an intricate political, cultural and literary process not only demonstrates that this (sub)genre was selected at the expense of others, but also proves the utility of a genre-based approach to ethnic, national or collective memory.

³ Mariano Siskind, “The Genres of World Literature: The Case of Magical Realism”, in Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, Oxon, Routledge, 2012, p. 347.

⁴ Anis S. Bawarshi, Mary Jo Reiff, *Genre. An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Indiana, Parlor Press, 2010, p. 24.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

Defining the Novel of Memory: the Spanish Context

Surprisingly enough, although the phrase “novel of memory” was used at least once in world literary scholarship in reference to the authors mentioned in the previous chapter and to many others, there are very little attempts to pinpoint this subgenre conceptually, in a more precise manner. This is because the phrase was initially launched by Salman Rushdie, who used it to explain his own novel *Midnight’s Children* in a famous 1982 essay, “Imaginary Homelands”, and then entered the postcolonial Anglophone critical mainstream in reference to other authors⁶. Besides the conceptual elusiveness, the essential challenge is to identify the formal characteristics of this subgenre while acknowledging its spatial dispersion and lack of direct connectivity between national chapters. Following Franco Moretti, the crux of genre is plot, and the textual devices that serve the plot best make up the standard version of it⁷. But memory cannot constitute a plot by itself, although Marcel Proust’s “mémoire involontaire” functions as a generative textual device not only in his multi-volume masterpiece *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927), but also, as Samuel O’Donoghue argues, in the novels of several Spanish authors from the (post-)Franco era⁸.

To further define the subgenre of the memory novel, we will first rely on the distinctions made by its main theorist, David K. Herzberger, who wrote about Spanish post-Franco literature in 1991, and then extrapolate from there. Novels of memory are, he says, “in the largest sense, those fictions that evoke past time through subjective remembering, most often through first person narration”, immediately adding that the past he refers to, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975), is a timeframe that was “eschewed and appropriated by Francoist historiography”⁹. As a result, we have to consider this subgenre as related to the political and the historical novel, but differing from each, first by its subjectivity or the personal implication of the narrative voice(s) as compared to the relative detachment of the narrator in the political novel, and secondly, by the challenge brought to the mono-tonality of the historical novel by the polyphony of individual voices engaging in dialogue with each other and (in effect) with History.

The features of the subgenre in Herzberger are explored while drawing a distinction between two types of novels dealing with memory. The early memory

⁶ Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands”, *London Review of Books*, 1982, 18, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v04/n18/salman-rushdie/imaginary-homelands>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

⁷ Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61, 2002, 1, pp. 207-227.

⁸ Samuel O’Donoghue, *Rewriting Franco’s Spain: Marcel Proust and the Dissident Novelists of Memory*, London, Bucknell University Press, 2018, p. xiv.

⁹ David K. Herzberger, “Narrating the Past: History and the Novel of Memory in Postwar Spain”, *PMLA*, 106, 1991, 1, p. 35.

narrations, written from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, belong to novelists he calls “social realists”, authors dealing with censorship and the obligation to conform to state orthodoxy. They respond to the “mythical mode” of official Francoist historiography by portraying, in an experiential and mock-heroic mode, “a specific present that suggests a specific past [...] necessarily divergent from the one trumpeted by the official historiography of the state”¹⁰. On the contrary, the next generation of memory writers, the novelists coming up in the latter half of the 1960s and onwards, bring along a temporal awareness largely absent from the social realists’ reconstructions of the past. For these authors, “to know the historical is to mediate and to narrate it with the voice of a subject in the present, who is also positioned within history”¹¹. The distinct and oppositional elaboration of the notions of self and state, or of memory and history in the novels of the social realists is replaced, in the 1970s novels of memory, by “the individual self (most frequently, but not exclusively, through first-person narration) seeking definition by commingling the past and present in the process of remembering [...], either voluntarily or involuntarily”, thus prompting a “bimodal correlation: the self in search of definition; the definition of self-perceived always within the flow of history”¹². These definitions lead up to considerations regarding technique. Herzberger mentions a subjectivity that may or may not involve first-person narrative, an ambiguity regarding the narrative voice (“indeterminate essence of the subjective”), a superpositioning of the individual and the collective self (since “history shapes and is shaped by the private affairs of the self”¹³), fragmented composition, sometimes temporal uncertainty (“teleogenic plot”), polyphony and dialogism (“dialectical propositions” regarding history), and embracing the text’s hybridity as a means to enhancing its authenticity.

But what is more important is the great relevance Herzberger attributes to form in the novel of memory. For him, what makes novel-form remembrance an actual novel of memory is the acceptance of the co-presence of multiple discourses on memory both in society and in the individual self, the result being a predilection toward elaborate form and metanarrative: “the novel of memory reveals (and asserts) the determinants of its own form, and thus lays bare the contingencies of narration as a way of knowing the past”¹⁴. While this definition might seem somewhat tributary to the 1990s vogue of postmodernism, Herzberger’s insistence on awareness with respect to the consequences of choosing one voice or another, one montage technique or another, hints at a dominant concern with the ethics of narration which will shape the subgenre in the following years. This far-reaching insight will make possible, in the coming decades, the inclusion of new concepts

¹⁰ David K. Herzberger, *Narrating the Past*, p. 36.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

and theory frames in the discussion of memory novels, such as trauma, affiliative memory and agonism¹⁵.

Another Spanish critic, Gonzalo Sobejano, refers to the drive to write narratives of remembering after the death of Franco as “a will to distance oneself from those events”¹⁶, echoing the complex psychological mechanisms involved in these literary choices: “Once completed, the past called for a kind of recapitulation, a view from a new vantage point, a view long desired and so patiently awaited”¹⁷. Sobejano also highlights the dialogic aspect of many Spanish novels from the 1970s up to the 2000s, detailing the ingenious narrative frames used by authors such as José-María Vaz de Soto, Carmen Martín Gaité or Luis Goytisolo to suggest inner debate, “phantasmagoric identities” or even “phantom-like interlocutors”. Later still, Sarah Leggott and Ross Woods invoke Cathy Caruth’s reworking of Freud’s theory of cultural traumata by discussing (quite generously, in our opinion) novels of memory from the whole postwar period in Spain¹⁸. More recently, Hans Lauge Hansen quotes Marianne Hirsh’s concepts of post-memory and affiliative memory to refer to the most recent developments of the subgenre after 2000, in the memory novels of a new generation of Spanish authors such as Benjamin Prado, who now contribute to

...a typical subgenre of post-memory or inter-generational memory, characterized by a strong hybridization of genres in an artistically elaborated discourse that blurs the distinctions between essay, biography and/ or autobiography, historiographical discourse, journalism, and novelistic fiction, and in which docu-fiction, auto-fiction and meta-fictional comments are combined¹⁹.

These novels of post-memory focus not so much on the processes of individual remembering (as the already canonical novels of memory did), but instead “depict the social processes that contribute to the construction of cultural memory”²⁰. So, what at one point was primarily a novel of trauma and self-investigation seems to turn, in the most recent examples of Spanish novels of memory, into analytical metanarratives, playing with nostalgia rather than pursuing traumatic closure, and reaching out to other places filled with memory for a confrontation of the mechanisms of community-building.

¹⁵ See Hans Lauge Hansen, “Modes of Remembering in the Contemporary Spanish Novel”, *Orbis Litterarum*, 71, 2016, 4, pp. 265-288.

¹⁶ Gonzalo Sobejano, “The Testimonial Novel and the Novel of Memory”, in Harriet Turner, Adelaida López de Martínez, *The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 185.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

¹⁸ Sarah Leggott and Ross Woods, *Memory and Trauma in the Postwar Spanish Novel: Revisiting the Past*, London, Bucknell University Press, 2013, p. 5.

¹⁹ Hans Lauge Hansen, *Testimony, Documentary, Fiction: The remediation of Stolen Children*, in Lars Saetre, Patrizia Lombardo, Sara Tanderup Linkis (eds.), *Exploring Text, Media and Memory*, Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2017, p. 318.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

The Romanian Chapter

We have analyzed in greater detail the Spanish critical theory on the novel of memory because it presents one of the most complex perspectives on the subject matter and it can therefore offer an analogy which may help us plausibly reconstruct the Romanian case. In general, critics speak of a Romanian “novel of memory” when discussing novels that appeared in post-communism. Indeed, after 1989, the concern with collective identity after the fall of communism, the need to process past trauma and an unrealistic trust in the clarifying and healing force of literature fueled expectations for the emergence of a vindicating and monumental “novel of communism”. The critic Dan C. Mihăilescu was only half-jokingly decrying the absence still, in the 2000s, of a “Great Novel of Our Suffering under Ceausescu”²¹, and his anxiety foreshadowed the drive to memory felt by many actors in the literary field, readers and writers alike. In a similar manner, another established critic, Nicolae Manolescu, complained that the 2000 generation of writers was “presentist [...], selfish, self-centered, sensuous, superficial”²², uninterested in the past and therefore endangering the continuity of literature’s mandate to embody the “historical conscience” of the nation. Indirectly answering this plight, Sanda Cordoș focused on the prose published after 2000, discerning two distinct waves: one constituted by “artists of memory” who write “novels of identity”, the other by writers positioned “against memory”. While the first are concerned with the phenomenon of leaving one world and entering another, namely from dictatorship to post-communism, the others move away from these crucial obsessions and propose new themes, polemical toward the former²³. Finally, Claudiu Turcuș also writes about novels of memory that he locates primarily in post-communism, although novels of memory are to be found, in his opinion, also before 1989²⁴; his criteria for identifying such novels are, however, imprecise²⁵.

But the novel of memory in Romania is not only a post-communist phenomenon. Keeping in mind the timeline of the Spanish novelization of memory,

²¹ Dan C. Mihăilescu, *Literatura română în postceaușism [Romanian Literature after Ceaușescu’s Regime]*, vol. II, Iași, Polirom, 2006, p. 147.

²² Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române. 5 secole de literatură [The Critical History of Romanian Literature. 5 Centuries of Literature]*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008, p. 1451.

²³ Sanda Cordoș, *Lumi din cuvinte. Reprezentări și identități în literatura română postbelică [Worlds Made of Words. Representations and Identities in Postwar Romanian Literature]*, București, Cartea Românească, 2012, p. 132.

²⁴ Claudiu Turcuș, *Împotriva memoriei. De la estetismul socialist la noul cinema românesc [Against Memory. From Socialist Aestheticism to the New Romanian Cinema]*, București, Eikon, 2017, p. 45.

²⁵ See also Andreea Mironescu, “Konfigurationen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses im postkommunistischen rumänischen Roman”, in Michèle Mattusch (ed.), *Kulturelles Gedächtnis—Ästhetisches Erinnern: Literatur, Film und Kunst in Rumänien*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2018, pp. 251-275.

we maintain that memory was one of the main concerns of Romanian authors also during communism, beginning with the end of the 1960s.

In discussing the novel of memory before and after the fall of communism, we first surveyed the novels indexed under the category “novel of memory”, “memory novel”, “novel of affective memory”, “autobiographical novel” and other related critical formulas in the two volumes of the *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* [*Contemporary Dictionary of the Romanian Novel*], 1844–1989 (DCRR) and 1990–2000 (DCRR 1990–2000), respectively. A second step was to discriminate between proper novels of memory (following the conceptualization of this subgenre in the literature on the Spanish case) and different instances of political, psychological or sentimental novels that dealt marginally with the problematic of memory. A third essential step was to complete the list of memory novels for the interval 2001–2020, which is uncharted by the lexicographical instruments available at present for Romanian literature²⁶. For this reason, we had to work with a list of titles released by the main publishers of the period, selecting those books which enjoyed critical success and multiple editions, received extensive reviews, gained literary prizes and nominations. With these limitations, the 50 novels presented in the following sections (5 from late communism and 45 from post-communism), constitute a “canonical list”²⁷, insomuch as it is made up of books selected by the market and by other canonical instruments. The criteria used to delimit them were both thematic – i.e. memory is a key theme, and the concern with collective identity has to be present – and formal, since memory novels are so tightly connected with ambiguity of voice, fragmented composition, temporal uncertainty, polyphony, subjectivity, dialogism and hybridity. Given that the subgenre is active and sprawling as we write, it is understandable why we could not provide a more detailed quantitative research on it.

The Novel of Memory under the Communist Regime

For the purpose of this discussion, one should note that Romanian communism is not a culturally and politically homogeneous period. There are times of pressure and times of detente, rough beginnings (the first communist government in 1945; the proclamation of the Republic and the ousting of king Michael I in 1947; the political repression of the 1950s), moments of apparent “thaw” that quickly return to freezing again (1953; 1956; 1958), and long decades of self-congratulatory dominance over any form of dissidence (1965–1989, the Nicolae Ceaușescu years). Also, the dynamics of the literary field is ever changing, with the literati first competing politically for positions of institutional authority, and later weaponizing

²⁶ Still, attempts to gather exhaustive data for this timeframe are in progress. See Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers. A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Review*, 28, 2019, 1, pp. 55-71.

²⁷ With a few exceptions located mainly in the traumatic memory novel category.

aesthetic performance in the service of either political immunity or active opposition. While in Spain a first wave of memory novels manifests itself at the beginning of the 1960s with the generation of the so-called social realists, we can speak of such a wave in Romania toward the end of the next decade. Taking advantage of the cultural liberalization brought about in 1965 by the change of guard at the helm of the Communist Party²⁸, many writers turned to what began to be called, euphemistically, “novels of the obsessive decade”²⁹. The novel of the “obsessive decade” was a local version of the political novel that helped exorcise the demons of early communism without in any way stirring its current demons. It dealt with the half-acknowledged political crimes perpetrated after the war and in the 1950s by the communist chiefs in their initial reckless and vengeful exercises of power, but it had to handle past histories with increased precaution, given the politically sensitive nature of the subject³⁰. We do not recognize all such novels as novels of memory because many of them are absorbed by moral reflection of a disingenuous nature, or by considerations about “power”, without giving much thought to the processes of remembering and forgetting, or to the collective identity that is formed through shared remembrance.

However, the Romanian novel of memory in communism grew in the shadow of the “obsessive-decade” novels, especially since the 1950s presented the kind of generational trauma needed for a memory boost to take place³¹. Paul Goma, a champion of the opposition to the dictatorship, published in 1981, while in exile, his novel *Patimile după Pitești* [*The Passion of Pitești*] illustrating the horrors of a torture episode in Pitești political prison in the 1950s, by using split identities,

²⁸ Eugen Negrici, *Literatură română sub comunism* [*Romanian Literature under Communism*], 3rd revised and completed edition, Iași, Polirom, 2019, p. 266.

²⁹ The phrase was borrowed from an essay by Marin Preda (“Obsedantul deceniu” [“The Obsessive Decade”], *Luceafărul*, 1970, 23, pp. 1, 3), himself one of the main representatives of this local subgenre.

³⁰ Some of the most remarkable novels of the “obsessive decade” are, in almost all critical accounts, Marin Preda’s *Intrusul* [*The Intruder*] (1969), Dumitru Radu Popescu’s *F [F]* (1969) and *Vânătoare regală* [*A Royal Hunt*] (1973), Alexandru Ivasiuc’s *Păsările* [*The Birds*] (1970), Augustin Buzura’s *Fețele tăcerii* [*The Faces of Silence*] (1974), Constantin Țoiu’s *Galeria cu viță sălbatică* [*The Wild Grapevine Gallery*] (1976). But even authors obedient to the regime wrote “obsessive-decade” novels in a complacent vein, adding some sort of love story background to a trip down memory lane made by a former party activist: see Corneliu Leu’s *Patriarhii* [*The Patriarchs*] (1979), Corneliu Sturzu’s *Ianus* [*Janus*] (1983), or Grigore Zanc’s *Cădere liberă* [*Free Fall*] (1976).

³¹ The novel of memory should also be distinguished from the psychological novel that happens to focus on remembering. Examples are books written by minor authors, usually indexed by the DCRR and DCRR 1990–2000 as “novels of affective memory”. They all lack the necessary preoccupation with collective identity in our subgenre. This is the case with novels that present characters with some kind of cognitive and neurological impairment: Anda Raicu, *Fiul luminii* [*The Son of Light*] (1983), Diana Turconi, *Legăți-vă centurile de siguranță* [*Fasten Your Seatbelts*] (1988), Traian Liviu Birăescu, *Pomul cunoașterii* [*The Tree of Knowledge*] (1983), Florin Bănescu, *Tangaj* [*Pitching*] (1980); or with sentimental novels that dwell on past events, for example Ștefan Damian, *Pisica de Eritreea* [*The Eritrean Cat*] (1986) and Alex Rudeanu, *Corabia de piatră* [*The Stone Boat*] (1988).

playing with the narrative voice in a manner typical of the subgenre and professing a durable commitment to memory: “memory, our mother and protector (as much as she can), memory, our mother, our savior”³². A novel in essay form about the artistic education of a young man in the 1950s is Norman Manea’s *Anii de ucenicie ai lui August Prostul* [*August the Clown’s Years of Apprenticeship*] (1980), which subversively mixes diary entries and paper clips from newspapers to render the confrontation between individual formation and public lies. A masterpiece of the subgenre is Gabriela Adameşteanu’s *Dimineaţa pierdută* [*Wasted Morning*] (1984), a generational novel that connects the trauma of losing the first part of the First World War by Romania in the autumn of 1916 and that of persecution in the first decade of the communist regime, and makes the high-class memories of Ivona Scarlat, filled with considerations on temporality and family life dysfunctions, intersect dialogically with those of Vica Delcă, the stronger, funny and sturdy working-class woman who comes to comfort her former employer. But we also have to include here Sorin Titel’s *Melancolie* [*Melancholy*] (1988), the semi-autobiographical coda to a great novelistic work dedicated to nostalgic family memory, now focusing on the moral pain and confusion of a student from the 1950s, expelled from school for political reasons. And, of course, mention must be made of Mircea Nedelciu’s *Zmeura de câmpie* [*The Field Raspberry*] (1988), subtitled “a novel against memory”, theorizing the need to cut off roots and live in the present, but making its heroes orphans with an interest in etymology, that is, personally invested in searching the past to find out causes and sources for the present-day situation.

Post-communism: Traumatic, (N)ostalgic, Agonistic

While novels of memory written before 1989 faced censorship and even repression and therefore had to use complicated plot and contorted diegesis, after the fall of communism such challenges disappeared. Still, such novels had to compete with the ample “memory wave” that swept the 1990s, including mostly memoirs by prominent victims of the communist regime giving testimony on violence, torture and abuse at the hands of the state. At the same time, the muted memory of the Holocaust came to life, especially the participation to the extermination of Jews by the Romanian state throughout Ion Antonescu’s military dictatorship (1940–1944). The co-presence of these two different slices of national memory supplementary hindered the possibility of constructing a unified national mythology of memory, so one of the main “memory battles” of the 1990s was fought, as some could only see these memories in competition with each other. This is why memory novels in post-communism had to adopt a hermeneutic, analytical and comparative disposition, since the past at their disposal seemed more

³² Paul Goma, *Patimile după Piteşti* [*The Passion of Piteşti*], Bucureşti, Cartea Românească, 1990, p. 5.

complex than might have been assumed. As a result, by contrast to the Spanish case, where the novel of memory has a well-delimited historical referent, the Romanian novel of memory should not be restricted to the so-called novel of communism.

In *Table 1* we have distinguished between three categories of novels in post-communism, namely *traumatic memory novels*, *(n)ostalgic memory novels*, and *agonistic memory novels*.

TRAUMATIC MEMORY NOVELS	(N)OSTALGIC MEMORY NOVELS	AGONISTIC MEMORY NOVELS
Teohar Mhadaș, <i>Pe muntele Ebal</i> (1990)	Ovidiu Verdeș, <i>Muzici și faze</i> (2000)	Norman Manea, <i>Întoarcerea huliganului</i> (2003)
Paul Goma, <i>Din Calidor. O copilărie basarabeană</i> (1990)	Ștefan Baștovoi, <i>Iepurii nu mor</i> (2000)	Ioan T. Morar, <i>Lindenfeld</i> (2005)
Mircea Nedelciu, <i>Zodia scafandrului</i> (2003)	Mircea Cărtărescu, <i>Orbitor II. Corpul</i> (2002)	Filip Florian, <i>Degete mici</i> (2005)
Gabriel Chifu, <i>Visul copilului care pășește pe zăpadă fără să lase urme</i> (2004)	Filip și Matei Florian, <i>Băiușei</i> (2006)	Gabriela Adameșteanu, <i>Întâlnirea</i> (2007)
Doina Ruști, <i>Fantoma din moară</i> (2008)	Iulian Ciocan, <i>Înainte să moară Brejnev</i> (2007)	Norman Manea, <i>Vizuina</i> (2009)
Varujan Vosganian, <i>Cartea șoptelor</i> (2009)	Dan Lungu, <i>Sînt o babă comunistă!</i> (2007)	Lucian Dan Teodorovici, <i>Matei Brunul</i> (2011)
Alexandru Vlad, <i>Ploile amare</i> (2011)	Radu Pavel Gheo, <i>Noapte bună, copii!</i> (2010)	Cătălin Mihuleac, <i>America de peste pogrom</i> (2014)
Florin Irimia, <i>O fereastră întunecată</i> (2012)	Doru Pop, <i>O telenovelă socialistă</i> (2013)	Radu Pavel Gheo, <i>Disco Titanic</i> (2016)
Filip Florian, <i>Toate bufnițele</i> (2012)	Mara Wagner, <i>În spatele blocului</i> (2017)	Daniel Vighi, <i>Trilogia Corso</i> (2018)
Ruxandra Cesereanu, <i>Un singur cer deasupra lor</i> (2013)	Alina Nelega, <i>Ca și cum nimic nu s-ar fi întâmplat</i> (2019)	Alexandru Potcoavă, <i>Viața și opiniile unui Halle</i> (2019)
Adrian Alui Gheorghe, <i>Urma</i> (2013)	Diana Bădica, <i>Părinți</i> (2019)	Lavinia Braniște, <i>Sonia ridică mâna</i> (2019)
Varujan Vosganian, <i>Copiii războiului</i> (2016)		Simona Sora, <i>Complezență. Înălțarea la ortopedie. Musafir pe viață</i> (2020)
Nicolae Avram, <i>Mame</i> (2016)		
Diana Adamek, <i>Adio, Margot</i> (2017)		
Viorica Răduță, <i>Orașul închis</i> (2017)		
Doina Jela, <i>Efectul fluturelui</i> (2018)		
Lucia Dărămuș, <i>Convoiul mieilor</i> (2018)		
Liliana Corobca, <i>Capătul drumului</i> (2018)		
Andreea Răsuceanu, <i>O formă de viață necunoscută</i> (2018)		
Florina Ilis, <i>Cartea numerilor</i> (2018)		
Cătălin Mihuleac, <i>Deborah</i> (2019)		
Nora Iuga, <i>Hipodrom</i> (2019)		

Table 1. The Novel of memory in post-communist Romania. A very short list

Some preliminary observations can be made on the novels short-listed above and also on the three columns we have delineated in the frame of the subgenre. As the table above shows at first sight, the three novelistic categories largely succeed each other chronologically, and also on a generational basis, although, of course, authors from different age cohorts are present in all three novelistic subgroups. Before proceeding to a narrower presentation of the three novelistic branches, we should emphasize that the various traits regarding the main theme, plot and narrative mode we used to exemplify the range of the three categories are not necessarily cumulative, nor limited to just one of the categories. Rather they migrate for one subgroup of novels to another, are taken up critically, reinterpreted and recycled intertextually. It is precisely for this reason that the demarcation lines between the three subgroups are extremely thin, even blurry.

There is no surprise that the first category, *traumatic memory novels*, amasses a number of novels equal to the other two subgroups (the (n)ostalgic and the agonistic), since this sub-subgenre emerged first, in the early 1990s. Traumatic memory novels usually refer to collective tragedies and focus not on the individual, but on entire categories of victims of a dramatic situation. These novels highlight a real event that they either narrate directly or indicate unmistakably by their allegorical treatment. Many of them are anticommunist novels, either because of the inevitable political positioning of the author-protagonist as victim of the regime, or through the strong personal conviction of the monographer.

The severity of trauma requires commitment, so the *testimonial* quality of an entire line of such novels is reflected by their autobiographical nature (Teohar Mihadaş, *On the Mountain of Ebal*, and Paul Goma, *The Calidor*).

Next to testimonial novels, there are *documentary novels*, such as Ruxandra Cesereanu's *A Single Sky above Them* or Viorica Răduță's *The Imprisoned City*, but also Lucia Dărămuș's *The Lambs' Convoy* and Liliana Corobca's *The End of the Journey*. They imply the passing of a duty of memory onto the survivors or next-generation descendants, which may be assumed by writers with a stronger sense of historic responsibility.

Thirdly, there are *allegorical novels* such as Mircea Nedelciu's *The Sign of the Diver*, Alexandru Vlad's *The Bitter Rains*, Florin Irimia's *A Dark Window*, and Varujan Vosganian's *Children of the War*. Here, a collective trauma (the 1941 anti-Semitic pogroms, the birth of bastard children after the war, or the psychological pressure of dealing with menacing figures of authority) is taken on by a contemporary writer, who uses the hazy referentiality of allegory (outstanding fantastic elements, unreliable narration) as a means of indicating the fictional status, unmistakable given the distance in time.

Nicolae Avram's *Mamé* has a special status, as it has a testimonial value, justified by the author's personal experience as a resident of the derelict, overcrowded, abusive orphanages in the 1970s–1980s, and also an allegorical profile, constructed through metaphor, poetic style, and temporal ambiguity. We concluded that the allegorical component is more prominent, as it serves the

function of exploring horror without exploiting sentiment, something that belongs more to the province of the testimonial and documentary novels of trauma. A particular line of traumatic memory novels deals with post-memory³³, as trauma is passed down in the family or inherited by means of voluntary affiliation.

Sometimes a contemporary writer would appropriate and rework an individual or family trauma. This is what happens in Doina Ruști's *The Phantom in the Mill* or in Nora Iuga's *Hippodrome*, but probably the most compelling case of memory being assumed later in the line and responsibly conveyed by descendants is Vosgianian's *The Book of Whispers*, which describes the Armenian genocide and the plight of Armenians in the Diaspora, especially in communist Romania after 1945. The author makes use of a plethora of techniques, invoking personal biography, commenting on photographs and, most of all, maintaining a dialogue with the elders of the family whereby their memory is kept alive. The particularity of the post-memory discourse is its fleeting quality, its lack of authority, supplanted by an emphasis on senses, as well as documentary memory props, which Vosgianian provides abundantly. Also, the intersectionality of a collective trauma of the magnitude of the Armenian genocide spans continents and contributes, in the end, to a global reach of memory by means of an affiliative memory no longer restricted to the national tribe³⁴.

While traumatic memory novels were the first to spring up after 1989, often through means of semi-autobiographic narratives by former victims of persecution, the (n)ostalgic memory novels took longer to present themselves as a well-defined category that requires attention. They are generally published after the year 2000 by a new generation of authors who spent their childhood and adolescence in late communism, which is also their main thematic focus. By referring to the daily life under communism of anonymous people, these authors seek to challenge the idea that everything then was "tainted" and the lives of the commoners, impregnated as they were by the ubiquity of communist symbols, needed increased political scrutiny to reach deliverance. Indeed, this Romanian wave of rejection directed against the anticommunist discourse of the 1990s was echoing a widespread feeling in post-communist societies, canonized through a German portmanteau word: "Ostalgie", or the feeling of nostalgia toward the communist times (and, in Germany, toward the former German Democratic Republic, "Ost Deutschland"), when for many life was simpler than in the troublesome transition period. Taken up in German novels such as Thomas Brussig's *On the Shorter End of Sun Avenue* (1999) or films like Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), (n)ostalgia – as we decided to call it – was a daring aesthetic proposition, but also a critique of the anticommunist discourse that was used to make dissenters from the triumphalist

³³ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 3.

³⁴ Andreea Mironescu, "Quiet Voices, Faded Photographs. Remembering the Armenian Genocide in Varujan Vosgianian's 'The Book of Whispers'", *Slovo*, 29, 2017, 2, pp. 20-39.

discourse of free-market capitalism feel guilty for clinging to a condemned past. But the growing mass of dissenters, and probably also the quality of the artistic reflection on the phenomenon in these years led to the conceptualization of “post-communist nostalgia” as the reverse of post-communist trauma, although in some of the novels discussed above nostalgia and trauma are strictly imbricated³⁵.

It is noteworthy that (n)ostalgic memory novels are experiential in nature and that they often assume an auto-fictional character or otherwise play with the limits of (auto)biographical discourse, as it happens with Radu Pavel Gheo’s *Good Night, Children!*. For most of the novels in this category, humor is the guarantee of an unprejudiced approach to the past, refusing to forge idols from figures of memory, no matter how impressive these are. One recurring device is the unreliable narrator, usually a child positioned as the reflector of the story, which also helps the novel acquire the inquisitive, fresh, ethical perspective of somebody who doesn’t understand compromise. The *naivety*, the wide-eyed curiosity of the narrator is a guarantee of sincerity and a strong comic device in Ovidiu Verdeș’s *Musics and Antics*, Filip and Matei Florian’s *The Baiut Alley Lads*, or Mara Wagner’s *Behind the Apartment Building*. Probably the key (n)ostalgic memory novel in Romania is Dan Lungu’s *I’m an Old Communist Biddie!*, based on the real life story of a working woman who remembers her youth in the 1970s and 1980s. Through the figure of Emilia Apostoaie, the author pleads for the necessity to illustrate the plight of unhappy characters that were refused even the status of victims at a time so enthusiastic for change that it ignored all those left behind.

While humor is characteristic for many of the artistic products included in this novelistic subgroup, there is also a feeling of loss and pain in (n)ostalgia which allows for a more introspective dimension, sometimes accommodating personal trauma in political history, as in Alina Nelega’s *As if Nothing Had Happened* and Diana Bădica’s *Parents*. In these novels, one may speak of an *interpretative* type of memory that delivers not just the contents of remembrance, but also reflections on false self-representations, on hidden personal motivations behind politically influential collective representations and on the life-changing importance of the peculiar, the quirky and the idiosyncratic. The feminine condition in a totalitarian society which ignores its own misogyny is, because of that, even more heartbreaking.

This introspective trend in (n)ostalgic memory novels may turn to the fantastic in order to accommodate personal trauma by transferring it to a metaphysical level, as in Mircea Cărtărescu’s *The Body*, the second volume of his acclaimed trilogy *Blinding*. Cărtărescu’s trilogy mixes in almost equal proportion elements from all three novelistic subgroups, but we chose for this article the volume which seemed to us the most autobiographic. *The Body* is also the most anecdotal book of

³⁵ Maria Todorova, “Introduction”, in Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (eds.), *Post-communist Nostalgia*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2010, pp. 1-5.

Cărtărescu's acclaimed trilogy, following a child-hero with his songs and games, who unassumingly acquires the power to conjure up protective forces that confound the secret police, thereby prompting a mythological interpretation of history.

Traumatic and (n)ostalgic memory novels set the tone for a lively memory landscape in Romania in the 1990s and 2000s, with anticommunism and nostalgia keeping each other in check. However, starting with the first half of the first decade of the 21st century, a new tone of memory and a new type of novel emerged. We call this the *agonistic memory novel*, following Hans Lauge Hansen's research on the Spanish memory novel in the 21st century. Hansen invokes the 2013 work of the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe on social identity. The latter tries to go beyond the aspirations nourished by European Union bureaucrats for a utopian equilibrium and maybe even synergy between adversarial memories on the continent. Instead, what she promotes is the idea of a rational contest conducted through "agonism", or respectful disagreement, and a will to cohabit the same political space, since common identities are inevitably constructed with an "other" in mind³⁶.

Agonism might well be the political call of a (new) generation, and indeed some writers we are locating in this category are clinging to a vision of the present at the edge of time. For them, getting the past straight is not a matter of rightly constructing a common identity of all parties, something they come to believe is unachievable. As a result, they refrain from participating in memory battles, which they prefer to evade by highlighting the manipulative outlook and the constructed character of memory. Essentially, they embrace the perspective of an impassioned witness of history, a seasoned traveller through diverse cultures or a latecomer to a debate already consummated, that (s)he shares almost nothing with ideologically, and this perspective serves the agonistic position well. Several narrative modes and devices are helpful for expressing this stance toward the available past(s).

First, the *satirical* mode must be considered one of the first signs of the coming of the agonistic age. Writers around 2005 started using humor to highlight the frailty and mystifying nature of collective memory, stemming as it does from a plurality of opposing group remembrances. Of course, there exists a strong satiric vibe in other memory novels from postcommunism, particularly those in the (n)ostalgic camp, which feel obliged to contest narrations of the immediate past by harnessing the subversive force of humor. But satirical agonistic novels are usually more far-reaching in their retrospective look, and their satire foreshadows a distrust of history across several historical ages, and even a satirical outlook on history as a whole. Filip Florian, in his acclaimed *Little Fingers*, employs a mystery plot with far-reaching historical implications, by conjuring around a trove of unidentified

³⁶ Hans Lauge Hansen, "Modes of Remembering in the Contemporary Spanish Novel", *Orbis Litterarum*, 71, 2016, 4, pp. 274-275.

bones many opposing interested parties: former communists, anticommunist activists, religious hierarchs, who want to see it confirm their identity myths. But they are all frustrated in their expectations, and this gives the narrator – an archeologist, therefore a professional of hermeneutics and “depth” – the satisfaction to celebrate his independence of thought, which guarantees his lucidity. Another novelist, Alexandru Potcoavă, in *Life and Opinions of a Certain Halle*, ventures into the much-disputed memory of the interwar period in the Banat region to see different recollections of different people with multiple ethnic backgrounds fail at the precise moment when they fall back on nationalistic mythologies.

Another perspective into an agonistic kind of memory is reached by means of *dialogism*. Some novelists, among them Gabriela Adameşteanu, Norman Manea, and Gheo, are in the habit of letting past traumas mirror each other, and thus measure up their relative amplitude. The goal of such dialogic memory mirrors is not a competition, but a study in transnational, often transcontinental solidarity. Their “multidirectional”³⁷ novels express an appetite for memory spanning a plurality of cultures, either in the course of one character’s life (as in Manea’s *The Lair*) or in people with different memory legacies intersecting, making them contextualize their own trauma (for instance, in Adameşteanu’s *The Encounter*).

Finally, there is a strong and recent direction of agonistic memory novels that are exposing a *post-ideological* stance. Novels such as *Sonia Raises Her Hand* by Lavinia Branişte or *Complacency* by Simona Sora express a distrust of both anticommunist memory and the ironical memory of the (n)ostalgics. They cautiously inspect the claims to truth of both parties and in the end reclaim the right to memory of more recent things or of personal pasts that have no connection with the formats of the previous memory modes. They flaunt a rejection of the ideology of memory itself, in that they affect disinterest toward the way in which memory constructs community, while they are actually contesting the contents, not the circuits of memory.

To Conclude: Future Perspectives

Our article is the first attempt to map the novel of memory both as a world genre and as a Romanian subgenre, drawing consistently on the theoretical grounds already established for the Spanish case. Although we worked on a rather limited list consisting of fifty memory novels published in the Romanian areal both before and after the fall of communism, we maintain that the three categories we delineated may very well function in other literatures, especially in post-communist cultures. Another important feature of this subgenre in its Romanian version is its strong transnational potential. While most critics and the main archives, among

³⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 11.

which DCRR and DCRR 1990–2000, restrict their area of investigation to novels published in the national area or in Romanian, the novel of memory challenges this methodology. On the one hand, that is because many memoirs or memory novels by Romanian authors were first published abroad, in foreign translation (most notoriously those of Paul Goma). On the other hand, because important authors born in Romania and writing in languages other than Romanian, such as Aglaja Veteranyi in *Warum das Kind in der Polenta kocht* [*Why Is the Child Cooking in the Polenta*] (1999), Andrei Codrescu in *Messiah* (1999), György Dragomán in *A fehér király* [*The White King*] (2005), and Herta Müller in *Atemshaukel* [*The Hunger Angel*] (2009), address topics like local communism, the Holocaust, postwar deportations to the Soviet Union and so on, and in this way participate in the same “Romanian” memory continuum. In their novels one finds the same historical mix filtered by the same critical and self-critical memory, with temporal and narrative identity games. This goes to show that the novel of memory subgenre goes beyond the linguistic margins of a particular literature, demonstrating the fluidity and permeability of these borders.

In an article about memory, it might be interesting to wonder what the future might hold in store for the subgenre we discussed. A phenomenon that can already be noticed is the shrinking of the testimonial variety of the traumatic novel, caused by the authors’ passing, and the growth of the novel of post-memory. The (n)ostalgic novel of memory is also a generational novel and it is only sensible that it too, in time, will wither. Given that it seems to be so much connected to a specific generation whose members were the last to experience childhood under communism, the emergence of newer generations born after communism, for whom that period is history, and not a part of their affective memory, post-communist (n)ostalgia will probably lose its literary attractiveness. Finally, we predict that agonistic memory novels will gain momentum in the next decade, provided that other memory waves wash over them and make them history.

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THE NOVEL OF MEMORY AS WORLD GENRE. EXPLORING THE
ROMANIAN CASE

(Abstract)

In the last four decades, the novel of memory has gained momentum on the world scene, taking advantage of the collapse of colonial and/ or dictatorial regimes around the globe. Romania was not an exception, so after the fall of Communism in 1989, and more prominently at the beginning of the new millennium, this subgenre blossomed. Based on quantitative and qualitative research of a selection of fifty novels published in the Romanian space both before and after the fall of the communist regime, this article is the first attempt to map the Romanian novel of memory from a genre-based perspective. Our approach follows the evolution of the novel of memory in the course of four decades, from a thematic, formal, and generational perspective. Relying on these operators, as well as on the culturalist approach to literature in memory studies, we distinguish between a traumatic, a (n)ostalgic and an agonistic novel of memory.

Keywords: novel of memory, world genre, national subgenres, traumatic memory, (n)ostalgia.

ROMANUL MEMORIEI CA GEN MONDIAL. O EXPLORARE A
CAZULUI ROMÂNESC

(Rezumat)

În ultimele patru decenii, romanul memoriei s-a impus pe scena globală, în parte și datorită căderii unor regimuri politice coloniale și/sau dictatoriale. România nu reprezintă o excepție în acest scenariu, prin urmare, după prăbușirea comunismului în 1989, dar în special odată cu debutul noului mileniu, acest subgen a erupt în arena publică. Având la bază o analiză cantitativă și calitativă pe marginea unei selecții de 50 de romane publicate în spațiul românesc atât înainte, cât și după înlăturarea regimului comunist, acest articol reprezintă o primă încercare de a cartografia romanul memoriei dintr-o perspectivă centrată pe genul literar. Abordarea noastră urmărește evoluția romanului memoriei pe parcursul a patru decenii, sub aspect tematic, formal și generațional. Îmbinând acești operatori cu abordarea culturalistă a literaturii din câmpul studiilor despre memorie, propunem trei categorii în interiorul subgenului: romanul memoriei traumatice, romanul memoriei (n)ostalgice și cel al memoriei agonistice.

Cuvinte-cheie: romanul memoriei, gen literar mondial, subgen national, memorie traumatică, (n)ostalgie.

**GENRES OF REALISM ACROSS THE FORMER
COLD WAR DIVIDE.
NEOLIBERAL NOVELS AND SELF-FICTION**

After having long struggled at the peripheries of the (post)modernist system of literary values, realism made a landslide return around the turn of the millennium in several genres of the narrative ranging from the more traditional novel of social observation to the more experimental forms of autobiography. In general, the shift to authenticity now witnessed in many literatures across the globe was seen as a momentous response to the collapse of the grand ideological narratives which had confined the Cold War cultural production². Many critics regarded this new stage of fiction, which was reflected in the post-theoretical age of literary studies, as a salutary retrieval of emotion and transparency after the demise of the bookish postmodernism. Other theorists, mostly coming from outside literary studies, doubted that the various realisms emerging after the end of the Cold War were still able to maintain a “realist” vantage point. On defining “capitalist realism”, Mark Fisher argued that the globalization of capitalism had entrapped arts themselves within an inescapable ideological worldview that reduced their ability to assume a critical distance³. It is true that the classic nineteenth-century age of realism benefitted from a fresh critical approach, once it became the cornerstone of Franco Moretti’s seminal research on the world-system developments of the novel. But even so, the recasting of contemporary realist fiction in critical studies still lagged behind (at least compared to the huge attention bestowed on new realism in cinema), mostly due to the bad repute that realism had inherited from the heyday of modernism and postmodernism. As a 2012 issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* pointed out, once devalued by socialist realism, realism became “peripheral” in the Cold War system of aesthetic values and was neglected by poststructuralist and even postcolonial studies (which favoured more sophisticated types of writing coming on the heels of their Frankfurt School credentials)⁴.

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0541, Contract 140/2018.

² See Ulla Haselstein, Andrew S. Gross, MaryAnn Snyder-Körber (eds.), *The Pathos of Authenticity: American Passions of the Real*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag, 2010; Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2017; Ellen Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism. A Cultural History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017.

³ Passim Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, New Alresford, O Books, 2009.

⁴ Joe Cleary, Jed Esty, Colleen Lye (eds.), “Peripheral Realisms Now”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73, 2012, 3, pp. 255-268.

Anglo-American criticism has recently made several attempts to relate the post-Cold War revival of realism to the ideological conditions of globalized neoliberalism. In their argument to a special issue about “Genres of Neoliberalism”, Jane Elliott and Gillian Harkins address from the very beginning the fluid semantics of the said notion. Although already working as a buzzword in contemporary literary studies, “neoliberalism” remains a rather unspecific notion which could in turn stand for a set of institutions and social practices, or for a larger pattern of “uneven development and distribution that is distinct from earlier phases of colonialism and imperialism” and in which privatization and deregulation take place within geopolitical (not national) relations of production. This variable meaning might suggest why the often-referenced term of “neoliberalism” lacks the explanatory power that “bourgeois capitalism” used to have for nineteenth-century realism. Equally telling is the fact that, while the *Bildungsroman* and the historical novel were genres corresponding to the rise of capitalism, globalized capitalism cannot be directly equated to a certain aesthetic form which would “acknowledge the shared social space that writers and readers inhabit”⁵.

In line with Mark Fisher’s notion of “capitalist realism”, theorists of “the neoliberal novel” tend to see behind the authenticity and the return to mimesis claimed by recent fiction a resignation with the inevitability of neoliberalism, and the failure to disrupt, or at least challenge its status-quo, by commenting upon relations of capital. Paradoxically, this sceptical view of the new realism is partly reminiscent of Fredric Jameson’s depiction of postmodernism as “the cultural logic of late capitalism” that was unable to establish a critical distance toward relations of capital. The proponents of “capitalist realism” and the “neoliberal novel” agree on both sides that none of the said ideological-aesthetic modes display the distinctive register of older forms of realism. For this reason, they try to define these notions in the negative, rather than by a positive set of features. In their view, the new genres of realism tend to “incorporate other genres”, or resort to “indeterminacy and contradiction” in order to “show the processes of their own commodification”. Within the ideological enclosure posited by capitalist realism, forms of literary realism such as “neoliberal novels” might attempt to record “the transformative capitalist processes of commodification and financialization”, but they remain unable to transcend their hesitation between “conservative and critical impulses”⁶.

In their more focused accounts of the genre, Walter Benn Michaels and Jeffrey J. Williams reinforce the idea that neoliberal novels reproduce contemporary economic paradigms and reigning ideologies, which undermines their tenets of

⁵ Jane Elliott, Gillian Harkins, “Introduction: Genres of Neoliberalism”, *Social Text*, 31, 2013, 2, pp. 1-15.

⁶ Alison Shonkwiler, Leigh Claire La Berge (eds.), “Introduction: A Theory of Capitalist Realism”, in *Reading Capitalist Realism*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2014, pp. 12-15.

critical realism⁷. Due to this underlying compliance with the status-quo, these novels downplay the topics of economic distribution and class inequality that were the usual concerns of realism, and fail to project any prospects of collective political action. Instead, they emphasize topics of identity and self-formation, with the result of naturalizing “the unimaginability of any alternative to neoliberalism” (Michaels) and adhering to the belief that “real action” can only occur “among the rich” (Williams). Within this view, even Jonathan Franzen’s renewed novel of social observation falls short of articulating any criticism of the system, but rather replicates the neoliberal emphasis on personal responsibility and individual action. All in all, Michaels and Williams argue that contemporary realist fiction fails to explore other forms of identity outside the mainstream neoliberal subjectivity predicated on the ideal of “free” individual choice.

Alissa G. Karl has a slightly different take on “neoliberal novels”, based on the analogy between figures of the body and social formations. In her view, the respective narratives try to interrogate the status of the neoliberal nation-state and the fate of the labouring bodies affected by the collapse of social collectivities. Karl herself acknowledges that neoliberal novels favour topics of personal identity. However, she argues that it is precisely this scenario that can “enact, but also confront contemporary neoliberal capitalism’s formulation of bodies and, by extension, social entities”⁸. For this reason, neoliberal novels thematise corporeality in a manner that is directly indicative of political realities and economic conditions, suggesting the social atomization brought by neoliberal policies:

The metaphorical figuration of the social body via ill, injured, and wasting bodies renders a system that does violence to individual bodies and demonstrates the deterioration of older tropes of social cohesion [...]. Such conditions entail an ambivalent view of the social as both ruptured and emphasized. Having undermined the self-contained and seamless body from the outset, the novel conceives instead of an imperfectly networked social totality that is a function of the neoliberal economic climate that it narrates⁹.

A common thread throughout these attempts to conceptualize the literary genres that address neoliberalism is the tendency to debunk their individualistic focus, and their subsequent scepticism about the prospects of collective political action, as a form of compliance with the neoliberal orthodoxy. This orthodoxy has not been, however, scrutinized in the post-communist literatures that witnessed,

⁷ Walter Benn Michaels, “Model Minorities and the Minority Model—the Neoliberal Novel”, in Leonard Cassuto *et alii* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 1016-1030; Jeffrey J. Williams, “The Plutocratic Imagination”, *Dissent*, 60, 2013, 1, p. 95.

⁸ Alissa G. Karl, “Things Break Apart: James Kelman, Ali Smith, and the Neoliberal Novel”, in Alison Shonkwiler, Leigh Claire La Berge (eds.), *Reading Capitalist Realism*, p. 65.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

almost simultaneously with Western literatures, a millennial shift to realism and authenticity. However, in these literatures, millennial realism resurfaced precisely in connection with radical individualism. The realist turn became apparent in Romanian literature towards the end of the first post-communist decade, when poetry displayed an ethos of transparency that was reminiscent of the Beat rhetoric, while the novel downsized to autobiography in the genre deemed as “self-fiction”. Young Romanian prose writers like Ioana Baetica, Ioana Bradea, Adrian Schiop, Ionuț Chiva, Claudia Golea, Cecilia Ștefănescu, Alexandru Vakulovski or Dragoș Bucurenci provided first-person accounts of drifting through the desolate landscape of post-communism. The protagonists of these self-narratives recorded their heightened experiences of corporeality and often reached the brink of existential despair. They presented themselves as marginals, in an implicit attempt to question community models (that pertained to the family, the city, or the nation), even if the overlap of realism with radical individualism weakened their force of social observation.

Millennial realism occasioned the introduction of “self-fiction” in the Romanian critical vocabulary, as a way to describe the emphasized autobiographical dimension of the new prose. As a literary genre, self-fiction was first theorized in French criticism at the end of the 1970s, when the effects of the poststructuralist/’68’s rethinking of subjectivity could materialize into fiction. In his 2007 account, Philippe Forest distinguishes self-fiction from other forms of autobiographical writing by the genre’s awareness of its own novelistic dimension. He also relates the emergence of the genre to the rising postmodernism, rather than to the Western entrenchment of neoliberal regimes¹⁰. Although it reflected the right-leaning tendencies that dominated the French intellectual life of the 1970s-80s, this demarcation was also indicative of larger trends within Anglo-American scholarship of the time, which “treated postmodern culture and neoliberal governmentality through different disciplinary and theoretical registers”¹¹.

The French-inspired concept of “self-fiction” was widely embraced in Romanian criticism with the realist turn of the 2000s, but its use was faulty from the very beginning, for at least three reasons. First, it was charged with the derogatory connotations of a minor literature, which most critics deemed as unable to transcend its authorial narcissism for better aesthetic goals. Secondly, it was too vague to be distinguished from the wider area of autobiographical writing, or even from the first-person narrative. Thirdly, the identity topics within which the concept was confined were too narrow to accommodate the full range of the ideological stances displayed by the new fiction.

On the other hand, the critical readings of Romanian self-fiction barely addressed the neoliberalism that formed the inescapable background of this new

¹⁰ Philippe Forest, *Romanul, realul și alte eseuri* [*The Novel, the Real, and Other Essays*]. Translated by Ioan Pop-Curșeu, Cluj-Napoca, Tact, 2008, pp. 144-145.

¹¹ Jane Elliott, Gillian Harkins, “Introduction: Genres of Neoliberalism”, p. 8.

literary genre due to the aggressive promotion of this kind of discourse during post-communism. A singular such connection was made by Iulia Popovici in a 2004 review of books by Adrian Schiop and Ioana Băetica. Referring to the frakturist manifestoes joining millennial realism, Popovici observed that the ethical, social-critical stance taken by these Romanian writers could be likened to the attitude of Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, or Douglas Coupland's fiction in response to the reigning thatcherism of the time. Although written in different historical moments, both types of fiction depict "individuals who were left adrift, were deprived of the support of the social values enjoyed by their parents [...], and had lost the sense of belonging to a family [...]"¹². Popovici contends that Romanian writers' use of first-person accounts of personal experiences works as a means to expose "the breakdown of the social cohesion", the "alienation and palpable misery of life"¹³ in post-communist Romania.

But otherwise, Romanian critics interpreted the biographical emphasis of self-fiction in existential terms associated with a rather timeless juvenile insurgency. The conversational, slang language employed by Romanian authors of self-fiction added to the impression of anarchic youth, whose depressive drift seemed to suggest a generation-specific identity crisis, instead of hinting at concrete social circumstances. Old guard, but still very influential critics like Nicolae Manolescu could not get past the so-called "self-centredness", "superficiality" and "egotistical sensuality" of these first-person narratives focused on the everyday. Long accustomed to the aestheticised language of the Aesopian prose written during communism, these critics regarded the lack of sophistication displayed by the self-narratives as an aesthetic deficit¹⁴.

The bad repute of the Romanian self-fiction was enhanced by the fact that the genre could never catch up with the paradigm-shifting impact of millennial realist poetry, but was most often seen as the mere companion of the latter. As a result of that, self-fiction enjoyed much fewer systematic accounts than the poetry written within the same literary paradigm. Although provided by critics who belonged to the 2000s' generation in terms of age (Adina Dinițoiu, Florina Pîrjol), these accounts either focused on narrow, inter-literary connections (with the poetics of the postmodernist prose of the 1980s), or discussed the background of transition in vague, unconvincing terms. Both Dinițoiu and Pîrjol's references were mainly indebted to French criticism, and, as such, were unlikely to address the political dimensions explored by recent Anglo-American theories of fiction, including those that concerned the slightly similar "neoliberal novel".

¹² Iulia Popovici, "Fracturi de atitudine" ["Fractured Stances"], *Revista* 22, 2004, <https://revista22.ro/cultura/fracturi-de-atitudine>. Accessed December 15, 2020.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române. 5 secole de literatură* [*The Critical History of Romanian Literature. 5 Centuries of Literature*], Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008, p. 1453.

In her overview of post-communist Romanian prose trends, Adina Dinițoiu acknowledges that the post-1989 demise of literature-centrism made writers more aware of social and political changes. However, Dinițoiu reads this new horizon of fiction in the hermeneutic terms provided by François Hartog's concept of "régime d'historicité". Although wide enough to cover a variety of discourses, this frame remains unspecific to the post-communist context. In fact, the reading of post-1990 Romanian novels in terms of their "shift between past-present-future" ignores the social and political particularities of their immediate context and overemphasizes their relation with the communist past. Dinițoiu distinguishes two clear-cut tendencies in the post-communist Romanian prose: on the one hand, the stronger focus on memory and the layered approach on the historical past in the works of older prose writers (most of whom pertain to the 1980s generation), and, on the other hand, the complete oblivion/erasure of the (communist) past in millennial prose which creates an overarching "présentisme". Although she mentions that the latter is also fuelled by the postmodern "consumer hedonism", Dinițoiu admits that the social, economic and political crises of transition are the main triggers of millennial fiction, considering that young writers face rising unemployment, poverty, lack of prospects, and so on. Even so, Dinițoiu overstates millennial prose's stance towards communism, and argues that its self-displayed indifference towards the past only reveals its inability to erase that past. Symptomatic for the young critic's allegiance to Bucharest liberal intellectual elite, her bias towards topics of memory and communism erases significant dimensions of millennial fiction as far as its reaction to contemporary transition is concerned¹⁵.

The only systematic account of Romanian self-fiction was published by Florina Pîrjol in 2014¹⁶. Here, the author makes commendable efforts to distinguish the 2000s' literary generation from the generation of the 1980s, against several critics' attempts to blend the two creative paradigms together on account of their shared biographical bent. Even so, Pîrjol still keeps the two literary generations close in a dialectical balance whereby millennial fiction simply emerges as the reverse side of the previous generation's postmodernist register. But if de-aestheticisation does single out the new Romanian fiction of the 2000s, it remains unclear why Pîrjol only defines it by features that actually pertain to a more sophisticated aesthetic regime, such as "exaggerated playfulness", "deliberate air of superficiality", "bawdy language", or "denial of conventions". While focusing on close readings and on the interplay of literary forms, the critic downplays the political stance taken by millennial fiction, which she addresses by recycling formulas that were already used to describe the 1980s' fiction: "complete indifference to ideology",

¹⁵ Adina Dinițoiu, "Prezentism și mizerabilism în proza douămiistă românească" ["Presentism and Miserabilism in the Prose of the Romanian 2000 Generation"], *Transilvania*, 2015, 2, pp. 25-29; Adina Dinițoiu, *Evoluția și direcțiile prozei românești după 1990* [*The Evolution and the Trends of the Romanian Prose after 1989*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2015, p. 109 sqq.

¹⁶ Passim Florina Pîrjol, *Carte de identități* [*Books of Identities*], București, Cartea Românească, 2014.

“refusal of the system”, “ostentatious frond”. However, Pîrjol does little to explain which “system” these young writers rebelled against, or how they could remain indifferent to ideology after getting through the first decade of post-communism.

Without a deeper delve into this context, the 2014 book on self-fiction fails to explain the novelty of the genre in the history of Romanian literature. This happens because Pîrjol blends the genre within the much larger history of autobiographical writing, whose genealogy extends way back to ancient and medieval texts. As far as Romanian literature is concerned, the author also pushes the emergence of self-fiction back to the communist age in those cases when the usually (self-)censored autobiographical strand erupted as a call for individual authenticity. This view bypasses the practice of Aesopian language during communism and the fact that the expressive circumstances of the age made the autobiographical drive impossible to be voiced in an overt manner. Most often than not, the “self” displayed in fiction written during late communism emerged as a fictionalized construct, rather than as a biographical given. This was the case of the pre-1989 “self-fiction” cited by Pîrjol, which ranged from the self-referential, experimental texts of the Târgoviște School, to the fictionally layered, quasi-autobiographical narratives of 1980s’ writers like Simona Popescu (*Exuvii*) and Mircea Cărtărescu (*Orbitor*). However, the young critic goes as far as to consider that even the bookish, postmodern fiction written by Gheorghe Crăciun or Ruxandra Cesereanu might be an instance of “introvert, surrealist self-fiction”. Placed beside such writers, millennial realists do gain some sort of symbolic validation, especially given the fact that Cărtărescu embodied the paternal figure the former have striven to define themselves against. At the same time, this enlarged view makes literary categories overlap indistinctly. Eventually, Pîrjol herself has to acknowledge the fact that it would be hard to “identify a pioneer of self-fiction in Romanian literature”, “list all local examples”, or trace a clear “ideological, historical and aesthetic contour” of the genre¹⁷.

The hesitant stance taken by these accounts was both conceptual and evaluative. Instead of making direct pronouncements on self-fiction’s aesthetic value, most Romanian critics tried to explain the genre by the public demand triggered by the best-selling memoirs and diaries that flooded the literary market after 1989. The most influential literary reviewers of the 2000s (Paul Cernat, Daniel Cristea-Enache) also voiced their suspicion that self-fiction might be just a circumstantial mass genre. In fact, the public appeal of self-fiction was overstated, even if Polirom Publishing House did try to market one of its collections of contemporary fiction by the label of “ego-prose”. At the same time, most senior and younger critics alike were reluctant to address the social-political contexts in which millennial realism emerged other than by vaguely mentioning the so-called “disillusionments” of the post-communist transition. Although being the post-

¹⁷ See *Ibidem*.

communist critic with the keenest eye on fiction's underlying ideologies, Mihai Iovănel shares with his aforementioned peers a certain doubt about self-fiction's ability to cast a window into the surrounding social reality. In his 2017 overview of post-communist literature, Iovănel poignantly observes that post-1989 Romanian fiction could not keep up with the pace by which social structures changed during post-communism, and for this reason autobiography was given an "excessive role in the entire post-communist prose"¹⁸. He also considers that self-fiction, which is a striking instance of the general tendency toward autobiographical writing, remains basically "a French import". Perhaps surprisingly, but rather in line with the French reading of the genre, Iovănel places self-fiction in the category of the "metarealism" developed from the 1980s postmodernism, because of its experimental nature displayed through the radical "overlap of author, narrator, and character"¹⁹.

All in all, maintaining the French frame of reference, which related to completely different historical circumstances, didn't help much in locating the debate around self-fiction within the neoliberalism on the rise during post-communism. In fact, the Romanian self-fiction of the 2000s could be productively related to the "neoliberal novel" by their common duplicity that made the self-expressed claim to realism hide a deeper compliance with the capitalist status-quo. In this respect, the crude narcissism displayed through the Romanian self-fiction was analogical to the economic and political formation of the post-1989 neoliberalism, whose underlying myths of individuation and free choice were reinforced by the rising consumerism and by mainstream media's attempts to project a type of citizen that would pursue his/her own best interests and act on his/her desires unhinged. Romanian writers of self-fiction have emerged from the 1990s' decade that celebrated the liberated individual while confronting people with unprecedented social insecurity, which explains the extreme narrative shape they gave to the post-communist ideal of self-determination. However, the genre had a short life span and faded by the time the 2008 crisis hit Romania. Moreover, it was unable to shake the grounds of the local literary canon, which remains to this day bent on conservative aestheticism, while continuing to be suspicious of the social-political referentiality embedded in literature.

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¹⁸ Mihai Iovănel, *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* [*The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017, p. 43.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

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GENRES OF REALISM ACROSS THE FORMER COLD WAR DIVIDE.
NEOLIBERAL NOVELS AND SELF-FICTION
(Abstract)

The article explores and correlates two genres of the new literary realism that emerged around the year 2000, as they were conceptualized and instantiated in fiction across the two sides of the Atlantic, in North America and Romania, respectively. The common background of this global wave of realism relates to the post-Cold War definitive entrenchment of neoliberalism and to its corresponding topics of personal identity, which provide the vantage point of the realist social observation. Despite the post-communist critical elite's bias for topics of memory and communism, the genre of "self-fiction" that emerged in millennial Romanian literature shared with the "neoliberal novels" theorized in Anglo-American criticism an underlying compliance with status-quo capitalism and its defining myths of individuality.

Keywords: neoliberalism, realism, individualism, biographical writing, post-communism.

GENURI ALE REALISMULUI LA CEI DOI FOȘTI POLI AI RĂZBOIULUI
RECE. ROMANUL NEOLIBERAL ȘI AUTOFICȚIUNEA

(Rezumat)

Articolul dezbate și corelează două genuri ale noului realism literar apărut în jurul anului 2000, așa cum au fost conceptualizate și exemplificate în proză de cele două părți ale Atlanticului, în America de Nord și în România. Fundalul comun al acestui nou val realist îl constituie definitivă instituționalizare a neoliberalismului după încheierea Războiului Rece și privilegierea corespunzătoare a tematicilor ținând de identitatea personală, aceasta fiind și perspectiva din care este realizată observația socială realistă. În ciuda tendinței elitelor critice postcomuniste de a aprecia/supralicita temele memoriei și ale reprezentării comunismului, „autoficțiunea” dezvoltată în literatura română douămiistă poate fi corelată cu „romanul neoliberal” teoretizat în critica anglo-americană prin prisma raportării similare, duplicare la status-quo-ul capitalist și la miturile sale specifice privind individualitatea.

Cuvinte-cheie: neoliberalism, realism, individualism, biografism, postcomunism.

DETECTIVE FICTION IN THE EAST¹

The detective novel, albeit not being a literary phenomenon with a long Romanian tradition, is regarded as fundamental for western popular culture, not only because of its outstanding tradition in the USA and in Western Europe, but also thanks to the various ideological stances it was imbued with and embodied throughout the years. A critical component of the 19th century feuilletonistic period, the stories of detection were one of the first instances of commercial literature that have permeated the public sphere, ultimately becoming the very embodiment, within the sociology of literature, of the democratization of literature, as its evolution unfolded simultaneously to the increase of literacy among the lower social strata. The literacy rates of late 18th century Europe, although higher than in the rest of the world, enabled only a fraction of the continent's population to enjoy reading literature. By 1820, the United Kingdom had a 53% literacy rate at a population of 16.2 million, whereas Sweden had the highest literacy rate of 75% at a population of approximately 2.59 million. France, although scoring lower than both, had a 38% literacy rate and a population of 31.5 million. This means that a little over 8 million people could read in the first two decades of 19th century Britain, while nearly 12 million people in France were literate at that time. By 1870, 76% of Britons and 69% of Frenchmen were literate, while the world literacy rate still lingered at 19%. We are looking at a near 20% increase in the literacy rates of Great Britain and a staggering 31% increase in France over the span of 50 years. In the case of the 20th century, it is perhaps relevant that in Great Britain alone, the number of published books increased exponentially, from 9.000 titles in 1914 to 14.000 titles published in 1939. However, the increase is most visible when seen against the increase in the number of books hosted by public libraries. In 1911, British public libraries contained 54 million books; by 1939, that number had reached over 247 million copies.

Franco Moretti, in his 2000 "The Slaughterhouse of Literature"², addresses the emergence of detective fiction against the backdrop of the broader evolution of commercial literature towards the end of 19th century Britain. He argues that the formal narrative component that succeeded in transforming *sensational literature* into *detective fiction* proper was the instrument of the "clue". In the

¹ This article is a revised and extended version of a paper presented at the International Conference „Zilele Sextil Pușcariu” (12-13 September 2019) and published, in Romanian, in the conference proceedings (*Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, 2019, 4, pp. 475-482). This is the first internationally available rendition.

² Franco Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61, 2000, 1, pp. 207-227.

“slaughterhouse of literature”, to borrow his metaphor, wherein emerging authors viciously fought for the attention of an ever-expanding readership, this was the element that vouchsafed the survival of certain authors to the detriment of other authors through two convergent and complementary processes, “selection and magnification”, as he calls them, in the sense “that readers *select*, and then markets *magnify*, but only in accordance with the perverse market logic – to those who have, more shall be given – that goes by the name of increasing returns”³. Essentially, if the literature of detection prior to Arthur Conan Doyle was profoundly elitist in its implications, in the sense that the narrative unfolding took place suddenly and unexpectedly, not having been foreshadowed by a series of “clues” that would have allowed the naïve reader to decipher the mystery himself, guiding his footsteps from the *suzjet* to the *fable* (according to Viktor Shklovsky’s classification), by introducing keys to understanding the process of defamiliarization, the detective narrative after Doyle significantly contributes to the democratization of leisure reading.

Three convergent forces, therefore, transformed detective fiction into one of the most popular narrative forms of the 20th century: the increase in literacy, the automatising of production coupled by the standardization of the labour day, and the formal democratization of the literary text.

The main lines along which the detective fiction of the 20th century came together as a cohesive genre are the British and the American tradition. The British *armchair detective* corresponds, in a wider context, to the generic cultural concept of “Britishness”: elitist in the language it employs, taking place preponderantly in aristocratic milieus which nevertheless limit themselves to a series of rural-idyllic or domestic environments wherein crime is an absolute exception. Relatively slow-paced in their narrative unfolding, the novels chiefly borrow the form of challenging intellectual puzzles, departing from the – oftentimes aestheticist – specificity of their protagonists (Hercule Poirot’s dandyism, Miss Marple’s warm-hearted temper, representing but slightly different versions of Sherlock Holmes’ idiosyncrasies). Ideologically, the armchair detective tradition attempts to shine light on the underbelly of a presumably morally degraded world, but which nonetheless conserves the guise of nobility, and through this uncover its hypocrisy.

The American tradition of the *hardboiled*, on the other hand, departs from the urban agglomerations of America: urbanized milieus massively borrowing from the angst and noir of German expressionism (an influence that becomes obvious in the genre’s cinematographic adaptations), engaging heteronormative, hyper-masculinized, overly qualified and morally incorruptible heroes. A man capable of intuition and wit, displaying physical force as well as unusual empathy, the hardboiled hero becomes a perfect narrative instrument, ready to handle and

³ Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, London – New York, Verso, 2013, p. 146.

resolve an infinite number of possible narrative permutations, not least because of his universality:

He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor – by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks – that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough like him, the world would be a very safe place to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in⁴.

A hero that “resists the official, but not quite legitimate, authority of a decadent society, now elevated into the towering bureaucratic impersonality of the law”⁵ and by whose presence the hardboiled novel succeeds in fulfilling two functions at the same time: first, that of bringing attention to the presumed moral decay of American society, presented as an ubiquitous and ever-worsening state, and second, that of emphasizing the pragmatism, matter-of-factly approach of the generic American hero, whose features will lie at the heart of later heroic representations, especially in the action film.

At the intersection of these two very specific subgenres a third one takes shape, that of the *police procedural*, which, as its name suggests, attempts to objectively depict police work in all its tediousness and unspectacular evolution. By eliminating the dominance of a single crime-solving agent, choosing to employ neither the dynamic and straightforward “lone detective”, nor the charismatic and sometimes peculiar “armchair detective”, the police procedural makes use of elements hitherto neglected, such as police bureaucracy, interrogations, fieldwork, forensics, and so on.

As for the predilect readership of detective fiction, it remains uncontested that it represented one of the most prolific segments of commercial literature during the 20th century, if not the most read genre altogether. The massive popularity of

⁴ Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1950, p. 19.

⁵ Sean McCain, “The Hard-Boiled Novel”, in Catherine Ross Nickerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 45.

paperback books, which increased exponentially during the 1930s with the founding of the Penguin publishing house, was preceded only by the proliferation of “penny dreadfuls” or “tuppenny books” during the 19th century. Highbrow literature with a claim on artistic merits, from which the entire literary canon of the 20th chose its most representative works, was printed, up until the late 1960s, in the form of hardcover copies, whereas the cheaper, dispensable paperbacks were reserved for commercial literature.

In discussing the presence of detective fiction in the communist East, I depart from a series of claims and observations conducted by the Russian-born scholar Andrew Baruch Wachtel, who in his 2006 *Remaining Relevant after Communism*, noted that “communist governments for the most part suppressed such Western literary genres as detective novels, thrillers, horror novels, fantasy and romance on the grounds that literary work of this kind could not play a positive role in nurturing communist society”⁶ and that “in Eastern Europe, at least until the collapse of communism, popular or pulp literature was for the most part non-existent, and serious nonfiction was rare”⁷.

Therefore, the novelistic genres and subgenres originating in the Western, capitalist tradition are not to be regarded as innocent cultural products, but as laden with the ideological background of the regime in which they emerged. Even if the import of these literary forms would not have had the projected corrupting effect anticipated by the communist authorities, Wachtel claims, their refusal is categorical and political in nature. Corollary to this refusal of foreign import, argues Wachtel, “Eastern Europe is that part of the world where serious literature and those who produce it have traditionally been overvalued”⁸, meaning that, far from being the sole consequence of communist cultural paternalism, the absence of a proper popular literature is the result of the massive symbolic capital of “serious literature”, designating literary production that fulfils the criteria of “the autonomy of the aesthetic”. The classical whodunit, initially conceived for a readership selected from the British bourgeoisie, portraying and allowing for the existence of class difference by choosing an aristocratic-idyllic narrative backdrop and a protagonist with intellectual tendencies, clearly divorced from the vicissitudes of Realpolitik, could never be cultivated or encouraged by communist literary institutions. The hardboiled tradition, on the other hand, is regarded as a response to the growing criminality of American society, marked by the absence of a strong state that would counterbalance it through social policies aimed at mending inequality and class tensions. In a society with claims on egalitarianism, such as the socialist one, urban criminality is refused literary expression, not least because

⁶ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism. The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*, London – Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 32.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

criminality in itself is tacitly hidden from sight, as it does not even make an appearance through the channels of state media.

What are the causes of this backwardness? The symbolic capital of communist authors, doubled by the policies imposed by the state-run publishing houses, concentrating on the democratization of reading and on the socialist upbringing of the proletariat through unprecedented print runs and massive royalties offered to authors, guaranteed that every book published was an instant bestseller. In a sense, every other novel was massively “popular” even in light of the fact that they could, after being read, become valuable currency in the informal trade market, being exchanged for basic goods such as meat or butter – especially during the last communist decade. Boris Akunin, probably the most popular crime fiction author of contemporary Russia, observed during a 2009 interview given to Radio Free Europe that detective fiction in the Soviet Union existed only *in nuce*, since crime, according to the party logic, is not possible under triumphant socialism.

The same conclusion can be drawn about the Romanian communist context as well, not least because the book market of the Socialist Republic of Romania mimicked the Soviet one shortly after 1948. On the other hand, Mihai Iovănel claimed in his 2017 *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* [*The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism*] that local detective fiction was abundant during communism, but essentially mediocre⁹. During post-communism, the same critic argues that Romanian popular literature virtually disappears, replaced, at least during the 1990s, by translations of western commercial literature. Consulting *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România 1990–2000* [*Chronological Dictionary of the Translated Novel in Romania 1990–2000*] (DCRT)¹⁰, we can observe, for instance, that a single American author of romance novels, Sandra Brown, was translated significantly more during this time than entire national literatures, not least because of the inexpensive translation rights when compared to other genres or authors. Even if “the prestige of serious literature declined drastically in the first post-communist decade”¹¹, this did not trigger a response on the national book market, weakened by economic liberalization, going through a laborious process of democratizing its institutions and attempting to cater to a precarious population, for which cultural consumption was not a priority.

“Foreign form, local material – and local form”¹², the triangular formula used by Franco Moretti to describe the mechanisms of literary import and the way in

⁹ Mihai Iovănel, *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* [*The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017, p. 184.

¹⁰ *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România 1990–2000* [*Chronological Dictionary of the Translated Novel in Romania 1990–2000*] (DCRT), Cluj-Napoca, “Sextil Pușcariu” Institute for Linguistics and Literary History, Romanian Academy, 2017.

¹¹ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism*, p. 6.

¹² Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, p. 57.

which literary peripheries found legitimacy through imitating canonical centres designates, in our case, novels that, departing from the most revered literary forms of the western canon and reaching the most marginal and lowbrow novelistic subgenres, mimicked formal elements in the attempt of obtaining equally valuable Eastern European renditions. The tendency that had emerged during the 1990s, as the Romanian book market was dominated by translations, has gained even more momentum, and translations continue to represent the most prolific component of the Romanian literary field; however, the poles of symbolic power within the translation market have shifted, as the Romanian cultural production is now under the strong influence of the European book market not only in regard to its own production, but also under the aspect of translations.

A recent example is illustrative of the peripheral position of the Romanian book market, which translated works belonging to other peripheral cultures only after they were successfully validated by core cultures in the West. For example, Scandinavian Noir, the most recent crime fiction subgenre from Scandinavia – a likewise peripheral cultural region which has become, by way of being validated by core cultures, the locus of Western interest, what Mads Rosendahl Thomsen called “a temporary sub-centre”¹³ in 2009 and what Dionýz Ďurišin by 1989 called a “group of a transitory popular direction”¹⁴ –, was predictably translated into Romanian only after the authors belonging to the genre acquired bestseller status in Germany – not least because Germany is the most powerful European book market. The Stieg Larsson case is well-known: after becoming an instant bestseller in 2009 in Germany, his writing attracts renewed global interest for detective fiction and especially for Scandinavian crime fiction, something that, in its turn, leads to more and more authors being translated into Romanian starting with 2011¹⁵. It is only after this initial validation in a core culture such as the German one that peripheries engage in two complementary actions meant to counterbalance a presumed cultural backwardness, but which, in fact, consolidate a form of cultural self-colonization:

1. The immediate translation of Scandinavian Noir authors, accelerated by the imperative of keeping pace with Western literary trends, determines the fact that, in

¹³ See Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature. International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2009, p. 35. “the dominant centers that exercise influence over a long period, both by distributing its authors to other cultures and by adopting others nations’ authors into their culture through translation and canonization, and the literatures whose contributions to world literature can be confined to a relatively short period of time or to a limited number of authors, but which create important temporal sub-centers of attention in the history of world literature”.

¹⁴ Dionýz Ďurišin, *Theory of Interliterary Process*. Translated by Jessie Kocmanová and Zdenek Pistek, Bratislava, Bratislava, Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1989, p. 27.

¹⁵ Ovio Olaru, *Translating Nordic Noir Bestsellers. Towards a Comparative View on German and Romanian Markets*, in Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu and Vlad Pojoga (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania/ Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2018, p. 238.

the absence of specialized translators from languages as exotic as Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, or Icelandic, authors were, at least initially, translated from the language in which they first entered an international readership and gained notoriety, namely German, English, or French. Because of this, these latter languages are the ones that re-establish themselves as markers of literary quality and as literary languages by definition.

2. Within the local book markets, literary formulas that had proven themselves successful in the West are instantly revered, in the sense that emerging authors quickly import themes, motifs, narrative elements, and even entire worldviews from the novels to which they are granted access, conserving, however, a local specific and narrative voice.

The ever-diminishing popularity of writers of literature, doubled by a canon that has more or less remained unchanged after communism, thus strengthening the preconception that the literary world nearly exclusively belongs to the great classics, enabled a radical segmentation of the Romanian book market, wherein certain publishing houses have eventually dedicated themselves exclusively to hosting commercial productions (Nemira and Herg Benet, for instance), while others have taken on the task of publishing contemporary foreign and Romanian literature (Polirom Publishing House), and a third group are keen on promoting well-known, conservative authors whose publication presents no financial risk (Humanitas).

In regard to the appeal the genre poses for Romanian readerships, I argue that it has a double component, somehow independent from the external pressure exerted by European trends in the book industry. The first component consists of a very strong set of Western aspirations shared among the Romanian middle class. The second regards the communist penchant for “serious literature”, so deeply engrained in Romanian culture as to be internalized and acted upon almost unknowingly.

The global cultural strata are an enlarged projection of nearly every nation’s cultural stratification, disposed along the general lines of the combined and uneven development, whereby “capitalist forms and relations exist alongside ‘archaic forms of economic life’ and pre-existing social and class relations”¹⁶, a situation that allows for functional illiteracy, for example, to perfectly coexist with the highest academic performances, oftentimes within the same region or city. Contemporary Romanian readers of Scandinavian Noir belong to the well-educated, culturally open-minded strata, for whom the Scandinavian space can exert at least some degree of fascination, derived from the understanding of cultural cues pertaining to Orientalism: one cannot understand the peculiarity of Lisbeth Salander, the epitome of nonconformism, decorating her newly acquired

¹⁶ WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2015, p. 11.

apartment with IKEA furniture, the distinguishable marker of Swedish middle-class conformity, without oneself being an aspiring member of the middle-class. Moreover, indulging in recreational reading signals class differentiation, since cultural consumption is not stringent in the hierarchy of needs of the average Romanian citizen: given the relatively high cost of books when compared to other, significantly cheaper entertainment alternatives, investing the time and intellectual resources in leisure reading is a clear indicator of middle- to high-income consumers, for whom Scandinavian Noir is as much a reading preference as a status symbol.

In much the same way as Asia and Africa's postcolonial turn has given rise to – in the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah – a “comprador intelligentsia”: “a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery”¹⁷, the post-communist intelligentsia of Eastern European cultures gradually became the embodiment of Western aspirations. Westernized by virtue of education – in the sense of sharing the values of their western counterparts *without* being necessarily trained abroad –, they lack the socio-cultural infrastructure that would allow them to be part of these ‘cosmopolitan circuits’. These Western aspirations were doubled by a firm repudiation, in self-colonizing manner, of everything Balkan/ Eastern European, whose corollary was inevitably the fetishization of the “civilized” West to the detriment of the “primitive”, “provincial”, “corrupt” East¹⁸.

In this sense, the Scandinavian space could be popular in Eastern Europe not because of a fascination with Orientalism, the cultural hallmark of Scandinavia, but rather because post-communist readerships sense that the Nordic countries represent an even better way of fulfilling their aspirations towards a Western standard of living, in much the same way they had idealized Western Europe before they were granted effective access to it. While Westerners dream about the romantic North, Easterners seek in Scandinavia an untainted version of the West. Without going into further details, this fetishization of the West is also the result of an Occidentalizing discourse¹⁹ that has become the mainstream in Romanian post-communist civil society, relying primarily on widely respected conservative “public intellectuals” and whose core values are abstract freedom, Christian morality, medieval Humanism, undiscerning meritocracy, and radical, unnuanced anticommunism. Unsurprisingly, they have been coined “boierii minții” [“the mind

¹⁷ Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 129.

¹⁸ Alexander Kiossev, “The Self-Colonizing Metaphor”, *Atlas of Transformation*, 2011, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>. Accessed November 25, 2020.

¹⁹ Couze Venn, *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity*, London, Sage, 2000.

boyars”]²⁰, a denomination that perfectly summarizes their outdated, but unfortunately still very revered, notions of intellectual aristocracy.

The second consideration regards the prestige literature has enjoyed during communism and which it has continued to enjoy during post-communism as well. Commercial literature – and implicitly also Scandinavian Noir – is a commonly read genre in civilized, prosperous European countries, where habits of cultural consumption are not hindered by the urgency of existential needs, but in Eastern Europe, commercial literature is popular inasmuch as it has the appeal of “serious” literature: lengthy books printed on good quality paper, donning carefully designed, sombre and tasteful cover art. In a sense, much of the appeal of the genre owes to the shallowness of its readers, for whom the books extend their purpose even after having been read, as decorative additions to their libraries.

In stark contrast to the Swedish book market, where crime fiction novels are published at different publishing houses addressing different types of readerships, Romanian renditions of the genre have been generally hosted by visible and affluent publishing houses exclusively: certainly, this owes to the fact that they rank among the few that can afford purchasing translation rights. In Sweden, barely 46 percent of crime fiction novels were published by established publishing houses between 2000 and 2010²¹, while the others were published by smaller, independent publishers. In Romania, the genre was traditionally imbued with the perceived advantages of high-brow literature, in the sense of conferring cultural capital to its consumers but without posing the same difficulties as traditional literary canon: the intricacies of modernist prose, the in-depth descriptions and painstakingly slow narrative pace cultivated by realism or the antiquated mannerism of romanticism. Post-communist cultures, which in the Soviet Union and in Romania alike have displayed a decade-long “literaturecentrism”²², i.e., a climate favouring literature to the detriment of all other forms of cultural production, have therefore allowed for Scandinavian Noir to evolve into a sort of alternative canon, a common platform for the periphery’s growing Western aspirations.

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²⁰ Sorin Adam Matei, *Boierii minții: intelectualii români între grupurile de prestigiu și piața liberă a ideilor* [*The Mind Boyars: Romanian Intellectuals between Status Group and the Free market of Ideas*], București, Compania, 2004.

²¹ Karl Berglund, *Deckarboomen under lupp: Statistiska perspektiv på svensk kriminal litteratur 1977–2010*, Uppsala, Avdelningen för litteratursociologi, Uppsala universitet, 2012, p. 19.

²² Andreea Mironescu, “‘Worlding’ Romanian Literary Studies”, *Philologica Jassyensia*, 14, 2018, 1, pp. 295-299.

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DETECTIVE FICTION IN THE EAST

(Abstract)

This study aims to shed light on some of the reasons behind the relative undersupply of crime fiction during communism. The article departs from the commercial nature of crime fiction and exposes the way in which its proliferation corresponded, in Western Europe, to the exponential increase in literacy at the end of the 19th century. Further on, the text addresses the mechanisms that dominated the Romanian publishing industry during the communist regime and how the paternalistic control exerted by the state apparatus virtually eliminated both translated crime fiction, as well as local renditions of foreign plots, whose ideological background were deemed incompatible to socialist society. Lastly, the present study focuses on post-communist evolutions in the book market, especially with respect to popular literature, whose import to East and Central-European countries reveals crucial contemporary cultural hierarchies.

Keywords: Scandinavian Noir, crime fiction, Eastern Europe, Romanian book market, (post)communism.

ROMANUL POLIȚIST. VARIAȚIUNI EST-EUROPENE
(*Rezumat*)

Acest studiu urmărește să explice producția aparent modestă de literatură polițistă din timpul perioadei comuniste. Articolul pornește de la o serie de argumente privind natura comercială a ficțiunii polițiste și dezvăluie cum proliferarea acestui gen a corespuns, în Europa de Vest a sfârșitului de secol XIX, unei creșteri exponențiale a gradului de alfabetizare al populației, alfabetizare cu care s-a aflat în constantă corelație. Un alt aspect discutat vizează mecanismele dominante ale pieței de carte românești din timpul regimului comunist și maniera în care controlul politic a împiedicat atât traducerea literaturii polițiste vestice, cât și emergența unei tradiții detectivistice clasice după model vestic plasate în imediata contemporaneitate, de vreme ce fondul ideologic al literaturii polițiste era considerat incompatibil cu societatea socialistă. Nu în ultimul rând, articolul urmărește mutația postcomunistă a pieței de carte și cu precădere în ceea ce privește literatura de consum, al cărei import în țările fostului bloc comunist dezvăluie o serie de ierarhii culturale cruciale pentru înțelegerea dezechilibrelor simbolice dintre centru și periferie.

Cuvinte-cheie: Scandinavian Noir, roman polițist, Europa de Est, piața de carte din România, (post)comunism.

POPULAR GENRES: SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, DETECTIVE NOVEL, THRILLER¹

Science Fiction

In Romania, the Science Fiction genre is marked by the realist socialist aesthetic of the 1950s. Prior to 1948, most of the local attempts at exploring this genre had been pretty inconsistent. Alongside several pioneering works of the 19th century, only Victor Anestin's *În anul 4000 sau O călătorie la Venus* [*In the Year 4000. A Journey to Venus*] (1899), *Un Român în lună* [*A Romanian on the Moon*] (1914), by Henri Stahl, or *Orașele scufundate* [*The Sunken Cities*] (1937) by F. Aderca, are worth mentioning. These are rather isolated works that fail to lay the foundations for a Romanian rendition of the genre. The socialist regime, as well as its Marxist underpinning, were inspired by a secular and scientific worldview, focusing their attention on the exact sciences, e.g., physics, astronomy, chemistry, and biology, precisely those usually lying at the core of Science Fiction literature. Having been introduced deliberately and enjoying institutional lobby, being hosted by a dedicated and highly popular publication during that time, "Colecția 'Povestiri științifico-fantastice'" (CPSF) ["The 'Science Fiction Stories' Collection"], Science Fiction literature was one of the most efficient channels through which scientific content and ideology was disseminated during the 1950s.

Writers such as I.M. Ștefan (1922–1992) and Radu Nor (1921–2006), who were behind the first Science Fiction novel in communist Romania, *Drum printre aștri* [*Journey among the Stars*] (1954), an adventure novel built on realist socialist conventions, were among the most prominent authors of that time. *Drum printre aștri* draws on Soviet inspiration to become an illustration of *space opera*: the novel depicts the adventures of two curious astronauts with an ambition to chart the galaxy. A Romanian team is boarded on an asteroid, which it intersects with help from a custom designed and engineered Romanian rocket; on the asteroid, the team circumnavigates the solar system for the duration of one year, gathering information and facing various threats. Encyclopaedic information is constantly substantiated by scientific sources (Soviet scientists being the main reference in this regard), but also by the period's futuristic projections: the planet of Venus hosts boiling hot geysers, luxurious vegetation, and freakishly large animals (an

¹ Preliminary versions of this article were published under the titles "Literatura polițistă" ["Detective Literature"] and "Literatura SF" ["Science Fiction Literature"] in Eugen Simion (ed.), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* [*General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*], second edition, vol. IV (H-L), București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017, pp. 777-781, 781-786.

aggressive lizard standing 15 meters tall is promptly rendered harmless with a “ray gun”).

The 1960s led to the genre’s relative emancipation from ideological demands, in the sense of replacing explicit propaganda with a less frigid “humanism”, through authors who had “escaped” the 1950s, albeit not without making compromises: Vladimir Colin, Adrian Rogoz (important figure in the genre, but also a reputable writer in his own right nonetheless), Sergiu Fărcășan, or Camil Baci. Belonging to the same generation, but proving his abilities as a Science Fiction writer only later in life and quite surprisingly for his contemporaries, Ov. S. Crohmăniceanu will author what will become two future landmarks of the genre and probably the most skilfully devised speculative works prior to 1990: *Istorii insolite* [*Extraordinary Stories*] (1980) and *Alte istorii insolite* [*Other Extraordinary Stories*] (1986).

During the 1970s, the genre takes a blow, as the CPSF collection is discontinued, but it will still enjoy support especially through the Albatros Publishing House, dedicated to a young audience, and particularly through the Fantastic Club collection (which hosts translated classics such as H. G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ray Bradbury, Gérard Klein, Stanisław Lem, among others, as well as contemporary Romanian authors – from Horia Aramă and Vladimir Colin to Mihail Grănescu and Alexandru Ungureanu). However, a coherent generation takes shape through contributions by Gheorghe Săsărman, the author of the Borgesian novel *Cuadratura cercului. Fals tratat de urbogonie* [*The Circle’s Quadrature. False Treaty in Urbogony*] (1975), by those of Horia Aramă, Mircea Oprea, but also by the Science Fiction duo consisting of George Anania (1941–2013) and Romulus Bărbulescu (1925–2010).

The truly professional period of the genre unfolds during the 1980s, when a so-called New Wave emerges on the Romanian Science Fiction scene, anticipated by Mihail Grănescu (1951–2014), whose debut novel, *Aporisticon*, is published in 1981, and by other names such as Cristian Tudor Popescu, Alexandru Ungureanu, Rodica Bretin, Ovidiu Bufnilă, and Silviu Genescu. Several of them will make their debut only after the 1989 regime change. The 1980s constituted a hotbed for the formation of strongly knit local fanbases and communities of writers as well, publishing numerous fanzines and participating in literary debates, discreetly passing around photocopies of Western works or illicit translations made by legendary literary translators within the fandom – such as Ion Doru Brana or Mihai-Dan Pavelescu – of works by Frank Herbert or William Gibson. 1982 sees the publication of the *Alamanahul Anticipația* [*Anticipation Literary Almanac*], reuniting Romanian and translated authors alike and having an initial print run of 100.000 copies. Many of the authors active during the 1980s possessed a background in science and had degrees in engineering; they were clearly more knowledgeable in technical fields as their dilettante predecessors and could more easily approach the more sophisticated concepts pertaining to “Hard Science Fiction”.

After the regime change, a series of complementary processes begin to take place. On the one hand, there is a clear boom in the number of translated Science Fiction titles, the most consistent of which owes to the “Nautilus” collection, hosted by Nemira Publishing House. On the other hand, Romanian Science Fiction literature undergoes a fatal retrenchment and is eventually declared dead; as Cristian Tudor Popescu claimed, Romanian Science Fiction

...possessed consistence inasmuch as it could be a way in which young people, and not only them, could circumvent and evade the political situation prior to 1989. It was typical of an era. That era is now gone. When he met his demise, Ceaușescu took along with him, among many other things, the Romanian Science Fiction as well².

This was, however, an exaggerated claim. Albeit translations were quantitatively more consistent (especially from the Anglo-Saxon classic authors) than the production of local Science Fiction, the genre underwent a visible revival. The commencement of 1990s Science Fiction is marked by the publication of *Jurnalul SF* [*The SF Journal*] (where Popescu’s claims are also contested), which hosts the emergence of a new tendency in the Romanian sci-fi community, built chiefly on William Gibson’s cyberpunk works. The backdrop of these new works is mainly international or postnational, but not exclusively so. Romania is featured as independent country by several authors: Liviu Radu, George Lazăr, Marian Truță, Doru Stoica, Cristian M. Teodorescu, and others.

Another self-deprecating preconception of Romanian Science Fiction is hereby set aside; according to Cristian Tudor Popescu, one of its “deeply rooted and defining contradictions was the impossibility of writing a ground-breaking piece about an astronaut named Vasile – ‘the astronaut Vasile’ could inspire nothing but ridicule”³. This “impossibility” had been manifest chiefly during the 1980s, finding expression in a joke about “the Slobozia Spaceport”, circulated among Science Fiction fans during the 1980s – a reaction to the discontinuation of Romania’s modernization projects as a result of Ceaușescu’s austerity measures, but also to the period’s cultural protochronist backwardness and kitsch nationalism – and referring, in Marxist terms, to the considerable difference between the country’s core and its superstructure (between how Romania really presented itself and the manner in which Science Fiction writers were pressured to image it). During the 1950s and 1970s, Romanian authors, like nearly all the pioneers of a certain field, had gone through an idealist phase, wherein they had imaged the future(s) of Romania in ways which seem ridiculously naïve to a contemporary observer.

However, unlike their predecessors, the writers of the 1980s were much more cynical, readily ridiculing scenarios in which “Romania conquers the Cosmos”. This helps explain the joke with the “Slobozia Spaceport”, which projected *Star*

² Cristian Tudor Popescu, “Ceaușescu a luat în mormânt și SF-ul românesc” [“Ceaușescu Took the Romanian Science Fiction Along to the Grave”]. Interview by Viorel Ilișoi, *Timpul*, 1994, 1 (republished in *Jurnalul SF*, 1994, 61, p. 15).

³ Cristian Tudor Popescu, “Literatura zilei” [“Literature of Today”], *România literară*, 1999, 31, p. 10.

Wars levels of technological progress unto Slobozia, a small town in the middle of the Bărăgan Plain. The most renowned author making use of these farcical references during the 1980s was Ioan Groșan; in his *Epopoea spațială 2084* [2084, *A Space Odyssey*] and in his *Planeta Mediocrilor* [*Planet of the Undistinguished*], he mocked most of the clichés prevalent on the socialist Science Fiction scene – unsurprisingly, these works could only be published in print after 1989, having been published previously in the *Știință și tehnică* [*Science and Engineering*] magazine, under Ioan Albescu's approval (as he was editor for the *Almanahul Anticipația*).

Throughout the 1990s, however, as Romanian culture distanced itself from the ostentatious nationalism in which it had indulged before and adopted postmodern technological imagery, the national specificity became yet again an acceptable content to employ in Romanian Science Fiction, this time unironically, starting with the edited volume *Motocentauri pe acoperișul lumii* [*Moto-centaurs on the Roof of the World*] (1995), which conceives an alternative history in which the Thracian Empire evolved from Burebista's centralized state to Bishop Ring colonies surrounding Earth during the 23rd century. Although the writers active during the 1990s (Sebastian A. Corn, Dănuț Ivănescu, Ona Frantz, Florin Pîtea, Liviu Radu, Michael Haulică, Don Simon, Costi Gurgu, and others) are not entirely uninfluenced by the general aesthetic tendencies of the 1980s (for which textual and stylistic experiments alongside narrative fragmentation were key), they evolve closer to the Western conception of postmodernism through their penchant for Anglo-Saxon popular literature, through a more technologically aware mindset, and through a vaster philosophical outreach than their immediate predecessors, who employed realism in attempting – and also believing that they were successful in their undertaking – to construct a postmodernist discourse in works about commuters which, albeit stylistically valuable, lacked in conceptual consistence.

In fact, Romanian Science Fiction literature between 1990 and 2010 (for which the 1980s laid the foundations) is unique in that does not consolidate a genuine popular culture, although it employs its artefacts. What it clearly lacks is a real market demand, which the loyal fanbase cannot substitute on its own. Romanian Science Fiction is rather a literary avantgarde through which new forms of literary production are assimilated into Romanian culture, starting with the computers and operating systems featured in Cristian Tudor Popescu's works from the 1980s and all the way to the complex cyber-capitalist networks imagined by Sebastian A. Corn in his *Adrenergic!* during the 1990s; in fact, the genre had possessed a pioneering role in the dissemination of technological trivia – albeit in a dominantly primitive literary form – since the 1950s and 1960s, which abounded in texts featuring spaceships and robots. The cultural importance of this literary production was implicitly acknowledged by Mircea Cărtărescu in his 2015 *Solenoid*, a tribute he pays to Science Fiction by making use of its narrative conventions (hi-tech gizmos and devices, global conspiracies with apocalyptic effects, etc.) and

combining them with metatextual autobiographical elements such as in his *Orbitor* [*Blinding*] trilogy.

An American author, Norman Spinrad, when given the chance of writing a postface to a collected edition of Romanian short stories, remarked – politely exaggerating, perhaps – that he can sense “no resemblance to American Science Fiction whatsoever” and that the Romanian texts are unique “at every level, from the surrealist narrative of the stories to the intense magic realism of their imagery”; “what you are about to read”, he claimed, “is closer to the spirit of Eugen Ionesco than of that of Heinlein or E.E. Smith”⁴. Spinrad’s observations, besides identifying in surrealism a local particularity, seemed to point towards another fact as well – the dissimilarity of Romanian Science Fiction with prevalent Western formulas. Equating commercial literature with “paraliterary” forms such as Science Fiction is nonetheless a penchant of Western culture and a Western “form”, which cannot find solid ground in post-1989 liberalized Romania, however, on account of the country lacking a sufficiently large book market. On the other hand, flying under the radar of mainstream culture and subsequently failing to be assimilated into its ranks, particularly by being ignored by literary criticism, Romanian Science Fiction could not exert a proper influence on the literary avantgarde, although it was later assimilated into the works of an established author such as Mircea Cărtărescu. The case study authored by the Spanish essayist and literary translator Mariano Martín Rodríguez regarding the assimilation of Science Fiction literature in the Romanian literary history books during postcommunism advanced the following conclusions:

The official contempt displayed by the central Romanian literary institutions towards Science Fiction as genre, as seen in the most prominent literary histories, seems not only incomprehensible, but is also detrimental. How can Romanian literary historiography or even the canon be renewed without considering the contributions of the genre, which has demonstrated its viability and universalist potential time and time again, through its narrative production, having enjoyed numerous translations into other languages, as well as through its critical output? Its banishment from the Romanian literary canon is not only untimely, given that we are still living in postmodernity, but also unacceptable under an historical and scientific point of view, considering its obvious value⁵.

The previous historical overview is an illustration of Fredric Jameson–Franco Moretti “law” regarding the manner in which peripheric cultures fuse together a

⁴ Norman Spinrad, “Postfață” [“Afterword”], in *Antologia science-fiction Nemira '94* [*The 1994 Nemira Science Fiction Anthology*]. Selected by Romulus Bărbulescu and George Anania. With a foreword by N. Lee Wood, București, Nemira, 1994, pp. 208-209.

⁵ Mariano Martín Rodríguez, “Cine dictează canonul? Spirit conservator și inovație în istoriografia literară românească din primul deceniu al secolului al XXI-lea. Cazul literaturii științifico-fantastice” [“Who Dictates the Canon? Conservative Spirit and Innovation in Romanian Literary Historiography during the First Decade of the 21st Century. The Case of Science Fiction Literature”], *Viața românească*, 2012, 7-8, pp. 135-136.

Western form and a local content⁶. The link between commercial literature and “paraliterature” such as Science Fiction remains a Western “form”, which cannot be yet assimilated by Romanian culture in the absence of a sufficiently large book market.

Fantasy

This bears a striking similarity to the emergence of Romanian fantasy. The genre’s Romanian pioneer and accidental forerunner is Vladimir Colin (1921–1991). *Legendele țării lui Vam* [*Legends of Vamland*] (1961), *Divertisment pentru vrăjitoare* [*Entertainment for Witches*] (a short novel included in the 1971 book *Capcanele timpului* [*Time Traps*]), a combination of *sword & sorcery* elements and Gérard Klein’s style in *Seniorii războiului* [*The Overlords of War*]), or *Grifonul lui Ulise* [*Ulysses’ Gryphon*] (1976) are just a few of the titles that established Colin as the genre’s Romanian founder and the first ever to have made use of local particularities. Another representative author is Iordan Chimet (1924–2006), through his 1970 *Închide ochii și vei vedea Orașul* [*Close Your Eyes and You Will See the City*]. For a long time, however, Romania had lacked a demand for literary fantasy. The 1975 translation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *O poveste cu un hobbit* [*The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*] by the Ion Creangă Publishing House (made by Catinca Ralea, who had converted the fantastical Nordic races to Romanian ones, therefore virtually cancelling their specificity), was to no avail. Even during the 1990s boom in the book market, the “Nautilus” collection registered but few fantasy titles – foremost, several novels by Abraham Merritt.

It is only during the early 2000s, following the success of the *Harry Potter* adaptations of J.K. Rowling’s books and *The Lord of the Rings*, the film based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s books, which had meanwhile been translated into Romanian as well, that the national book market began to focus its attention on this genre, now too popular to be ignored. Radu Ciubotea’s 2005 *Apărătorii* [*The Defenders*] is a historical novel with fantasy undertones, hailed as “the first Romanian fantasy”, spanning more than 1.000 pages, is disinhibited in its choice of narrative content, as it dares to engage Stephen the Great and a group of ninja warriors within the same fictional decorum. Polirom Publishing House unknowingly publishes two landmarks of the genre, simultaneously two masterpieces of postcommunist Romanian literature: Radu Pavel Gheo’s *Fairia* [*Fairia – A Land Faraway*] (2004) and Răzvan Rădulescu’s *Teodosie cel Mic* [*Theodosius the Small*] (2006). *Fairia* represents the ironic – and at times even satirical – fusion of *space opera*, the popular fairy tale, and the serialized fantasy, possessing, however, a melodramatic

⁶ Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”, in *Distant Reading*, London – New York, Verso, 2013, p. 50: “[I]n cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a Western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials”.

conclusion, and reflecting, much like Michael Ende's Bastian in *The Neverending Story*, on the role of the Story and the alienation to which one succumbs once it is over. Other two landmarks of the genre are authored by Sebastian A. Corn. In *Imperiul marelui Graal* [*The Empire of the Great Grail*] (2004), a *heroic fantasy* set in a mixed and uncertain timeline, technology is laboriously advanced, and the reality – or, better yet, the realities – constructed by the narrative is complex and paradoxical, an existential slate unto which several technological endeavours from different timelines simultaneously and haphazardly rewrite the text. *Vindecătorul* [*The Healer*] (2008) is set during prehistoric times and follows the adventures of Krog, a civilizing hero whose journey around the Earth lasts – by his own reference system – for two years, but actually spans, not unlike the popular fairy tale, over the course of “a youth without youth and a life without death”, i.e. over an entire lifespan (children grow up to become warriors during his leave; as he returns, the woman he had been in love with had grown old).

Tritonic Publishing House, through the fiction.ro collection, coordinated by Michael Haulică, attempted to be more proactive in promoting Romanian fantasy writers. It is Tritonic that hosts Costi Gurcu's (b. 1969) *Rețetarium* [*RecipeArium*] (2006), a masterpiece of Romanian fantasy. Written in the early 1990s, yet without being able to find a publishing house willing to publish it (a common occurrence during the precarious circumstances of the book market of that time), the novel represents a very original mixture of fantasy and *New Weird*, complemented by horror undertones, and constructs, by making use of lush descriptions of culinary delights, a cruel, nonhuman, baroque world hosted by an absolutist Leviathan. Culinary art dictates all socio-political links, as well as all the moral hierarchies of this Rabelaisian world with Science Fiction underpinnings.

Liviu Radu would inaugurate a Romanian fantasy series with his 2007 *Waldemar* and follow through with *Blocul căș* [*The Tilted Block*] (2008), *O după-amiază cu bere și zâne* [*An Afternoon with Beer and Fairies*] (2009), and *Vânzoleli nocturne* [*Nocturnal Hassles*] (2012) as subsequent instalments. A mixture of *heroic* and *comic fantasy* following the style of Roger Zelazny in his *Amber* series, *Waldemar* makes use of the specifically Romanian and international mythology of the “iele” – faeries bearing semblance to nymphs, dryads, and naiads – and of the “pricolici” – a mixture of vampires and werewolves in Romanian imaginary –, contriving otherworldly battles, including some that take place against the familiar backdrop of Bucharest. Liviu Radu will eventually author a new series, this time hosted by Nemira Publishing House, containing elements of *light fantasy*; its first instalment, *Armata moliilor* [*Moth Army*] (2012), will be continued through *La galop prin piramidă* [*Gallop through the Pyramid*] (2013) and *Înfruntarea nemuritorilor* [*The Clash of the Immortals*] (2014). This new series is a combination between *One Thousand and One Nights* and George R.R. Martin's 1986 *Tuf Voyaging*.

Recently, through the *Harap Alb continuă* [*Harap Alb Continues*] comic book series, a sequel of Ion Creangă's well-known story, inspired by Tolkien, Marian

Coman has attempted to test whether or not a fantasy comic book series could be successful on the Romanian book market. One of the series' spin-offs is Marian Coman's novel *Haiganu. Fluviul Șoaptelor* [*Haiganu. The River of Whispers*] (2015), followed by a second instalment, *Haiganu. Furia oarbă* [*Haiganu. Blind Rage*] (2017).

Broadly speaking, Romanian fantasy follows the same trajectory as the Science Fiction genre (both being a global form seeking out a local background in order to shine brighter – the difference being that the latter is much more pronouncedly enriched with Romanian cultural particularities), but they face a common impediment: the absence of a sufficiently mature book market that would generate the necessary momentum for the genres to become truly popular.

Detective Novel

In Romania, crime fiction is an imported form that gradually adapts to an array of local institutions on their path towards modernization. The beginnings of the genre were still under the strong influence of the sensationalist French paraliterature, chiefly Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* (1843). This helps explain why the relatively modest literary output of 19th century Romania enabled the publication of novels bearing titles such as *Mistere Bucureștilor* [*The Mysteries of Bucharest*] by G. Baronzi (1862), *Misterele din București* [*The Mysteries from Bucharest*] (1862), by Ioan M. Bujoreanu, *Condamnata* [*The Condemned*] (1868), by Emanoil Arghiropol, *Crima din Calea Moșilor* [*The Crime from Moșilor Avenue*] (1887; the first Romanian attempt at a spy novel), by Teochar Alexi, *Otrăvitoarea din Giurgiu* [*The Poisoning Woman from Giurgiu*] (1884), a "crime novel" by Panait Macri, *Din memoriile unui procuror* [*From the Recollections of a Prosecutor*] (1888), by N. Rădulescu Niger, as well as *Dramele Veneției sau pumnalul răzbunător* [*The Tragedies in Venice or the Vengeful Dagger*] (1889) and *Clotilda sau crimele unei femei* [*Clotilde, or the Murders of a Woman*] (1891), by Alexandru I. Alexandrescu.

With the exception of Baronzi and Bujoreanu, the literary quality of these works is mediocre, as they were nothing but shoddy imitations of French works. At blame is not only the absence of a cultural system capable of inspiring decent literary performance, but also that of modern police institutions that could conduct investigations according to a rational, objective, and, most importantly, formalized set of laws. During that time, the police force enjoys a rather bad reputation, famously summarized by I.L. Caragiale in his character Pristanda, the embodiment of corruption and servitude towards the political *status quo*. On the other hand, French and British crime fiction had emerged precisely as a result of the formation of coherent penal systems. The first French crime fiction novel, *O afacere tenebroasă* [*A Shady Business*] (1841), is, in equal measure, the creation of Balzac and that of Vidocq, the ex-criminal who was to become the founder, under

Napoleon, of Sûreté Nationale [National Security], or that of Fouché, the founder of the Secret Police during the French Consulate.

As regards the manner in which these bourgeois institutions were mirrored in the works, their particular traits determined the traits of each corresponding literature. Luc Boltanski, for instance, in his comparative analysis of French and British detective fiction, illustrated the consequences of the two nations' differences: whereas in France, the task force could don civil attire and therefore use disguise, the English policemen were required to wear the official uniform. Therefore, the French police officers enjoy a good public image in French crime fiction, whereas in England, the Scotland Yard is reduced to the function of mere aide for the private detective Sherlock Holmes⁷. In conclusion, although Romania imports a foreign form (the detective fiction novel in its primitive form as mystery novel), the Romanian penal system still lacks the coherence that would allow it to find itself reflected in literary production.

After this initial pioneering period, crime fiction nonetheless fails to impose itself on the Romanian literary scene in the interwar period as well. It decisively loses in favour of other forms of popular, commercial literature; during this period, it is rather the romanticised biographies and sentimental-sensationalist novels that are popular and in demand, whereas Romanian-language detective novels fall behind, not least on account of the fact that there are numerous publishing houses laboriously translating foreign detective fiction already. However, there are several prominent authors who seem not to hold detective fiction in the same contempt as their contemporaries: Mateiu Caragiale with his novella *Remember* (1924) and with his unfinished novel *Sub pecetea tainei* [*Obscured by Mysteries*], Victor Eftimiu with his *Kimonoul înstelat* [*Starry Kimono*] (1932), Mihail Sadoveanu with *Baltagul* [*The Axe*] (1930) and *Ostrovul lupilor* [*The Island of Wolves*] (1941), and Liviu Rebreanu with *Amândoi* [*Both*] (1940).

The Golden Era of Romanian crime fiction will be the communist period, during which the state will deliberately cultivate the genre because of obvious reasons: supporting popular literature can vouchsafe an efficient dissemination of ideology. The foreign form is strong, the local background – set within communism's confines – is also robust. Crime fiction proves to serve a useful purpose for the regime: it cultivates positive representations of policemen and of Securitate officers, depicting them as heroes; it encourages denouncement practices and xenophobia, or at least mistrust towards foreign citizens; it rewrites history from the standpoint of the dominant ideology (for example, the way in which Haralamb Zincă presents the events from August 23rd 1944); it contrives a myth about Romania possessing a decisive superiority in every field, capable of churning out one invention after the other, making it the target of global envy. Well established in the editorial programs of national publishing houses and lacking genuine competition from translated literature (although the western classics of the

⁷ See Luc Boltanski, *Énigmes et complots*, Paris, Gallimard, 2012.

genre had already been translated during the 1950s: Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie), local crime fiction (jokingly dubbed “the milițier”, from the French denomination of “policier”, a play derived from the word used for the police force during communism, “Miliția”) enjoys considerable print runs. Several specialised collections activate simultaneously and sometimes promote translated titles as well: the “Cutezătorii” collection at the Tineretului Publishing House, the “Aventura” collection at Albatros Publishing House, “Scorpionul” at Dacia Publishing House, “Sfinx” at the Military Publishing House, “Fantomas” at the Junimea Publishing House, or the “Delfin” collection at the Meridiane Publishing House. As regards the supply of foreign titles in translation, there was only one collection publishing international crime fiction during this time, the “Enigma” collection at Univers Publishing House; many of the titles, however, are from the USSR, Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia, or Poland. The original crime fiction subgenre of communist Romania (but not only from Romania, but also from China⁸, the USSR, Bulgaria⁹, and the entire Eastern Bloc) consists of the depiction of battles conducted by communist intelligence agencies against hostile agents pursuing to overturn communism and rehabilitate the former regime.

These villains belong to two distinct groups: they can either be remnants of the former system (landowners sabotaging collectivization, members of the Iron Guard who have fled to the mountains to become resistance fighters, former industrialists, or aristocrats) or originate outside of it (chiefly Germans who had previously fought for the Nazis and became capitalist spies in the aftermath of the war, but one can also encounter British or American spies as well). The perpetrators of the former regime are invariably treated with suspicion, regardless of whether or not they had previously been landowners or industrialists. For the odds to turn against a character in a Romanian crime fiction novel, it suffices that he lives in a large, old house or belongs to a so-called distinguished family. The genre was thus conceived as to focus the attention and suspicion of its readerships towards the potentially dangerous elements of society.

Another, more benign category of villains starting to emerge in Romanian crime fiction novels after the first two communist decades is that of the small businessmen, whose existence the regime had allowed in the latter half of the 1960s, and who have been collectively coined “mandatari”. In numerous novels, small restaurant owners, as well as those running guest houses are cast as antagonists. By much the same token, professions with a varying degree of regularization, such as actors or singers, are often assigned roles as villains. The heroes are selected, on the one hand, from the ranks of Security or police officers

⁸ Wei Yan, “Sherlock Holmes Came to China: Detective Fiction, Cultural Meditations, and Chinese Modernity”, in Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, Theo D’Haen (eds.), *Crime Fiction as World Literature*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 254.

⁹ Mihaela P. Harper, “‘In Agatha Christies Footsteps’: *The Cursed Goblet* and Contemporary Bulgarian Crime Fiction”, in Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, Theo D’Haen (eds.), *Crime Fiction as World Literature*, p. 176.

(from the judicial or economic department, but also from the traffic police department). Gradually, as the public image of the Security officer worsens and he becomes a real-life villain, some of the authors will face the difficulty of casting such characters, who cannot be depicted as anything but heroic. For instance: Mircea Vigu, the hero of Nicolae Mărgescu's novels, is featured as a Securitate officer in *A treia noapte fără lună* [*The Third Moonless Night*] (1955) and *The Bătălia nevăzută* [*Unseen Battle*] (1958), the first two books in which he features, where he initially confronts the illegal mountain resistance and then an evil network manoeuvred by Western powers seeking to obtain the plans to radioactive ore deposits; throughout the following novels in the series, however, the hero changes his identity and becomes a more neutral officer of the Judicial Police.

There are also alternatives for the role of the detective. Consequently, George Arion will cast a journalist as hero, whereas Vlad Muşatescu casts a writer. Other emblematic heroes are oftentimes teachers and professors: either researchers in STEM fields (chemistry, physics) making revolutionary discoveries which immediately find an application in industrial plants and factories in order to conserve communism's technological upper hand; archaeology professors, conducting field research in the Romanian mountains and discovering all sorts of Dacian treasures representing "Our gift and the gift of our forefathers for the Dacians who will come to see the light of day beyond the walls of warrior fortresses"¹⁰. These two basic types of teachers¹¹ are illustrative of the regime's objections and wishful projections: shaping a technocratic elite capable of ensuring the regime's self-sufficiency by putting an end to technological imports from the West and which actively participates in the effort of preserving the dominant communist ideology. Of course, all these professors bear rather an ambiguous role, as they can always prove to be deceitful traitors. For instance, in Nicolae Mărgescu's 1979 *Reversul Medaliei* [*Flipping the Coin*], we encounter Mihnea Gelep, one of Romania's top cyberneticians, but also the offspring of an old boyar family – which allows for staging another ideological conflict, the class struggle; the antihero sells Romanian technological secrets abroad, then falls from grace by fleeing to Italy and to the United States, and eventually becomes member of a criminal occult with international ramifications. Understandably, the Secret Police is crucial in its role of safeguarding all these precious secrets and for averting these catastrophes. Precisely because of its role as protector, the Secret Police is very well integrated into communist detective fiction; reading these novels (published at the height of the communist regime, *nota bene*), one can become aware of how the

¹⁰ Gabriel Iuga, *Comoara regilor daci* [*The Treasure Trove of Dacian Kings*], Bucureşti, Editura Tineretului, 1969.

¹¹ The most common triad consists of an old professor, his daughter, and the professor's young apprentice/assistant teacher. Speaking of women's emancipation, the daughter is usually cast either as romantic interest or as domestic aide: she helps her father in his academic work and/or falls in love with his assistant. The daughter's role is to illustrate the transfer of the humanist-communist legacy (abstract as any other intellectual capital) from the older to the younger generation.

officers violate private correspondence or disguise themselves (both these illicit actions pursue the greater good), claiming, for instance, to be engineers when traveling abroad, and so on. Other representative authors are Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu, Theodor Constantin, Horia Tecuceanu, Chiril Tricolici, and others.

As opposed to Science Fiction, which had been considerably more solid as a genre between 1948 and 1989 and had survived the regime change, the detective novel underwent a complete and utter dissolution after 1989. This owes not only to the massive wave of translations crushing any attempt made by Romanian authors to keep the genre alive, but also to the fact that, whereas Science Fiction was bound to a background that could eschew any socio-ideological determinations, detective fiction was much too reliant on its characters, the police and State Security officers – some of the regime's most hated agents.

Among the few authors who made the object of postcommunist reprints are preponderantly those whose detectives were journalists (such as George Arion) or whose heroes were, in fact, antiheroes (Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu); even these two, however, reedited their works themselves in order to survive. There are, indeed, several exceptions, starting with Pavel Coruț, a former intelligence officer. He makes his debut with the 1992 novel *Quinta spartă* [*Broken Quintet*] (1992), the first instalment of a series consisting of more than 100 volumes and a work that, according to its author, sold “more than 310.000 copies” alone. His novels combine the prevalent tropes of spy literature with the idiosyncrasies of Science Fiction, culminating in a series of outlandish conspiracy theories involving a fictional Romanian intelligence agency dubbed “The Octagon”. Another prominent author is Eugen Ovidiu Chirovici, whose books stage the impression of being, in fact, translations of Western works. These clones of Western paraliterary works illustrate not only Chirovici's versatility as writer, but also an attempt of the Romanian literary field to overcome the unreasonably large influence of translations from Anglo-Saxon sources, as well as the regrettable position of a literary field so narrow so as not to allow for the existence of “commercial literature” as marketable alternative to high-brow literary production, so that the former eventually becomes a mere succession of metaliterary experiments. In fact, following the popularity of postmodern theory during the 1980s, detective literature, alongside the entirety of commercial literature, undergoes a rehabilitation within *mainstream* literature and metaliterature, finding itself ranked high in the new hierarchy of literary genres attempting to bridge the ancient gap between low-brow and high-brow culture.

During communism, beyond the relatively moderate interest literary critics such as Mircea Iorgulescu, Voicu Bugariu, or Dan Culcer displayed towards the genre, certain elements of crime fiction have imbued “serious” literature as well, in novels such as Nicolae Breban's *Animale bolnave* [*Sick Animals*] or Marin Preda's *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* [*The Most Beloved of Earthlings*], but also in poetry: Mircea Ivănescu's 1973 poetry collection presents itself as a detective novel. Starting with the 1960s, the “false ‘policier’” emerges under the influence of

the Nouveau Roman in making use of police investigative methods – for instance, Alain Robbe-Grillet in his 1953 *The Erasers* or his 1959 *In the Labyrinth* – as pretext for narrative experiments and formal renewals. This sort of narrative tendencies become customary for the prose writers of the 1980s and for those following in their footsteps (Mircea Cărtărescu, Ion Manolescu, Caius Dobrescu, and others). Therefore, although Romanian crime fiction ceases to be in demand after 1989, it is granted a place in *mainstream* literature and literary theory.

However, a relative revival of crime fiction as commercial genre is underway, especially through the efforts of Tritonic Publishing House, led by Bogdan Hrib, himself a reputed author within the genre; the new works signed by Daniel Timariu, Teodora Matei, Lucian Dragoș Bogdan, Petru Berteanu, Lucia Verona, Irina Munteanu, and others try to breathe new life into the genre and imbue it with the Romanian postcommunist social structure.

Thriller

Addressing the “thriller” separately is, perhaps, debatable, as the label can widen to include both Science Fiction novels and crime fiction, spy novels, erotic novels, and so on. The unique particularity of the genre is its inherent rhythm, its quality as *page-turner* designed for eager, impatient consumption. Precisely because it does not rely on themes that are recognizable only for a limited fanbase, as it is the case with the detective or Science Fiction novel, but exclusively on its quality as pure entertainment, the thriller is more reliant on a cohesive and well-structured book market. Up until 1990, this market was supplied by authors of spy novels such as Haralamb Zincă, Horia Tecuceanu, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu, Chiril Tricolici, alongside others, whose dominance was ensured by the book industry’s capacity to render any sort of competition against Western thriller authors harmless by limiting the latter’s import via translation. However, the postcommunist period saw an upsurge in the number of translations, which more or less crushed any chance of surviving on the book market for all the aforementioned authors, with the exception of Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu.

The most prominent thriller author after 1989 is Pavel Coruț (b. 1949). His novels are a combination between the prevalent tropes of the spy novel and Science Fiction, generously garnished with conspiracy theories involving the Romanian Secret Police and its postcommunist renditions (rather those fictionalized under the name of the Octagon, and not the contemporary Romanian Intelligence Service, an institution of which the author thinks rather badly¹²). Whereas the first novels of the series seem to cultivate realist conventions (albeit the Romanian superspy Petre Varain, Coruț’s hero, yields unreasonable parapsychological powers), in later

¹² Coruț imagines the Octagon as a Romanian intelligence agency different both from the State Security/ Directorate for Foreign Intelligence and from the Romanian Intelligence Service/ Foreign Intelligence Service.

instalments, the Octagon will take the form of a mighty combatant in a galactic conflict in which Romania will unsurprisingly embody the forces of good. The shift from a planetary-scale to a galactic-scale conspiracy is best illustrated through the expansion in meaning suffered by the term “bubuli”, through which Coruț designates the forces of evil. In *Quinta spartă*, “bubuli = scorpions = Zionists”, respecting the antisemitic conspiracy theories perpetuated in the ranks of the former Securitate and reinforced by the ever-prevalent paranoia about a presumed global Judaic economic domination. In later instalments, however, the series will go beyond this simple equation, transforming the “bubuli” into global instances of anti-Romanian feeling, therefore embodiments of evil. The evolution can also be the result of the author exhausting the myriad of sensational “findings” regarding the 1989 Romanian Revolution, which sit at the core of the first several novels, and attempting to cover new and unexplored contents for the enactment of dramatic events. The typical pattern followed by his novels implies a first sequence, which falls into the convention of an *adventure*-style narrative and casts the spy Petre Varain as the hero, and a second and final sequence, which raises claims on being “nonfictional” and in which Coruț himself acts as the hero, posing as an investigator of recent history (from the Romanian Revolution to the rise of the Islamic State). 84 volumes into the series, in *Stăpânii din umbră* [*The Masters in the Shadows*] (2008), Petre Varain loses his wife and child, who had been assassinated by “Zionists”, but remarries and has a child with an extra-terrestrial female assigned to the alien mission that keeps Earth under observation, under the command of Zamolxe (to whom the members of the Octagon address as “Commander”), a mission whose outpost is hidden deep in the Carpathian Mountains (implying that Romania enjoys preferential treatment “from above”). Varain, having suffered a series of mutations under the influence of alien technology, has himself become half-alien.

The Octagon ranks among the top global secret agencies (having access to the aforementioned alien technology as well, which allows it to earn billions of dollars). However, notwithstanding its close ties with alien forces, Romania remains “at the bottom of the heap” (a contradiction for which Coruț himself cannot find an explanation other than the stupidity of common people). Throughout the series, the sociological structure remains intact, and the members of the Octagon do not change – Commander Cremene (“Flint”), the drunken womaniser from Lipova, Bălaiul (“the blonde one”), and the technological genius Orozan (a low-budget version of James Bond’s tech prodigy, Q). Racism (and even antisemitism) and ethnic clichés continue to be common occurrences. The narrative scheme is maintained throughout the entire series: Varain and the members of the Octagon go on a mission – searching after an artefact or an information, hunting down an occult organisation (the Masonic Lodge, the Islamic State, the Retrograde Occult, etc.) – which is invariably met with the utmost success. Only the timeline changes throughout the series; one of the most recent books, *Viitorul creator* [*The*

Future Creator] from 2016, makes reference to Brexit and Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

Despite the popular success during the past decade, Coruț has not managed to amass a following of likeminded authors trying to imitate his writing style and follow in his footsteps. One reason for this is certainly the weak representation of the thriller genre on the Romanian book market: it simply failed to emerge after 1989, buried as it was under the massive output of translations. Among the few successful Romanian thriller authors worth mentioning is Adrian Onciu; his 2017 *Cercul Kagan* [*The Kagan Circle*], addressing contemporary themes such as terrorism and ecologism, construct a relatively efficient local pattern by mimicking Western models (nonetheless with limited local content, so that the novel gives the impression of actually being a translation).

Alongside Pavel Coruț (whom he is by a large margin superior), Eugen Ovidiu Chirovici (b. 1964) is the most prominent name associated with commercial literature in postcommunist Romania. Chirovici became the subject of an article in *The Guardian* for having presumably sold an English-language thriller for a seven-figure amount. Chirovici was not entirely unknown. Having made his debut in 1991 with two action-packed novels, *Masacrul* [*The Massacre*] and *Comando pentru general* [*Commando for the General*], Chirovici published throughout a wide range of genres: sensationalist nonfiction in *Misterele istoriei. Religie, politică, bani* [*The Mysteries of History. Religion, Politics, Money*] (2005), the comic novel in *La broasca leșinată. Balada unui pierde-vară* [*At the Fainting Turtle. The Ballad of a Good-for-nothing*] and *Suflete la preț redus* [*Souls at a Discount*] (both from 2007), the parodic crime novel in *Cine a ucis-o pe Nora Jones* [*Who Killed Nora Jones?*] (2011), the classic hardboiled novel the likes of Raymond Chandler in *Voodoo* (2010), conspiracy literature in *Labyrinth.com* (2009), the medieval novel along the lines of Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose* in *A doua moarte* [*The Second Death*] (2006), horror à la Stephen King in *Pulbere neagră* [*Black Powder*] (2010), and *Sanitarium. Locul în care nimic nu este ce pare a fi* [*Sanitarium. The Place Where Nothing is What it Seems*] (2012). With the exception of *La broasca leșinată. Balada unui pierde-vară* and *Suflete la preț redus*, all of the books cultivate the illusion of being translations from Western authors: the settings and the characters are international and lack any Romanian background, and the quality of the writing is perfectly decent even in a global context, without displaying the common shortcomings typical of the few Romanian authors attempting to write commercial literature. His books are nearly perfect copies and point towards two somehow contradictory things: 1. The attempt of the Romanian literary field to counteract the overwhelming threat posed by translations from the Anglo-Saxon cultural space by replicating their style (Chirovici delivers high-quality copies displaying the “naturally identical undertones” to which some of the books' presentations allude); 2. The unfortunate backwardness of the same literary field, whose corresponding market is so restrained that “commercial literature” cannot become economically viable.

Another relevant title is *Biblia pierdută* [*The Lost Bible*] (2015), the debut novel signed by Igor Bergler (b. 1970). On first glance, it is merely one of hundreds of copies after Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (the book's cover art hints towards this as well): a deeply buried ancient secret, planetary conspiracy, clues hidden within various artefacts, mysterious and highly efficient assassins, cultural tourism, a romantic interest developing between the characters, and so on. However, the book proves to be much more intelligently written and exciting than this first impression would lead us to believe: conspiracy novel à la Dan Brown, excellently documented and ambitious in its proportions, it succeeded in combining a local material (Vlad the Impaler/Dracula) and an international literary formula (the conspiracy thriller). Moreover – something the author seemingly borrowed from Umberto Eco –, *Biblia pierdută* is much more self-ironic and metafictional than Brown's novels, therefore containing its own formula, but also the secret to its deconstruction. The Wikipedia page dedicated to the novel mentions a print run of over 130.000 copies¹³.

Two years later, Igor Bergler publishes a new novel, *Testamentul lui Abraham* [*Abraham's Testament*], yet another conspiracy thriller which, according to the genre's established tradition, contrives secret societies and stories built on the principle of "connect everything": from Alexander the Great to Pope Ratzinger and Donald Trump, not forgetting to add the Great Library of Alexandria, Eldorado, fascists, and the Holocaust. Unlike *Biblia pierdută*, Bergler has almost entirely renounced the Romanian component (both regarding theme, as well as spatial setting), maintaining but few references to the Romanian origins of his protagonist, Charles Baker. The novel features a generous amount of literary references, from Cervantes, Umberto Eco, or the Voynich manuscript (which is to be found in Cărtărescu's *Solenoid* as well), and even to Borges (*Death and the Compass* is integrated into the text without any significant change). The characters themselves bear names with a literary or cinematographic veneer – Petra Menard (from Pierre Menard, featured in Borges as well), Mabuse, or Caligari. Endless intellectual conversations or anecdotes about Antiquity's lost books are intertwined with over-the-top action scenes. Of course, erudite thrillers are not a rare sight in Western libraries. But such a mix of inter- and metatextual elements is unusual in commercial literature. Bergler's novel rather displays the pattern of a postmodern metafictional novel.

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¹³ Last accessed February 2, 2019.

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POPULAR GENRES: SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, DETECTIVE NOVEL, THRILLER

(Abstract)

This article presents from a historical point of view, starting from the 19th century to the present, the evolution of the main paraliterary genres in Romanian literature (science-fiction and fantasy literature, detective literature, thriller). The study is theoretically based on a double hypothesis. First, that the evolution of these genres follows the Fredric Jameson–Franco Moretti “law” according to which in peripheral cultures the novel is imported as a form of compromise between a Western form and local materials. Secondly, that the communist period (1948–1989) is the reference period for the development of the popular fiction in Romania.

Keywords: Romanian literature, science fiction, fantasy, detective fiction, thriller.

GENURI POPULARE: ROMANUL ȘTIINȚIFICO-FANTASTIC ȘI FANTASY, ROMANUL POLIȚIST, THRILLER

(Rezumat)

Acest articol prezintă din punct de vedere istoric, din secolul al XIX-lea până în prezent, evoluția principalelor genuri paraliterare din România (literatura science-fiction și fantasy, literatura polițistă, literatura de tip thriller). Studiul se bazează din punct de vedere teoretic pe o dublă ipoteză. În primul rând, că evoluția acestor genuri urmează „legea” Fredric Jameson–Franco Moretti potrivit căreia în culturile periferice romanul este importat ca o formă de compromis între o formă occidentală și un fond local. În al doilea rând, că perioada de referință pentru dezvoltarea ficțiunii populare în România este perioada comunistă (1948–1989).

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură română, science-fiction, fantasy, literatură polițistă, thriller.

BUCURA DUMBRAVĂ'S OUTLAW/ HAJDUK NOVEL¹

Born in today's Bratislava, called Pressburg at that time, on 28th December 1868, Ștefania Seculici (or Fanny/ Stefanie Szekulicz, a.k.a Františka Jozefiny Szekuliszovej according to her birth certificate²), Bucura Dumbravă moved to Bucharest in 1873, to join her father who was the executive of the „Dacia Română” Insurance Company and one of King Carol I's advisors. The chance of being in the entourage of the royal family provided the newcomer a quick social prestige and a nuanced intellectual and spiritual elevation as she became Queen Elisabeth's lady in waiting. The queen was a writer herself, publishing under the pen name Carmen Sylva; under her guidance, Bucura Dumbravă deepened her interest in literature and in the various aspects of the Romanian folklore and spirituality, also becoming one of the first female mountaineers of the country. Her passion for high altitudes resulted in a mountaineering guidebook, *Cartea munților [The Mountains Book]* published in 1920, and in the foundation of the first mountaineering society of Romania. A high-altitude lake and a peak in the Romanian Carpathians, both called *Bucura*, still celebrate her achievements.

Bucura Dumbravă was also the founder of the Romanian chapter of Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society. She learned to use spiritual keys to interpret the world, wrote books and texts dedicated to the necessity of spiritual transfiguration and translated a selection of Jiddu Krishnamurti's teachings, published in 1924 under the title *La picioarele învățătorului [At the Teacher's Feet]*. She died of an epidemic fever in January 1926 in Port Said, Egypt, while returning from a theosophical congress held in Adyar, India, a month earlier.

The intellectual drive directed Bucura Dumbravă towards the spiritual aspects of the Romanian history and ethnology, and she became a member of the so-called *Chindia Society*, which reunited several ladies from Queen Elisabeth's entourage, dedicated to promoting the rural domestic folklore and the dances of the peasantry. Folklore knowledge also helped Bucura Dumbravă to deepen her research enough to write two historical novels, *Der Haiduck/ Haiducul/ The Hajduk* (1908) and *Der Pandur/ Pandurul/ The Pandur* (1912), which were parts of an unfinished trilogy

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the International Conference „Zilele Sextil Pușcariu” (12-13 September 2019) and published, in Romanian, in the conference proceedings (*Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, 2019, 4, pp. 364-376). This is the first internationally available rendition.

² Luiza Marinescu, “Bucura Dumbravă Sur les routes de l'Inde (Pe drumurile Indiei). Journal de voyage en Inde d'une femme écrivain et traductrice de la Roumanie au début du XXe siècle”, *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, 2019, 17, p. 159.

entitled *Spărgătorii de valuri* [*The Wave Breakers*], written initially in German and then translated into Romanian by Teodor Nica and Elisa I. Brătianu, two of the author's closest friends. A few years later, Bucura Dumbravă produced an improved Romanian version of the *The Pandur*, while in 1912, a second German edition of *Der Haiduck* was printed with a foreword signed by Carmen Sylva.

The two novels (and explicitly the *Haiducul/ The Hajduk*) are novels with hajduks ("romane haiducești" in Romanian), meaning regional versions of the more general typology of the historical novel, that is the Robin Hood type novel with outlaws. In her seminal *The True Story of the Novel*, Margaret Anne Doody³ notices that although a lot of great novels of the 19th century were historical, towards the turn of the century one can see a degrading shift in the direction of sensationalism, making these novels more adventurous and boisterous rather than truly historical. Margaret Anne Doody also asserts that any historical novel – including those offered to the consumer culture – is, in any case, an interpretation of the objective historical truth, which often challenges the "sacred" stereotypes of the official historical discourse.

The typical protagonist of these novels is the hero-outlaw, or the so-called "noble criminal" to whom Eric J. Hobsbawm dedicated a whole book in 1969 entitled *Bandits*, preceded by *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, published by the same author in 1959⁴. In an entry written for *The Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*, Paul F. Algolillo⁵ says that the imaginary prototype of this type of narratives was the Robin Hood story, also shared by the Romanian *hajduks*, who were the typical guerilla fighters of the 16th–19th centuries in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Especially popular in the Balkans, the *hajduks* were rapidly converted into the epitomes of heroism, aggressiveness and masculinity, called by Lucien J. Frary⁶ *andrismos*. The strict etymology of the word refers to the military, the Hungarian *hajdú* (pl. *hajdúk*) meaning a mercenary soldier⁷. The Turkish word is *haïdud*, designating a mercenary of Hungarian origin. Related terms are *gaïdúk* in Russian, *hajduk* in Bulgarian, Polish, Serbian and Czech, or *haïdút* in Albanian.

The *hajduks* were a cherished topic of the Romanian consumer culture, especially in the legends disseminated by the popular ballads. The *Hajduks* or the

³ Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, London, Harper Collins Publishers, 1997, p. 295.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Century*, New York, Norton, 1959.

⁵ Paul F. Algolillo, "Noble Criminal", in Jean-Charles Seigneuret (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*. Vol. II, New York – Westport Connecticut – London, Greenwood Press, 1988, pp. 915-918.

⁶ Lucien J. Frary, *Russia and the Making of the Modern Greek Identity, 1821–1844*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 69.

⁷ With an uncertain etymology, the word originally designates the cattle driver responsible for the safe movement of herds from one place to another.

Jiens [Jienii]⁸ are the constant figures of the popular, secular theatre within the second half of the 19th century. The representations encapsulated popular songs and a wide range of colorful outfits, and they were directed to the subliminal, rebellious drives of the onlookers by providing them vivid fantasies of how to punish evil-doers or how to compensate for the overwhelming social injustice by restoring a state of well-being.

The enthusiastic popular demand generates a new literary subgenre whose central protagonist is Iancu Jianu, captain of thieves, presented for instance in a very popular play written by Matei Millo and Ion Anestin by the mid-19th century. Similar to Robin Hood⁹, who functions as the prototype of this type of outlaw hero-bandit, the widespread popularity enjoyed by Iancu Jianu is first of all emphasized by his noble pedigree, as he was the offspring of a wealthy boyar living in Wallachia in Prince Ioan Caragea's time (1812–1818). Setting aside his privileges, Iancu is later converted into a defendant of the poor by his profound sense of social justice.

We cannot go further without asserting the tremendous popularity of this type of literary scenario, since no fewer than around eighty different hajduk novels were published in between 1855 and 2000 in Romania, according to *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel*]. The time peaks were 1892–1916 and 1970–1978, both being characterized by a boost of national patriotism and pride, since – according to Margaret Anne Doody¹⁰ again – the universal patterns of the narrative are diluted by a localizing process called “domestication”, which designates the replacement of the universal narratives with elements provided by the domestic, national historical pool. Let's also reflect upon the two time periods mentioned above: their context is similar (increasing patriotism, national pride), but the peculiar social and historical agendas are nevertheless different, as the interval ending in 1916 targeted the pre-war ideal of the Greater Romania, while the second wave was a purely ideological one, triggered by the nationalist manipulations of the Communist dictatorship. Focusing on the first of these periods, Roxana Patraș considers that the readers' appetite for this type of literature was actually increased by three determining factors: “the massive publication of epic poetry – called ‘hajduk ballads’ or ‘hajduk rhapsodies’ [...], the emergence of original fiction and ‘genre-authors’ who expand ballad ‘floating episodes’ or simply embed large quotations

⁸ Alina Rece, *Istoria teatrului românesc și a artei spectacolului. De la origini până la înființarea primelor teatre* [*The History of the Romanian Theatre and the Performing Arts. From Its Origins to the Establishment of the First Theatres*], Craiova, Universitaria, 2014, pp. 72-76.

⁹ Stephen Knight, “Introduction”, in Stephen Knight (ed.), *Robin Hood. An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer Cambridge, 1999, p. XIX.

¹⁰ Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, p. 292.

from hajduk ballads into their 'original' prose [...], the circulation of Romanian translations from hajduk novels belonging to neighbouring cultures"¹¹.

As a precise historical figure living between 1787 and 1842, Iancu Jianu provides Bucura Dumbravă with an ideal pretext to fictionalize the period of the Phanariot rulers and to embed it into more or less utopian patriotic scenarios. There is also a subliminal spiritual program in the way the three novels were planned to belong to a progression. The title of the German version of the second novel, *Der Pandur. Geschichte des Rumänischen Volksaufstandes im Jahre 1821*, explicitly suggest the historical timing and evokes Tudor Vladimirescu, the military leader of the 1821 revolution, while the protagonist of the first novel (*Der Haiduck/ Haiducul/ The Hajduk*) is an outlaw, a hajduk, Iancu Jianu, that is a rebellious fighter living outside the social norm. The third, unwritten part was planned to center around Gheorghe Lazăr, a teacher responsible for founding the first Romanian schooling system in Wallachia, and so the progressive, theosophical program of the construction becomes more than obvious, the transformation of the hajduk into a commander and later into a sage being underpinned by the idea that history evolves from that which is material to that which is spiritual.

Therefore, the protagonist of the first novel embodies the elementary force of revolt, the second one the organized, disciplined form of it, while the beacon of the whole edifice would be the spiritual metamorphosis, that is the transformation of the raw forms of rebellion into spiritual self-fulfillment, equaled with patriotism and with the Romantic will to promote national culture as a means of collective refinement and improvement. It goes without saying that the patriotic echo of the cycle was tremendous: the Romanian version of *The Hajduk* is reprinted in ten huge popular editions between 1908 and 1947, equaled in popularity only by the *The Pandur*. Theosophy is, of course, gradually forgotten.

The plots of the first two novels written by Bucura Dumbravă are deeply permeated by her historical research. Iancu was a young boyar from Romanăți, a region of South-Eastern Wallachia, who became one of the most feared hajduk leaders that ever existed. Putting together an army of 1000-2000 rebels proved to be a real menace in the versatile social and political realities of the Phanariot era. Iancu turned his back on his ancestry and became the protector of the poor, being acclaimed by legends and songs. When captured, he escaped by relying on an unwritten law of those times, which said that even a thief could be redeemed by marrying a maiden who wants him. Iancu's choice was a beautiful girl, Sultana Gălășescu, who belonged to Princess Ralu Caragea's princely escort. After a short period of marital tranquility, Iancu took up his sword again in order to join Tudor Vladimirescu's heroic revolution (1821). He was jailed and then liberated, but after Vladimirescu's defeat he retreated home again, dying of natural causes and far

¹¹ Roxana Patraș, "Hajduk Novels in the Nineteenth-Century Romanian Fiction: Notes on a Sub-Genre", *Swedish Journal of Roumanian Studies*, 2, 2019, 1, p. 26.

away from the calling sirens of history. Bucura Dumbravă's *Haiducul/ The Hajduk* depicts Jianu's deeds up to his salvation story by marrying Sultana Gălășescu, while in *The Pandur* he becomes a hidden protagonist, the author's interest being that of presenting the revolution as an exemplary fulfillment of the national destiny.

A secondary hero of *The Hajduk*, the wise boyar Vasile Moangă, provides the best psychological definition of the hajduk during his conversation with Tudor Vladimirescu: he has a deep sense of justice, is an instinctive warrior, is symbolically married to the woods and is appreciated and protected by the peasants, but the boyar also warns Vladimirescu concerning the erratic military virtues of the *hajduks*.

Boyar Moangă's canonic definition insists on the essential element of the hajduk's way of life, namely the attachment to the forest. Similar to the English model represented by the Robin Hood legends, the Romanian folklore depicts the *hajduks* as outlaws who prefer to live deep inside the forest by forging a harmonious, pure and organic group philosophy ostentatiously opposed to the nasty challenges of the outer world's "civilization". Life in the woods nurtures no dubious or unfair laws, but is a world entirely governed by fraternity, friendship and mutual dedication, values reserved only to those are excluded from society.

Far from being depicted as a bloody wrongdoer, Iancu Jianu derives his essence from his certain spiritual superiority, being recognized as a *Captain*, similar to Vladimirescu, who is *The Lord*, both of them living in accordance with the exemplary existence expected from a savior able to harmonize perfectly the ups and downs of the energies of life, and a heroic kind of self-control mastered by means of a high sense of justice. Iancu Jianu internalizes the urge to combine redemption and historical necessity while listening to Friar Damaschin's stories about Horia, one of the leaders of the 1784 Transylvanian peasant uprising. Therefore, in a purely Orthodox understanding of his spiritual call, the martyr Horia (who was publicly tortured and executed) functions as Iancu Jianu's inner "brother" or "icon".

The divine investiture has to be, obviously, a valued part of the savior image. By reaching the highest level of power among his fellow warriors and the peasants – Bucura Dumbravă asserts – Iancu Jianu takes over from the Lord the privileges of supreme punisher and supreme giver, and does all these from an *avant-la-lettre* theosophical perspective, which sweeps aside the doctrine of reincarnation but presents Jianu as the pure, uncontaminated and naïve embodiment of social justice, who shares the belief that there is no such thing as an effect without a cause, punishment without guilt, or a fair deed without a subsequent reward.

Iancu Jianu and his outlaw fellows' milieu is the unjust social and political environment governed by the Phanariot rulers. During Prince Ioan Caragea's heavy dictatorship (1812 – 1818), many Romanians managed to share the ideals of the Greek War of Independence, heralded by a secret society called Hetairia ("The

Society of Friends”), whose historical consequences will animate the basic ideology of Bucura Dumbravă’s second novel, *Pandurul/ The Pandur*. In their European background we can find Napoleon Bonaparte’s crusades and the Congress of Vienna, which puts an end not only to the Hetairia, but to any national liberation struggle in the Balkans. *Haiducul/ The Hajduk* features a pro-Greek group of boyars, members of the Hetairia, led by boyar Samurcaș, whose idol is the famous Greek bard Rigas Feraios Veletinlis, the so-called “founder of the Hetairia”, whose hymn („Fili mu simpatriote,/ Dulinametha, os pote,/ Ton achrion Musulmanon/ Tis Elados ton tyranon?”¹²) is sung by Iancu while he is imprisoned in the salt mines of Telega. The effect is electrifying on the Greek patriots, who hasten to liberate him. The hymn is quoted in both of the language versions of the novel, but the German edition has an explanatory annotation¹³, while the translation is omitted from the second German edition of *The Pandur*¹⁴. Tudor Vladimirescu’s alleged Hetairia membership is stipulated in *Haiducul/ The Hajduk* and taken for granted in *Pandurul*, where the hero is executed – this is the strict historical truth – by the same secret society whose membership he allegedly shared.

In the Romanian collective memory the Phanariots are labeled as extremely corrupt and inhuman, the main accusations listing a large variety of political and moral indictments like generalized corruption, public robbery and fiscal fraud. Further wrongdoings include the orientalized mimicry of everyday life (habits, morals, clothing or food), as well as the savage exploitation of the peasants by a group of alien, non-Romanian oppressors. The list ends with the terrible pest cutting hundreds of thousands of innocent lives during Prince Ioan Caragea’s reign.

A structural negative mirror image provides a psychological explanation for Iancu Jianu’s transformation into a *hajduk*, the hero’s “dark ghost” being a Phanariot aristocrat called Pervanoglu, who is constantly presented as maleficent and grotesque in the plot of the novel. Pervanoglu abducts a young girl, Ileana Golfineanu, and tries to assassinate Iancu Jianu before capturing him. This long list of atrocities is sufficient to determine Iancu Jianu to abandon his class allegiance and take over the tasks of a famous former local hajduk called Mereanu. But being wise and systematic, he decides to undermine the system from within, so he accepts boyar Moangă’s advice to become temporarily the chief tax collector (*zapciu*) of his region, a position which allows him to get a deep insight into the hidden mechanisms of the Phanariot administrative and punitive system.

¹² Bucura Dumbravă, *Haiducul [The Hajduk]*. Translated by Teodor Nica, fourth edition, București, Editura Librăriei Școalelor C. Sfetea, 1919, p. 230.

¹³ Bucura Dumbrava, *Der Haiduck*, Regensburg, W. Wundeling’s Hofbuchhandlung, 1908, p. 228: “Geliebte Landesleute, bis wann werden wie die Sklaven der graufamen Osmanen, der Tyrannen von Helas, bleiben?!” “Beloved contrymen, until when will we remain the slaves of the cruel Ottomans, the tyrants of Helas?”.

¹⁴ Bucura Dumbrava, *Der Pandur. Geschichte des Rumänischen Volksaufstandes im Jahre 1821*, Zweiter Band, Regensburg, W. Wundeling’s Hofbuchhandlung, 1912, p. 191.

Folklore elements are massively inserted in the text. Iancu is always accompanied by his mythical projection, as it happens in the Telega prison, where his arrival is preceded by rumors of his legendary deeds. For instance, there's a common belief that he possesses a magical herb, the so-called "grass of the beasts" (*iarba fiarelor*), able to undo any lock. It is also in Telega where Iancu hears a heroic song about himself. The plot of the song is actually soteriological, speaking about someone who is resurrected after a short stay among the dead.

The German edition of the book provides the translation of the song in which Iancu Jianu is compared to Christ, as a man who "comes back" to life from the "death" of the prison cell. Further spiritualistic interpretations are provided by Bucura Dumbravă's theosophical insights. Theosophy interprets enlightenment as a powerful, individualistic rise from the handcuffs of the bleak material world. In order to symbolize this, Jianu is initially presented as being one among an amorphous social mass, which he transcends because of his deep sense of responsibility and justice, both spiritual values. Furthermore, his rise is presented as a shift from darkness to light, the two delineated by the green forest. The thesis of the forest's mediating role is emphasized by an open eulogy to the Bucegi Mountains, the crib of Bucura Dumbravă's passion for mountaineering.

The Hajduk also hides a secret autobiographical code regarding its author. One of the most notable figures of the already mentioned Phanariot era was Princess Ralu Caragea, Prince Ioan Caragea's art loving daughter, who laid the foundations of the very first theatre in Wallachia, the so-called "Red Fountain Theatre" (Cîșmeaua Roșie) and who introduced modern, Western cultural values into the country. She was so enthralled by the modern conquests of civilization that she imported the very first hot air balloon of the region, launched in Bucharest to the vivid amazement of the locals. In Bucura Dumbravă's fiction, Ralu is surrounded and protected by her access to art (for instance, she summons Western musicians to play Beethoven), while the novel mentions the otherwise true detail that Princess Ralu owned the only pianoforte existing in Wallachia at that time. In other words, Princess Ralu is a foreigner who uses art as a subtle expression of her local dedication. By formulating the image in this way, it is obvious that the author projected onto the princess her own subliminal ideals of patriotism and dedication.

Written in German and published initially in the Western world, in a period of full swing literary emergence, based on a romantic sense of aesthetic associated to the powerful ideology of the national revival, Bucura Dumbravă's novels manage to illustrate the dynamic and refined imagery of a powerful, locally colored protagonist, the *haiduk*, who is by all means recognizable when one thinks of the Robin Hood cycle, but also bears the strong peculiar imprints of the Romanian national identity. Found everywhere in the popular 19th century East European and Balkan literatures, the self-image type projection of the *haiduk* is an important item of the emerging national ideology of these regions, which also explains its enhanced literary career and success. As Joep Leersse notices in the inaugural

section of the seminal study entitled "The Rural Outlaws of East-Central Europe", far from being a mere exotic fictional trope, the topic of the haiduk "draws on figures, facts, or materials from living historical memory, folklore, and oral balladry, using this not as a thrilling form of escapism for middleclass readers but as a glorification of heroic resistance and a means of anchoring a nascent high literary tradition"¹⁵.

But apart from other stories featuring historically attested *haiduks*, Bucura Dumbravă's novels are based on a really minute scholarly documentation, by mixing verified oral traditions and strictly decanted historical records. They contain detailed ethnographic, architectural and geographic descriptions, aiming to provide the most exact, most objective reconstruction of the given epoch, although we mustn't forget that they do not fail to occasionally romanticize. Nineteenth century archaisms and long forgotten figures of speech are intentionally inserted into the narration in order to provide a local flavour not only to the domestic reader, but also to those who read in German, as it is known that exoticism has always been a successful form of literary persuasion. Being explicitly patriotic and promoting an initiatory, spiritualistic program, the novels finally become the embodiment of a personal existential creed, in which an open aristocratic ideal, a refined pro-European cultural orientation and a disciplined theosophical belief are subtly interconnected in an equation based on the idea that even in a country of adoption self-fulfillment can be attained by those persons who capture the inner flow of what the given community believes is historicity.

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¹⁵ Joep Leerssen, John Neubauer, Marcel Cornis-Pope, Dragan Klaic, Biljana Marković, "The Rural Outlaws of East-Central Europe", in Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds.), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Volume IV: Types and Stereotypes*, Amsterdam – Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004, p. 410.

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BUCURA DUMBRAVĂ'S OUTLAW/ HAJDUK NOVEL (Abstract)

The Robin Hood type of outlaw hero, as delineated by Eric J. Hobsbawm in his seminal *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* of 1959, has a counterpart in the Romanian folklore and fiction, namely the outlaw (hajduk) Iancu Jianu, who lived between 1787 and 1842. A folklore hero, he also became the protagonist of no fewer than sixteen novels, as well as a few movies. Iancu Jianu has been traditionally associated both to the social and to the national struggle for justice and independence, as his insurgency, highly praised by the common people through various heroic representations disseminated in ballads and sayings, coincided historically with the Greek War of Independence, when the Romanian principalities were ruled by the hated "phanariots". The latter were offspring of privileged families living in the Greek district of Constantinople, who used to pay heavily for the throne, later deploying a bloody campaign to recover and increase their investment. This resulted in a cruel social and economic oppression, famine and even plague, which fuelled, among the poor and the dispossessed, the myth of an outlaw hero living in the woods, chased by the authorities, but robbing the rich to give to the needy. The paper analyzes Iancu Jianu's literary representation in Bucura Dumbravă's novels. She was, interestingly enough, both a lady in waiting for Queen Elizabeth (Carmen Sylva) and the acting president of the Romanian Theosophical Society. The paper scrutinizes both the patriotic imprints of the two novels and the spiritual symbols embodied in the plot, since Bucura Dumbravă's noble intention was to illustrate the emergence of the Romanian identity as the gradual scenario of a heroic initiation whose final outcome is the emancipation of the spirit, of the intellect, and the victory of light against darkness.

Keywords: social bandits, Iancu Jianu, outlaw, Romanian folklore and literature, Bucura Dumbravă.

ROMANUL HAIDUCESC AL BUCUREI DUMBRAVĂ
(Rezumat)

Eroul de tip Robin Hood, așa cum este definit de Eric J. Hobsbawm în cartea sa din 1959, *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, are un corespondent în spațiul românesc, haiducul Iancu Jianu, care a trăit între 1787 și 1842, eroul multor producții folclorice și protagonistul unui număr impresionant de romane (șaisprezece) și al câtorva filme artistice. Iancu Jianu a fost în mod tradițional asociat atât cu lupta socială pentru justiție, cât și cu cea națională pentru independență, insurgența sa, elogiată de popor prin reprezentări eroice diseminate în balade și legende, manifestându-se în timpul Războiul Grec de Independență și a domniilor fanariote, epocă marcată de opresiuni economice și politice, traversată de foamete și ciumă. Toate acestea au alimentat mitologia haiducului, erou popular care trăiește în pădure, este urmărit sistematic de autorități și îi pradă pe cei bogați pentru a-i ajuta pe săraci. Lucrarea analizează reprezentarea literară a lui Iancu Jianu în romanele Bucurei Dumbravă, care a fost atât doamna de onoare a reginei Elisabeta a României (Carmen Sylva), cât și președinta Societății Teosofice din România. Lucrarea abordează atât mărcile patriotice prezente în cele două romane, cât și simbolurile spirituale încorporate în țesătura narativă, Bucura Dumbravă intenționând să ilustreze atât identitatea națională emergentă, cât și scenariul unei inițieri eroice graduale, ce culminează cu victoria spiritului, a intelectului, cu triumful luminii împotriva întunericului.

Cuvinte-cheie: bandiți, Iancu Jianu, haiduc, literatura și folclorul românești, Bucura Dumbravă.

POLITICAL FICTION OR FICTION ABOUT POLITICS. HOW TO OPERATIONALIZE A FLUID GENRE IN THE INTERWAR ROMANIAN LITERATURE

What's in a Genre?

A reader of contemporary genre theories is compelled to conclude that, one way or another, the idea of literary class has managed a narrow escape from obsolescence. Conceptual maximalism fell behind the pragmatic call to respond to a global cultural environment for which the task of grouping, structuring, organizing, labelling remains vital for a long list of reasons, of which marketing policies are not to be forgotten. The modern story of the field has seen many twists and turns. After some theories of genre evolutionism – derived more or less from Darwinism – consumed their heyday in the 1890s–1920s¹, Bakhtin (1937) took a decisive step toward a “historical poetics”, before Wellek, Warren (1948), Northrop Frye (1957), and Käte Hamburger (1957), and, later on, Gérard Genette (1979), Alastair Fowler (1982), or Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1989) returned to self-styled mixtures of formalism and historicism².

The study which pushed forward the scholarship in the field was, surprisingly or not, a fierce deconstruction of the “madness of the genre”, perceived as a self-defeating theory and practice of classification, highly necessary and utterly impossible at the same time. In his usual paradoxical manner, Derrida (1980) construes the relationship between the individual work and its set as one of

¹ See, for instance: Ferdinand Brunetière, *L'évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*, Paris, Hachette, 1890–1892; Albert Thibaudet, *Le liseur de romans*, Paris, G. Crès et Cie, 1925; Viktor Shklovsky, *О теории прозы* [*On the Theory of Prose*], Москва, Издательств о “Федерация”, 1925. A later retake of the subject is Paul Van Tieghem, “La question des genres littéraires”, *Helicon*, 1938, 1, pp. 95-101.

² See M.M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (1937), in *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas, 1981, p. 84; René Wellek and Austin Warren, “Literary Genres”, in *Theory of Literature* (1948), London, Jonathan Cape, 1954, pp. 235-248; Northrop Frye, “Fourth Essay. Rhetorical Criticism. Theory of Genres”, in *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (1957), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 243-340; Käte Hamburger, *Die Logik der Dichtung*, Stuttgart, Ernst Klett Verlag, 1957; Gérard Genette, *Introduction à l'architexte*, Paris, Seuil, 1979; Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982; Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1989. For a synthetic review of Hamburger, Genette, Schaeffer, or Compagnon's contributions, see Marc Lits, “De l'importance du genre en culture médiatique”, *Belphégor. Littérature Populaire et Culture Médiatique*, 3, 2003, 1, <https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/47672>. Accessed October 11, 2020.

“participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of”, due to the interpretive indetermination of the literary text. This turns the boundary of the set into “an internal pocket larger than the whole”³. Derrida’s challenge of the static core-periphery mapping draws attention to the margins as productive spaces where genres interact to merge into a system, functioning as a whole embedded in changeable historical frameworks. The competition between genres results in shifting hierarchies in time, but also in genres that continuously adjust themselves in order to become “fitter to survive”, so that their definitions fluctuate and class-gatherings rely more on “family resemblances”⁴. It is telling that the quantitative formalist experiments conducted by the Stanford Literary Lab operate with functional linguistic parameters rather than with conceptual descriptions, while Moretti charts his famous history of novelistic genres of the 18th–19th centuries without providing definitions of any kind⁵.

Is Political Fiction a Literary Genre?

The helter-skelter⁶ of what is improperly called the genre system is due to the heterogeneity of the criteria involved, in different times and places. In what concerns fiction, we can count realist, modernist, postmodernist, but also epistolary, graphic, children, adult, autobiographical, historical, gothic, silver-fork, mystery, thriller, romance, steampunk, picaresque, pastoral, psychological, fantasy, or Sci-Fi novels, depending on the clustering traits taken into consideration (style, structure, medium, theme, plot, characters, period, readership a.s.o.).

For some theorists, not just *any* designation qualifies as a genre. For example, Wellek and Warren have provided a negative answer to the question highlighted in the subtitle above, listing derisively the political novel – together with the “ecclesiastical novel”, “the novel of factory workers”, “the novel of the Oxford

³ Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre”, *Critical Inquiry*, 7, 1980, 1, pp. 59, 81.

⁴ Without attempting to provide a systematic account of recent genre theories, I list the works that helped me shape my synthetic argument: Ralph Cohen, “History and Genre”, *New Literary History*, 17, 1986, 2, pp. 204-205 (a reassessment of Derrida’s 1980 article; the historicity of genre), pp. 215-216 (reshifting genre hierarchy); John M. Swales, *Genre Analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 49 (“family resemblances”); Daniel Chandler, “An Introduction to Genre Theory”, *Visual Memory*, 1997, pp. 2-3, <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/intgenre/>. Accessed October 11, 2020 (comment on the “family resemblances” between members of the same genre). In the same vein, Franco Moretti treats the novel as a “family of forms” in his study “The Novel: History and Theory”, in *Distant Reading*, London – New York, Verso, 2013, p. 166.

⁵ Literary Lab (Sarah Allison, Ryan Heuser, Matthew Jockers, Franco Moretti, Michael Whitmore), “Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment”, *Pamphlet*, 1, 5 January 2011, pp. 1-29, <https://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet1.pdf>. Accessed October 11, 2020. Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees. Abstract Models for Literary History*, London – New York, Verso, 2007, pp. 3-33. Moretti only lists the works from which he drew his periodization, giving no attention to definitions (pp. 31-33).

⁶ Or the “hodge-podge” (Literary Lab, “Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment”, p. 10).

Movement, Depiction of Teachers in the Nineteenth-Century Novel, Sailors in the Nineteenth-Century Novel, also Sea Novel” – among the classes “based only on subject matter”, able to provide “a purely sociological classification”. On the contrary, a *literary* classification should dwell on “the formalistic side” of the text. Jonathan Swift’s Hudibrastic octosyllabics make more of a genre than all the aforementioned motley bunch of labels, the authors contended⁷. However, even adhering to Wellek and Warren’s exclusive interest in the “formalistic” criteria, admitting or rejecting political fiction as a literary genre is a matter of debate, since tracing a firm line between “content” and “form” is highly problematic (in general and in particular, as we will see in the concluding remarks).

Another assault against the genre was launched by the French champions of *la nouvelle critique* and of *le nouveau roman*. For them, contesting the political novel meant challenging the mainstream institution of *le roman engagé* established earlier by the existentialists, and promoting their own group’s production in its stead. Barthes’ distinction between *écrivains* and *écrivants* (1960) served as a theoretical platform for a long-lived argument against the literariness of *le roman à thèse*. The opposition between the one who writes for literature’s sake (*l’écrivain*) and the one who writes for an end other than literature in itself (*l’écrivant*) gives birth to “the bastard type” of “*l’écrivain-écrivant*”, none other than the committed novelist, held responsible for accommodating a non-literary agenda in literature. Barthes compares him or her to Maître Jacques, Voltaire’s comic character who served either as a cook, or as a coachman, never being able to be both at the same time. The epitome of this type of writer, endeavouring pointlessly to resolve an insurmountable incompatibility, is J.-P. Sartre⁸. One year later, in his famous essay *Pour un nouveau roman* (1961), Robbe-Grillet targets once more committed literature, in which he identifies two subsets: (1) the socialist realist prose, in the service of the Zhdanovist propaganda; (2) the existentialist novel, associated with various versions of “humanism”. Both rely on the Marxist claim about the novel’s role in awakening political consciousness. On the contrary, Robbe-Grillet preaches, in the spirit of his group, the retreat within the realm of “artistic form”, where language suspends its referential insertion and signifies nothing but itself⁹. *Le nouveau roman* comes as a radical consequence of the modernist project, based on the principle of aesthetic autonomy.

In contrast with the French poststructuralist suspicion against political fiction, there is a relatively rich tradition of American literary studies treating the matter.

⁷ See the whole argument in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, pp. 242-243.

⁸ Roland Barthes, “Écrivains et écrivants”, in *Essais critiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1981, pp. 147-154. Benoît Denis connects the hybrid *écrivain-écrivant* to the practice of existentialist literature and to Sartre in particular, in his study *Littérature et engagement. De Pascal à Sartre*, Paris, Seuil, 2000, p. 21.

⁹ See Alain Robbe-Grillet, “On Several Obsolete Notions”, in *For a New Novel. Essays on Fiction*. Translated by Richard Howard, New York, Grove Press Inc., 1965, p. 41: “Once there appears the concern to signify something (something external to art), literature begins to retreat, to disappear”.

Two content-based definitions of the genre from the interwar period¹⁰ informed the most influential post-war scholarship¹¹. Putting pieces together, one can work out an all-encompassing “analytic” definition. So, the political novel chiefly deals with: i. ideology (in all its guises, from party propaganda to the relationship ideology-worldview-consciousness); ii. governance institutions (local, regional, national, international); iii. political acts (from lawmaking and lobbying to reforming and protesting); iv. the life of the political milieu (with the drawing room as one of the most attended *topoi*). Boyers (1985)¹² refers to the same set of traits in his book on the political novel since 1945, with a more precise focus on the

¹⁰ Here is Morris Edmund Speare’s answer to the question what is a political novel (in *The Political Novel: Its Development in England and in America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1924, p. IX): “It is a work of prose fiction which leans rather to ‘ideas’ than to ‘emotions’; which deals rather with the machinery of lawmaking or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation; and where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform, or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or of the forces which constitute government. In this exposition the drawing room is frequently used as a medium for presenting the inside life of politics”. For H.A.L. Fisher (“The political novel”, *Cornhill Magazine*, 1928, 64, p. 25), the political novel is “the novel which chiefly concerns itself with men and women engaged in contemporary political life and discussing contemporary political ideas”.

¹¹ Irving Howe (in *Politics and the Novel*, New York, Horizon Press, 1957, p. 17) lays stress on the role of ideology in the genre: “By a political novel I mean a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting”; or, a couple of pages later (*Ibidem*, p. 19), the political novel is “the kind in which the *idea* of society [...] has penetrated the consciousness of the characters in all of its profoundly problematic aspects, so that there is to be observed in their behaviour, and they are themselves often aware of, some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification”. On the other hand, Joseph L. Blotner (*The Political Novel*, New York, Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1955, p. 2) focuses on “political phenomena”, or “political acts”: “Here a political novel is taken to mean a book which directly describes, interprets, or analyzes political phenomena. Our prime material is the politician at work: legislating, campaigning, mending political fences, building his career. Also relevant are the people who influence him: his parents, his wife, his mistress, the girls who jilted him, the lobbyist who courted his favour. The primary criterion for admission of a novel to this group was the portrayal of political acts, so many of them that they formed the novel’s main theme or, in some cases, the major theme”. In his 1966 book (*The Modern American Political Novel. 1900–1960*, Austin – London, University of Texas Press, 1966, p. 8), Blotner tries to refine his definitions, though qualifiers like “literal”, “functional”, or “conventional” can hardly shed light on the meaning of the key-terms: “[...] ‘political’ is here defined in a very literal and functional sense. The subject of these works [...] is also primarily political. Politics is not merely a secondary interest. These novels deal with the overt, institutionalized politics of the office holder, the candidate, the party official, or the individual who performs political acts as they are conventionally understood”.

¹² Robert Boyers (*Atrocity and Amnesia. The Political Novel since 1945*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 9) quotes Howe extensively when listing the traits of the political novel: “ideas have a ‘kind of independent motion’ and become ‘active characters’”; “political intrigue is more than a backdrop”; “characters ‘regard their personal fates as intimately bound up with social and political arrangements’”; the political novel attempts “to project a common world, that is more than a series of isolated tableaux, images, or emblems”. Moreover, “the determinate goal toward which the various elements tend will have something to do with ideas about community, collective action, and the distribution of power” (*Ibidem*, p. 16).

management of power. Despite their different ideological biases, the theories of these scholars converge in their main tenets.

Almost a decade later, Susan Rubin Suleiman makes a liberal and unpatronizing reassessment of the French *roman à thèse* of the 20th century, producing her influential definition:

A *roman à thèse* is a novel written in the realistic mode (that is, based on an aesthetic of verisimilitude and representation), which signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical, or religious doctrine¹³.

The main problem with this book, specified in its first paragraph¹⁴, is equating *le roman à thèse* with the ideological novel, which results in narrowing the scope of the latter to old-school realism and didacticism, an anachronism for the timespan considered by the author. Actually, between the Dreyfus Affair and the beginning of WWII, the ideological novel meandered from the “monological” to the “pulverized”¹⁵ meaning, taking part in more than one modernist literary experiment, though without ceasing to be ideological. It happened not only in the “major” culture of France (where writers like André Malraux, Jean-Paul Sartre, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Louis Aragon, and Robert Brasillach cut new narrative paths into European fiction), but also in semi-peripheries like Romania (with authors like Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian or Gherasim Luca, attuned to the new trends and willing to upgrade the domestic repertoire). However, leaving aside the perplexing choice to consider *le roman à thèse* and the ideological novel as synonyms, Suleiman’s research is instrumental in introducing the genre to the updated toolkit of narratology, handled with both discretion and precision.

Stuart A. Scheingold’s research complements Suleiman’s, in that it covers some of the “blind spots” where Suleiman’s restrictive definition could not reach, i.e. the realm of political fiction rejecting any definite body of doctrine¹⁶. The theorist calls his subgenre the “novel of political estrangement” and finds in Kafka, the author of *The Trial*, its founding father. It is a novel about losing hope in the

¹³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 1-2. Here is the problematic first paragraph of the “Introduction”, where the author sketches a definition *sui generis* of the ideological novel: “This book is about novels with a clear ideological message – novels that seek, through the vehicle of fiction, to persuade their readers of the ‘correctness’ of a particular way of interpreting the world. I call such novels ideological, not in the broad sense in which we can say that any representation of human reality depends on, and in some way expresses, a more or less consciously defined ideology (in this sense, any work of fiction, indeed any work of art can be considered ideological), but in the more narrow sense in which we might call a discourse ideological if it refers explicitly to, and identifies itself with, a recognized body of doctrine or system of ideas”.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Stuart A. Scheingold, *The Political Novel. Re-Imagining the Twentieth Century*, Auckland, Continuum, 2010.

project of modernity as a whole, after the massacres of WW I, and, even more, after the Holocaust. The definition is inspired from the political essays by Zygmunt Bauman and Tony Judt about the “terrible 20th century”:

[N]ovels of political estrangement were, I argue, sown in the blood, the tragedy and the deceptions of World War I. Put another way, novels of political estrangement express a distrust of the political derived from and in tune with World War I, the subsequent global economic turmoil and totalitarianism of the left and the right in the 1930s¹⁷.

Historically, Scheingold splits this subgenre in two periods. In the interwar years, the novels voice a naive anti-war, populist and anti-capitalist creed, as in Ernest Hemingway and Erich Maria Remarque’s bestsellers. In the post-war decades, they undertake a more complex critique of modernity, as in the works of Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, or Pat Barker. Scheingold’s strength lies in disclosing the hidden planet of this subgenre, often overlooked by other critics, in which all public institutions and actors are out of sight and yet the political is subtly dissipated in the narrative, as an “absent presence”¹⁸. The vulnerability of his approach consists in the difficulty to draw the limits of his category. It is doubtful whether Hemingway and Remarque qualify as novelists of “political estrangement” or even as political novelists at all¹⁹. As a rule, frontiers involved in the attempt to divide and subdivide the genre are relative, if not ineffable.

After briefly reviewing a part of the American bibliography, we can conjecture that the most frequent two problems encountered – (1) defining and (2) mapping political fiction – often lead to a catch-22 situation. When piecing together an all-comprising definition, the outskirts of the genre fade away into the social²⁰ or into the war novel²¹. Conversely, focusing on a neatly circumscribed class of texts results in a truncated notion of ideological novel²². However difficult it may be to match the definition and the territory of the genre, giving it up altogether is not an option either, since political literature not only reflects ideology, but also reflects *on* ideology, as a resourceful critical discourse available since the mid-19th century. As a mediating form between entertainment and politics, the novel has taken part in bringing ideology closer to its audience, in publicizing mainstream or subversive bodies of doctrine and in effecting social and economic changes

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹⁹ The author unconvincingly divides between the anti-war novels which are/ are not political (*Ibidem*, p. 27). For instance, he places Jaroslav Hašek’s *The Good Soldier Švejk* series in the latter category, while Hemingway and Remarque belong to the former.

²⁰ See Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, p. 19, footnote: “I am quite aware that in practice it would often be impossible or not very useful to draw a sharp line of distinction between the political and social novels as I have here described them”.

²¹ See Stuart A. Scheingold, *The Political Novel*.

²² See Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*.

accordingly. We shouldn't overlook its societal impact, despite the blurry conceptual infrastructure it stands on: an impact which consists more in its *praxis* than in its *theoria*²³.

Interwar Romanian Prose: Political Fiction or Fiction about Politics?

As in most interwar European cultures, a strong prejudice against political fiction may be noticed in Romanian literary criticism. E. Lovinescu's *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*] (1937) does not mention the genre in its chapters and subchapters dedicated to prose, though juggling with tags like "social satire", or "modernist, fantasist, pamphleteering, lyrical, abstract, essayistic, picturesque narratives"²⁴. The same disinterest is maintained in *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present*] (1941) by G. Călinescu, which operates with eclectic classification criteria²⁵, not to mention the less influential *Istoria literaturii românești contemporane* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*] (1934) by N. Iorga. When Mircea Eliade publishes his novel *Întoarcerea din rai* [*The Return from Paradise*] (1934), the literary critic Șerban Cioculescu reviles the presence of ideological characters whose density in the novel results in an "unachieved fresco", and suggests the writer should turn back to the tools of the Balzacian, realist mode²⁶. A "good" writer should leave out of his work the foreign body of politics, and busy himself

²³ Christopher Harvie (*The Centre of Things. Political Fiction in Britain from Disraeli to the Present*, London, Unwyn Hyman Ltd., 1991, p. 2) raises doubts about the possibility of answering the theoretical questions incurred by the genre, but nevertheless pleads for its cultural importance: "But is there a proper genre to be investigated? If there is, what does it consist of? Why is it important? Is this for intrinsic reasons, or because of the politics of its own production and reception? I believe the importance of the genre lies in its *praxis*: it merged 'entertainment' and ideology to produce a useful political discourse for a traditional society intent on social and economic change, and then, more capriciously, it commented on and provoked its increasingly eccentric development in the twentieth century".

²⁴ E. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane (1900–1937)* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature (1900–1937)*], București, Editura Librăriei Socec, 1937, pp. 406-407.

²⁵ G. Călinescu (*Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present*]. Edition and preface by Al. Piru, București, Minerva, 1988, pp. 1056-1057) applies heterogeneous criteria to systematize his work: historical, generic, literary, aesthetic, cultural a.s.o. For instance, "the novel of the crowd" shares a chapter with "the novel of childhood" and "the Proustians", while the "ethnographic prose" stays together with the "poetry of paternity". The phrase "political fiction" is hardly used.

²⁶ See Șerban Cioculescu, *Opere. II. Aspecte literare contemporane. Viața lui I.L. Caragiale. I.L. Caragiale* [*Works. II. Contemporary Literary Aspects. The Life of I.L. Caragiale. I.L. Caragiale*]. Text selected and established, notes, comments, manuscript variants, and indexes by Bianca Burța-Cernat, Ștefan Firică și Alexandru Farcaș, București, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2019, pp. 455, 457. See also Cioculescu's other reviews of *Întoarcerea din rai* (pp. 949-951) and *Huliganii* [*The Hooligans*] (pp. 958-961).

with the “creation of characters”, the realization of which gives the measure of his talents. It is noteworthy that Eliade actually listens to the suggestion, remodelling his novel’s sequel *Huliganii* [*The Hooligans*] (1935) on the narrative template advised by the critic, and lowering the political stakes proportionally²⁷. The writer’s turning back from the ideological to the social “fresco”, “achieved” in the manner of a universal “human comedy”, illustrates the pressure exerted by the late-modern canon of aesthetic autonomy on the political fiction, pushed to the margins of art. The little *querelle* between Cioculescu and Eliade only typifies European modernism discrediting political literature as a contradiction in terms, or as an oxymoron²⁸.

The scarcity of studies dedicated to the interwar genre suggests that the prejudice lasted for a long time. Even a massive compendium like *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 1989*] (DCRR) hardly uses the tag, opting for canonical descriptions like “social”, “satirical”, and “psychological”, as is the case, or circumlocutory characterizations like “novel of the Jewish community and *milieu*”, “novel of the Romanian political reality”, or “social novel with a political bias”²⁹. The authors’ lexical choices mirror either an alignment to the modernist taboo, or a suspicion towards a notion insufficiently explained and demarcated so far.

Given the enduring tradition of obscuring the genre in the Romanian literary studies, researching the fiction concerned with politics is no easy task, and still something of a pioneering enterprise. Before mapping the interwar literary field in search for the “members” of the genre, the scholar should answer some basic questions: (1) is it really *useful*, in the first place, to single out a genre of fiction dealing with politics? Considering a positive answer, further questions arise: (2) how should we call it? Is the popular *denomination* “political fiction” appropriate? (3) what *criteria* should we apply to define it? and (4) what genre *configuration* should we expect in the Romanian literary system between the wars?

²⁷ Here is Eliade’s straightforward confession, in a 1936 interview (in “*Dosarele*” *Mircea Eliade* [*Mircea Eliade’s “Dossiers”*], vol. IV. Preface and text established by Mircea Handoca, București, Curtea Veche, 2000, pp. 125-126): “I wrote *Yoga* for the scientists, and *Huliganii* for the literary critics. I dare say, for instance, that I wrote *Huliganii* for the critic Șerban Cioculescu, who claimed that I couldn’t achieve an epic work. So, I gave up here, as much as I could, the ideological discursivity and the interior monologue, a literary technique which befitted my intentions”.

²⁸ Stuart A. Scheingold, *The Political Novel*, p. 6.

²⁹ See *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 1989*], București, Editura Academiei Române, 2004, pp. 170, 318, 388, 396, 420, 486.

In the following, I will try to sketch my own answers after conducting some individual research which partially addressed the questions above³⁰.

(1) The usefulness of talking about such a class of texts is beyond doubt, if we consider the term “genre” with all due relativity. The epistemic advantage of archiving a whole genre/ category/ kind of literature resides in enabling us to see, beyond the canonical peaks, the mass of “the great unread”³¹. A cultural or literary researcher might be interested to note that, apart from the better known *De două mii de ani* [*For Two Thousand Years*] (1934) by Mihail Sebastian, *Huliganii* (1935) by Mircea Eliade, or *Gorila* [*The Gorilla*] (1938) by Liviu Rebreanu, a lot of other novels delved into the ideological debates sizzling in the interwar years, with the narrative toolkit available at that stage of literary development. After distance-reading a wide array of texts, he or she might gather relevant new data about the distribution of aesthetic orientations (realism, existentialism, expressionism, avant-garde, constructivism, surrealism), novelistic types (*roman à thèse*, *Bildungsroman*, psychological, autobiographical, essayistic, allegorical, utopian, dystopian, thriller), narrative patterns (3rd person/ 1st person/ limited/ neutral/ omniscient/ engaged/ camera-eye/ single-/ multiple-point-of-view narration, retrospection, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, collage, newspaper clips), literary spaces (“centre” vs. “periphery”, capital vs. “provinces”, urban vs. peri-urban vs. rural, “Western” vs. “Eastern”), etc.

But, maybe first and foremost, this researcher might want to scan for political stock-characters and political story-plots, in order to survey the political imagination existing in the literature of the epoch. To this effect, undoubtedly the best solution would be to run a complete scan of *all* the interwar fiction. However, given that such a solution is technically unfeasible for the current state of affairs in our literary studies, a database bringing together only those novels concerned with politics “to a higher extent than the others” (whatever that means) might come in handy.

The gains of accessing a large corpus of texts (bracketing what is canonically claimed of “literary value”) for myth-busting, re-imagining, i.e. finally de- and re-constructing literary and cultural histories, were emphasized by scholars like Margaret Cohen or Franco Moretti. The in-depth mapping of a literary class (like political fiction) is a preliminary step toward making statistics, compendia, dictionaries, histories, and other resources valuable for further research.

(2) Tradition proved that the denomination “political fiction” led to theoretical conundrums, even more so since the neo-Marxist contention that all literary

³⁰ It is the project *Political Fiction and the Question of Identity in the Interwar Romanian Literature*, *POLLIQUID*, (project no. 21/ 2018, supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, PN-III-P1-1.1-PD-2016-0142, within PNCDI III.

³¹ Margaret Cohen, “Narratology in the Archive of Literature”, *Representations*, 108, 2009, 1, p. 59.

practices are inherently political³². Therefore, a prudent approach would be dodging the controversial phrase and using more or less versatile paraphrases, like “novels with political plotlines” or “novels that provide access to behind-the-scenes politics and political institutions”³³. The latter string of words describes, according to Scheingold, what most of the readers call “political fiction”.

I prefer the short label “novels about politics”³⁴, because it implies modesty and common sense in its theoretical claims. Primarily, genre should be understood as a “weak” rather than a “strong” concept, i.e. more of a marketing tag than an abstract-Aristotelian category. Hence, a literary text may take part in more than one genre (in line with Derrida’s idea about “participation without belonging”). I also find the label useful because it pinpoints the distinction between *the political* in general and *politics* in particular, i.e., roughly speaking, between what is related to power relations (which is... basically everything, at least since Foucault) and the organizational or institutional structures actively involved in the public sphere (parliament, government, presidency, local administration, militant NGOs, subversive groups, etc.). We use the word *politics* not in the “deep” acceptation taught in philosophy courses, but in the daily sense used in the media, when talking about “political news”, “life”, or “scandals”.

Therefore, the old and “naive” definitions provided by Speare, Fisher, Howe, and Blotner may result in a more efficient tool than expected.

(3) The criteria for membership in the class of “novels about politics” should be transparent and based on the occurrence of *overt political signifiers* like: (i) narrative political plots or subplots; (ii) political actors as stock characters; (iii) ideological reflection or debate. We may add that (iv) the participation of (i)-(iii) in the novel’s economy of significances should be relatively high. Obviously, the last provision concerns the most difficult parameter to quantify by human agency, so that a quantitative analysis of the texts under scrutiny could be a valuable assistance. We will return to this point in the concluding remarks.

In what regards (i), the *fabula* of a novel about politics includes narrative units like elections, negotiations, corruption acts, conspiracies, rallies, strikes,

³² For instance, for Terry Eagleton (in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, second edition, Malden – Oxford – Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 169), in a Marxist vein, “ideology might be said to be the class-struggle at the level of signifying practices. And since literature is certainly a signifying practice, it follows that it is one terrain on which the class-struggle is fought out”. The argument is developed further in his essay “Literature and Politics Now”, *Critical Quarterly*, 20, 1978, 3, pp. 66-67. To add a new level of complexity, literary metadiscourse is also inherently political: “There is, in fact, no need to drag politics into literary theory: as with South African sport, it has been there from the beginning”.

³³ This second paraphrase belongs to Stuart A. Scheingold in *The Political Novel*, p. 19.

³⁴ For Tom Kemme (in *Political Fiction, the Spirit of the Age, and Allen Drury*, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987, pp. 4-5), the phrase holds a disparaging connotation as the “superficial” *ersatz* of the “political novel”, dealing with the “deep” problem of power and considered positively as “vital”, “organic”, “pure”, “elemental”, and “aesthetic”.

revolutions, riots, insurrections, terrorist attacks, reforming, law-making, bill-passing, lobbying, party switching, and other events related to the parliamentary, governance, or party life. An extended survey of the genre may eventually result in a repertoire of specific “functions” and “motives”, in the spirit of Veselovski, Tomashevski, Propp, or Doležel’s morphological poetics.

Stock characters embedded in political plotlines (ii) comprise corrupt or incorruptible politicians, demagogues, revolutionaries, spies, pacifists, humanitarianists, feminists, anti-feminists, anarchists, internationalists, bolsheviks, deviationists, unionists, jingoists, legionaries, fascists, political prisoners, side by side with other figures charged with significance in the political field, like financiers/ plutocrats/ lobbyists, magistrates, strikers and strike-breakers, rioting peasants and workers, prison guards, secret police officers, anti-Semites, pro-Zionists, pro-assimilists, “Jewish-gentiles”, etc. The weights of these categories vary in different historical epochs. For instance, the parvenu (“ciocoiul”), i.e. the plebeian and ruthless social climber stereotypical of a certain Balkanic self-image, dominates the advent of Romanian fiction (1860s–1910s), while the high-profile hero of the communist decades (1947–1989) is the activist, whether good or bad. The palette of political actors in the interwar period includes interesting figures like the feminist (*În cetatea idealului* [*In the Citadel of the Ideal*], 1923, by Dem. Theodorescu; *Marșul femeilor* [*The Women’s March*], 1933, by Alice Gabrielescu; *Tablete din Țara de Kutu* [*Sketches from the Kutu Country*], 1933, by Tudor Arghezi), the female spy (*Roșu, galben și albastru* [*Red, Yellow and Blue*], 1924, by Ion Minulescu; *Zvetlana*, 1930, by Octav Dessila; *Războiul micului Tristan* [*Little Tristan’s War*], 1937, by Mircea Gesticone), or the charismatic leader (*Un strigăt în noapte* [*A Scream in the Night*], 1933, by Adrian Hurmuz; *De două mii de ani* [*For Two Thousand Years*], 1934, by Mihail Sebastian; *Tigrii* [*The Tigers*], 1937, by Dragoș Protopopescu; *Furtuna* [*The Storm*], 1937, by Ovid Densusianu-Jr). However, by far the most visible character in terms of frequency but also of centrality in the plotline is the “politicianist”, who is neither a corrupt politician, nor a demagogue, but a bit of both. This local species, or rather its clichéd mythology in the interwar period, speaks about a whole range of conservative political thinking, from the nostalgia for the good-old boyar ruling class to the support for a far-right conservative revolution.

Strongly reviled by the modernist aestheticism, the passages of ideological reflection (iii) may take monologic or dialogic forms (both in a literal and in a Bakhtinian sense). *Les romans à thèse* deny the “polyphonic” principle *audiatur et altera pars* (*Petru Arbore*, 1924, *Glasuri în surdină* [*Silenced Voices*], 1927, and *Prietenii lui Miron* [*Miron’s Friendships*], 1934, all by Eugen Relgis), the essayistic novels, with sluggish narratives, make room to endless lectures on doctrine (*Calea calvarului* [*The Way of the Calvary*], 1935, and *Samson și noul Dagon* [*Samson and the New Dagon*], 1939, by A.L. Zissu), while novels claiming heteroglossia feature the distribution of “voices” typically meeting and duelling in

socializing spaces like the drawing room or the pub (*Întoarcerea din rai*, 1934, by Mircea Eliade; *Gorila*, 1938, by Liviu Rebreanu).

(4) The interwar fiction about politics enters a diversified and relatively mature cultural market, partially synchronized with its central models from Western Europe. The novelistic offer confronts a polarized audience, in terms of ideological orientations and aesthetic tastes, which explains the competition between a lot of narrative strategies and political agendas. Literary historiography talks about three macro-currents interacting in the national field (traditionalism, modernism, and avant-garde), each of them branching into further schools, orientations, and trends (from late-romanticism to dada and surrealism). In what regards ideology, the old representation of a bicoloured map, split between a reactionary and a modernizing camp³⁵, was replaced by the more accurate image of a six-block system: liberal, agrarian, traditionalist, antimodernist, far-right, far-left, with all the passing corridors in-between³⁶. The political fiction of the period has plenty of combinatorial options in store to merge politics and literature in products of entertainment more or less successful with the public or with the critics.

Diachronically, this rich spectrum comes after a long “dawning” period, starting in the 1860s, when the genre tried out various formulae: romantic realism (*Ciocoii vechi și noi* [*The Old and the New Parvenus*], 1863, by Nicolae Filimon), conspiracy mystery fiction (*Doritorii nebuni* [*The Crazy Dreamers*], 1864, by Dimitrie Bolintineanu), proto-Sci-Fi (*Finis Rumaniae*, 1873, by Al. N. Darius, *Spiritele anului 3000. Impresiuni de călătorie* [*The Spirits of the Year 3000. Travel Impressions*], 1875, by Demetriu G. Ionescu), or fictional autobiography (*Dinu Millian*, 1887, by C. Mille). Only one of them (Filimon’s parvenu story) represented a viable transplant, leading to Duiliu Zamfirescu’s classic “cycle of Comăneșteanu family”, before being canonized by E. Lovinescu as the *origo* of local realism. Taking in consideration all the other feeble streams emerging after 1900 (e.g.: the socialism and feminism of Sofia Nădejde and Smara, the commercial populism of Nicolae G. Rădulescu-Niger), the genre develops under the monopoly of the *roman à thèse*. Symmetrically, the spectrum will return to an even narrower monochrome after the installation of communism (1947), when Zhdanov’s code of socialist realist art production rules out any errancy from the “method of creation”. A few years before, during, and immediately after WW II (1940–1946), there is a “strange interlude” when the multiple aesthetic choices of the 1930s, still available, meet their ideological limitations due to the war and post-war censorship.

³⁵ Z. Ornea, *Tradiționalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea* [*Traditionalism and Modernity in the Third Decade*], București, Eminescu, 1980, p. 315.

³⁶ Sorin Alexandrescu, “Modernism și antimodernism. Din nou, cazul românesc” [“Modernism and Antimodernism. Again, the Romanian Case”], in Sorin Antohi (ed.), *Modernism și antimodernism. Noi perspective interdisciplinare* [*Modernism and Antimodernism. New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*], București, Cuvântul, 2008, pp. 130-150.

Therefore, in this troubled 20th century local history, typical of a Eastern European culture crossing several dictatorships, the relatively liberal literary system of the interwar decades provides the safest environment for the development of a genre highly dependent on non-literary contexts, with a low degree of autonomy or “refraction to external resolutions”, in Bourdieu’s terms³⁷. The dispersion of the genre in the 1920s–1930s prompts us to leave behind the “centralized” model (i.e., bulking the greatest part of its members into a core). Actually, we can only find few texts to represent what Irving Howe used to call “pure” political fiction: *Rătăcire* [Errancy] (1923) by Aida Vrioni, *Conservator & C-ia* (1924) by N. Davidescu, *Tigrii* [The Tigers] (1937) by Dragoș Protopopescu, *Gorila* (1938) by Liviu Rebreanu and maybe a couple of others. “Authentic” or “elemental” novels about politics (i.e., concerned *only* with politics) are rather the exception than the rule, given the inherent eclecticism of the genre poetics. Moreover, the text unanimously acclaimed as the archetypical representative of its class³⁸, *Gorila*, is more of a novel of manners, considering that it places centre-stage the “politicianist” Toma Pahonțu, an old-fashioned parvenu in the spirit of Nicolae Filimon’s protagonist Dinu Păturică, while leaving out of focus the leader of the far-right movement Dolinescu, more consistent and more up-to-date as a political actor.

In exchange, many novels migrate to the boundaries of the genre, confirming Derrida’s contention about the margins turning into sizeable “pockets”, accommodating most of a class’ worth. Instead of looking at political fiction as a territory with exact borders, it is more productive to conceive of it as an open field dissolving into adjoining fields, giving way to one or more crossings. The majority of texts interfere with “social” fiction (*Domnul deputat... [Mr. M.P...]*, 1921, by V. Demetrius; *Purgatoriul* [Purgatory], 1922, 1938, by Corneliu Moldovanu; *În cetatea idealului* [In the Citadel of the Ideal], 1923, by Dem. Theodorescu; *Babylon*, 1924, by Radu Cosmin; *Fecior de slugă* [A Servant’s Son], 1932, by N.D. Cocea; *Pentr-un petec de negreață* [For a Little Black Bush], 1934, by N.D. Cocea; *Ciulinii Bărăganului* [The Thistles of Bărăgan], 1943, by Panait Istrati), war fiction (*Ne leagă pământul* [The Land Binds Us], 1926, by Victor Papilian; *Moartea unei republici roșii* [Death of a Red Republic], 1924, by Felix Aderca; *1916*, 1936, by Felix Aderca), judiciary fiction (*Apărarea are cuvântul* [The Defence May Speak], 1934, by Petre Bellu; *Cazul doamnei Predescu* [Mrs. Predescu’s Case], 1935, by Petre Bellu), fiction of religious “ideas” (*În credința celor șapte sfeșnice* [The Cult of the Seven Candlesticks], 1933, by Victor Papilian; *Samson și noul Dagon* [Samson and the New Dagon], 1939, by A.L. Zissu), psychological fiction

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “Le champ littéraire”, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 1991, 89, p. 8.

³⁸ Written by a canonical author, *Gorila* is included (as a political novel) in all major literary histories, from G. Călinescu’s *Istoria literaturii române* (p. 736) to Nicolae Manolescu’s *Istoria critică a literaturii române. 5 secole de literatură* [The Critical History of Romanian Literature. 5 Centuries of Literature], Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008, p. 608.

(*Întoarcerea din rai*, 1934, by Mircea Eliade; *Surorile Veniamin* [*The Veniamin Sisters*], 1935, by Sergiu Dan; again *1916*, 1936, by Felix Aderca), experimental fiction (*Ruben Hirsch*, 1928–1929, by Scarlat Callimachi; *Un strigăt în noapte* [*A Scream in the Night*], 1933, by Adrian Hurmuz; *Fortul 13* [*Fort 13*], 1936, by Dragoș Protopopescu; *Fata Morgana*, 1937, by Gherasim Luca; *Prăvălia diavolului* [*The Devil's Shop*], 1942, by Mircea Streinul; *Cocktail*, 1942, by Victor Valeriu Martinescu), “Jewish” fiction (*Profeți și paiate* [*Profets and Clowns*], 1930, by Emil Dorian; “*Actele vorbește*” [*“Acts Speak”*], 1935, by I. Peltz; *Țară bună* [*Good Country*], 1936, by I. Peltz; *Trustul* [*The Trust*], 1938, by I. Călugăru), popular fiction (*Roșu, galben și albastru* [*Red, Yellow and Blue*], 1924, by Ion Minulescu; *Zvetlana*, 1930, by Octav Dessila; *Marșul femeilor* [*The March of Women*], 1933, by Alice Gabrielescu; *Tudor Ceaur Alcaz*, 1940–1942, by Ionel Teodoreanu; *Ochii strigoiului* [*The Eyes of the Undead*], 1942, by Cezar Petrescu).

Further subsets can be traced. For instance, war novels can specialize in the German occupation and in the retreat to Iași during WW I: *Strada Lăpușneanu. Cronică din 1917* [*Lăpușneanu Street. A Chronicle from 1917*] (1921) by Mihail Sadoveanu, again *Roșu, galben și albastru* (1924) by Ion Minulescu, *Războiul micului Tristan* [*Little Tristan's War*] (1937) by Mircea Gesticone. Or “social” fiction can delve into the social peripheries: *Ghetto veac XX* [*20th Century Ghetto*] (1934) by Ury Benador, *Bariera* [*The Barrier*] (1946) by G.M. Zamfirescu.

An interesting case is the eight-volume book series *În preajma revoluției* [*Around the Revolution*] (1932–1936) by C. Stere, usually labelled “political” by the critics because of the author’s high profile as a left-wing ideologist, though actually mixing long streams of *Bildungsroman*, memorial, family, social, or sentimental fiction.

Moreover, the “novelistic” boundaries of political fiction are just as permeable, engendering other transgressive forms: with autobiography (*Spre altă flacără. Spovedanie pentru învinși* [*To the Other Flame. The Confession of a Loser*], 1930, by Panait Istrati; *La răspântie de veacuri* [*At the Turn of the Century*], 1935, by Gala Galaction; *În noul Paradis* [*In the New Paradise*], 1941, by Lucia Dem. Bălășescu), anti-utopia (*Arimania sau Țara Buneiînțelegeri* [*Arimania or the Land of Goodwill*], 1923, by Iuliu Neagu-Negulescu), pamphlet (*Tablete din Țara de Kuty* [*Sketches from the Kuty Country*], 1933, by Tudor Arghezi), reportage (*Românii la Budapesta* [*The Romanians in Budapest*], 1920, by Radu Cosmin; *Mesia poate să aștepte* [*Messiah Can Wait*], 1933, by I. Ludo), or ideological essay (*Calea Calvarului* [*The Way of Calvary*], 1935, by A.L. Zissu). Some of them, though using fictional strategies (character portraiture, dialogue, surprising narrative modes) aren’t novels yet, but deserve being noted at the periphery of the genre.

Concluding Remarks

Judging many of these texts as political or not amounts to applying more or less tightly the criteria (i)-(iv) mentioned in the previous section, and especially the last one: how exactly can we rate the weight of “the political theme”, in the novel’s architecture of meanings, as “high” or “low”? And when should we consider it “enough” for the admittance of a novel in the class of political texts? Confronted with such a typical situation of a “qualitative” appreciation boiling down to a “quantitative” evaluation, I suppose that substantial help could be given by the tools of quantitative analysis.

The formalist approach has proved its usefulness in “recognizing” classes of texts based on the occurrence of certain language patterns, as shown in the experiments developed at the Stanford Literary Lab. The program DocuScope proved effective in operationalizing the concept of ideological novel, by charting and scatterplotting different linguistic categories³⁹. For that matter, the experiment contradicted Warren and Welleck’s claim that political fiction had no literary meaning whatsoever, as a strictly content-based class: actually, the ideological “content” comes all wrapped in its “form”, resulting in a distinctive rhetorical profile, maybe hard to see by a human, but detectible by means of stylometry.

Another way to use technology in order to detect a genre could be counting what the Stanford research team called “context words”. In our case, this more intuitive, though less exact, method⁴⁰ would consist in scanning for key-terms from the sphere of political institutions and concepts.

One way or another, computer-assisted analysis can be, if not decisive, at least instrumental in flagging the presence and weight of political storylines, political actors, and ideological inserts in a text, and eventually in shaping the genre database.

If this end seems far enough, the preliminary step of digitalizing the corpus of interwar Romanian fiction looks like a more tangible target. Before making these documents accessible and data-searchable, any attempt of mapping the field of political fiction remains only the site of a work in progress, with some materials in excess and some others missing.

³⁹ See Literary Lab, “Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment”, pp. 21-23. The DocuScope, a program run by Michael Witmore and the Stanford Literary Lab, detected a series of LATs (Language Action Types; i.e., words, strings of words, and language structures) characteristic of the ideological novel (Jacobin, anti-Jacobin and evangelical). According to the interpretation given by the authors, these LATs signal the presence of the argumentative style: oppositional particles (“but”, “however”, “not”), conditionals (indicating the realm of possibility), and the impersonal pronoun “it” (marking abstract discussions).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

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POLITICAL FICTION OR FICTION ABOUT POLITICS. HOW TO
OPERATIONALIZE A FLUID GENRE IN THE INTERWAR ROMANIAN
LITERATURE
(Abstract)

The marginal position into which political fiction was pushed, in modern times, is a predictable result of the literary canon relying on the strict principle of aesthetic autonomy. More than a few leading scholars dismissed it as a non-literary or a “bastardized” category, while others undertook constructing its theory. After reviewing some of their trials (and errors), the article puts forward a possible way of looking at the distribution of the genre in the interwar Romanian literary system. As an eclectic class, depending essentially on extra-aesthetic contexts, the political novel or the novel about politics was highly affected, in its fused narrative and ideological patterns, by the installation of communism. Until then, and particularly between the wars, writers experimented with many ways to interweave literature and ideology, resulting in a variegated and, sometimes, puzzling offer on the cultural market. Today’s researchers interested in mapping this dense landscape may find a valuable tool in the computer-assisted analysis.

Keywords: political fiction, genre theory, ideology, interwar Romanian literature, quantitative analysis.

FICȚIUNEA POLITICĂ SAU FICȚIUNEA DESPRE POLITICĂ. UN GEN FLUID ÎN LITERATURA ROMÂNĂ INTERBELICĂ*(Rezumat)*

Poziția periferică în care a fost proiectat romanul politic, în epoca modernă, e rezultatul predictibil al construcției canonului pe bazele autonomiei estetice. Unii cercetători l-au tratat ca pe o categorie non-literară sau „bastardă”, în vreme ce alții au încercat să-i construiască teorii mai mult sau mai puțin specializate. După ce trece în revistă câteva dintre aceste teorii, articolul de față propune un mod de a examina distribuția genului în sistemul literar românesc interbelic. Fiind o categorie eclectică, dependentă în cel mai înalt grad de contexte extra-estetice, romanul politic sau romanul despre politică a fost profund afectat, în straturile lui narative și ideologice fuzionate, de instalarea comunismului. Până atunci, și mai ales între cele două războaie mondiale, scriitorii au experimentat numeroase moduri de a combina literarul și ideologicul, dând naștere unei producții variate și, uneori, surprinzătoare, pe piața culturală a epocii. Azi, cercetătorii interesați să exploreze acest peisaj bogat ar putea găsi un instrument folositor în analiza cantitativă asistată de computer.

Cuvinte-cheie: roman politic, teoria genurilor, ideologie, literatura română interbelică, analiză cantitativă.

MAGDA WÄCHTER

THE ROMANIAN INTERWAR NOVEL. DEFINITIONAL ATTEMPTS AND CONTROVERSIES¹

The 1930s, when artistic effervescence was at its peak, witnessed “the most fertile theoretical dispute in the history of the Romanian novel”². Writers and critics of different ages and orientations defined their own positions on the matter at hand, sometimes disavowing their previous opinions or even their own creative recipes. Some realistic novelists gave precedence to psychological analysis, while others who preferred the novel of consciousness seemed to favour, at least in theory, the pure epic strain. Proustians, like Felix Aderca in some of his novels, did not always like Proust, while Gide aficionados, like Octav Șuluțiu, questioned the possibility of authenticity in literature. Critics wrote novels that did not fully correspond to their formerly held beliefs, as was the case of G. Ibrăileanu’s *Adela*, while writers turned theorists proposed original novelistic typologies. Rarely were the debates waged on a strictly literary ground. When they were, as in the case of the “Trăirists”³, the participants’ intention was to deny aesthetic values or to foretell the substitution of the novel with other genres or species in the near future. Most often, the favourite ground of interpretations was literary sociology, combined with ethnic psychology, philosophy or even political economy. The novel was deemed to be illustrative of literary reflection, literature was regarded as emblematic for the entire cultural landscape, while culture was symptomatic for the profile of an entire nation.

Moreover, the controversies concerned not so much the reality of the novel, already validated by representative works, such as *Ion* (1920) and *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*The Forest of the Hanged*] (1922) by Liviu Rebreanu, *Concert din muzică de Bach* [*A Concert of Bach’s Music*] (1927) by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Întunecare* [*Darkening*] (I–II, 1927–1928) by Cezar Petrescu and many

¹ This article is a revised and extended version of a paper presented at the International Conference „Zilele Sextil Pușcariu” (12-13 September 2019) and published, in Romanian, in the conference proceedings (*Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, 2019, 4, pp. 523-530). This is the first internationally available rendition.

² Al. Protopopescu, *Romanul psihologic românesc* [*The Romanian Psychological Novel*], București, Eminescu, 1978, p. 72.

³ “Trăirism” (from “a trăi”, meaning “to live”) is a pejorative term invented by the literary critic Șerban Cioculescu in order to delineate the excessive metaphysical “lived experience” promoted in the 1920s and 1930s by Nae Ionescu’s so-called “mystical school of thought”. The supporters of “trăirism” (among which could be mentioned Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran) are inspired mainly by the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, André Gide, Giovanni Papini, and José Ortega y Gasset.

others, as its conditions of possibility. Aspiring to catch up with European cultural debates on the obsolescence of the genre, Romanian literary theory reached a pinnacle of development, analysing simultaneously the beginning, the zenith and the decline of Romanian novelistic fiction, from a twofold European and Romanian perspective. While critics engaged in such discussions mostly from a polemical standpoint, their arguments reflected quite accurately the contradictory situation of literature, located at the intersection of the most varied trends and orientations, at the border of other genres or species, such as the novella, the essay or the reportage, and in a cultural space that was still insufficiently clearly defined. What this debate also highlighted was a passion for denial and self-denial grafted on a native philosophical nihilism, characteristic of both traditionalism and modernism, which paradoxically converged on this aspect.

Thus, amid the controversies over the alleged non-existence of Romanian culture and literature, the emergent cultural and literary works contradicted the shortcomings that had been pointed out by the theorists. While the absence of the novel was hotly disputed, the novel thrived without disturbing the fervour of the debates. Even the problem of theoretical disputes became the object of theoretical disputes. Some of the writers, such as Camil Petrescu, complained, at that very time, about the lack of polemics, seeing this as the symptom of a worrisome literary parasitism⁴, while others, like Eugene Ionesco, deplored the fact that “the most significant achievement of one hundred years of Romanian groping in the dark” was “the discussion of the most significant achievement of one hundred years of Romanian groping in the dark”⁵. In any case, in the late 1920s, while the controversy regarding the conditions of possibility of the Romanian novel was very much ongoing, the whole array of novelistic forms had been experimented with, from “Sămănătorism”⁶ to the anti-novel. As Al. Protopopescu noted, the novel appeared to know his future even better than its past⁷.

The so-called “discord” around the crisis of the novel that began in the 1920s and continued partially in the following decade raises some legitimate question marks. N. Davidescu talked about the “agony” of a literary genre⁸, Felix Aderca wondered about the novel’s “decline” or “decay”⁹, Eugen Ionescu spoke about the

⁴ Camil Petrescu, “Polemiciile” [“Polemics”] (1924), in *Opinii și atitudini* [*Opinions and Attitudes*]. Anthology and foreword by Marin Bucur, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1962, p. 168.

⁵ Eugen Ionescu, *Nu* [*No*] (1934), București, Humanitas, 1991, p. 153.

⁶ “Sămănătorism” was a conservative, Romanticism-inspired ideology and literary movement promoted by the *Sămănătorul* review, in the first decade of the 20th century. Its main theoretician was the literary critic and historian Nicolae Iorga.

⁷ Al. Protopopescu, *Romanul psihologic românesc*, p. 47.

⁸ N. Davidescu, “Agonia unui gen literar” [“The Agony of a Literary Genre”] (1921), in *Opinii românești despre roman* [*Romanian Perspectives on the Novel*], II. Anthology by Justin Constantinescu, Octavian Lohon, Pompiliu-Mihai Constantinescu, București, Sigma, 2009, pp. 26-28.

⁹ Felix Aderca, “Descompunerea unui gen literar” [“The Decay of a Literary Genre”] (1928), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 153-155.

“death” of the novel¹⁰, Mihai Ralea wondered why Romanian literature did not have novels¹¹, and so did Nicolae Iorga in an article from 1890¹². On the other hand, Perpessicius celebrated the flourishing of the novel in 1925, noting ironically that it had always been the nightmare of Romanian literature, or “better said, the American uncle everyone is talking about and waiting for and who is never going to arrive”¹³. The subtlety of the interpretations and classifications, the intervention of novelists turned critics and essayists attested, beyond the actual reality of the literary works, a theoretical complexity that far exceeded the question whether there were any good novels in Romanian literature. Writers and critics spoke, while trying to answer the initial question, about Proustianism, Gideanism, intuitionism, phenomenology, existentialism, the indirect novel, the parodic novel, the novel of ideas or the pure novel. Ibrăileanu’s dichotomy between creation and analysis led to original distinctions, formulated by the novelists themselves, between dynamic and static novels (Anton Holban)¹⁴ or between observative and resolute literature (Ionel Teodoreanu)¹⁵.

Romanian literature seemed fully synchronised with European literature in theory, especially since the very problem of the crisis of the novel lay under the sign of this synchronisation. However, the question of the non-existence of the novel in our literature followed a traditionalist, “Sămănătorist” line, anticipated by N. Iorga’s ideas, with even older roots. In an article from 1890, N. Iorga asked “Why don’t we have a novel?”. He identified the same causes that were to be highlighted a few decades later: the indifference of the public, the social circumstances of the artist’s life, the lack of professional writers and critics, and the limited range of themes, revolving around “brigandry”, “fantasy pessimism” and pornography¹⁶. Speaking from a “Sămănătorist” perspective, Iorga criticised the Romanian novel in almost Lovinescian terms, concluding that “in order for it to live, it needs an eminently modern social category”¹⁷. Advocating a transition from

¹⁰ Eugen Ionescu, “Moartea de mâine a romanului” [“The Novel’s Upcoming Death”] (1934), in *Război cu toată lumea. Publicistică românească* [At War with Everybody. The Romanian Journalistic Writings], I. Edited and bibliography by Mariana Vartic and Aurel Sasu, București, Humanitas, 1992, pp. 61-62.

¹¹ Mihai Ralea, “De ce nu avem roman?” [“Why Don’t We Have a Novel?”] (1927), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 121-129.

¹² Nicolae Iorga, “De ce n-avem roman?” [“Why Don’t We Have a Novel?”] (1890), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, I, pp. 244-249.

¹³ Perpessicius, “Înflorirea romanului” [“The Blossoming of the Novel”] (1925), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, p. 58.

¹⁴ Anton Holban, “Testament literar” [“Literary Testimony”] (1937), in *Romanul românesc interbelic. Dezbateri teoretice, polemici, opinii critice* [The Romanian Interwar Novel. Theoretical Debates, Polemics, Critical Opinions]. Anthology, foreword, critical analyses, notes, dictionary, chronology and bibliography by Carmen Mușat, București, Humanitas, 1998, p. 75.

¹⁵ Dinu Pillat, *Mozaic istorico-literar. Secolul XX* [A Literary-Historical Mosaic. The Twentieth Century], București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969, pp. 33-35.

¹⁶ Nicolae Iorga, “De ce n-avem roman?”, pp. 244-249.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

rural to urban themes and from social to consciousness issues, Eugen Lovinescu made similar accusations against “the world of outlaws and horse thieves” or “the stories of old men smoking their pipes, in the half light of dusk”¹⁸. Two opposing literary formulas came together to ascertain the absence or failings of the novel. The same happened a few decades later, except that the divergent literary trends were more numerous, the reasons were also more varied, and the solutions were often disconcerting. What, then, were the causes, symptoms and remedies of the alleged crisis of the novel reported in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century? If there really was a crisis, what did it consist of?

The first argument that was put forward was a purely quantitative one: we have too few novels. While, at the end of the nineteenth century, N. Iorga considered himself perhaps too generous by stating that “we have at most six novels that can be read”¹⁹, the situation did not seem to be very different to some writers even a few decades later. In 1934, Eugen Ionescu predicted the death of the novel in no more than ten years, noting that barely ten literary books written after 1920 deserved recognition²⁰. Even in 1938, after the publication of the great Romanian fictional narratives, there were voices that said that “the Romanian novelist does not know what a novel is”. This statement belonged to G. Călinescu²¹.

Other analysts of the problem, such as Tudor Arghezi, foresaw, on the contrary, the danger of mediocrity arising from the abundance of novels that were written at that time, claiming that there were “so many novelists and so few writers”²². Given “the unexpected surge of novels in recent years”, G. Călinescu emphasised the ineptitude of our literary critics, concluding, in a 1934 text, that “if Anatole France had been Romanian, he could not have made a career here”, and that “if it were judged by the measures of our critics, all world literature would be greatly diminished”²³. This time, it was not about the lack of novels, but about the incompetence of critics, to which was added the readership’s unpreparedness for the novel and for literature in general. In the aforementioned article from 1890, N. Iorga also noticed the indifference of a Frenchified readership, accustomed to reading foreign literature. At the opposite end, Mihai Ralea considered that readers lacked appropriate skills because of the Romanians’ social and cultural backwardness. Vehement polemicists, like Emil Cioran or Eugen Ionescu, ridiculed the Romanian public’s lack of appetite for culture, for the higher forms of thinking

¹⁸ Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*] (1926), II, București, Minerva, 1973, pp. 209-210.

¹⁹ Nicolae Iorga, “De ce n-avem roman?”, p. 246.

²⁰ Eugen Ionescu, “Anul literar 1934 și ceilalți ani” [“The Literary Year 1934 and the Other Years”] (1934), in *Război cu toată lumea*, p. 68.

²¹ G. Călinescu, “Câteva cuvinte despre roman” [“A Few Words about the Novel”] (1938), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 497.

²² Tudor Arghezi, “Roman, roman...” [“Novel, Novel...”] (1933), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 308.

²³ G. Călinescu, “Nici o graniță” [“No Borders”] (1934), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 375.

as a whole. On the other hand, Camil Petrescu, N. Davidescu and Ion Vinea invoked the discrepancy between the outdated habit of reading novels and the fast pace of modern life. In 1918, the follower of intuitionism and phenomenology wondered:

Who has the patience to read a novel today? Who even has time to read a novel? Old maids, country maids, war invalids, students in boarding school and a few other categories of their kind! [...] The age of electricity, airplanes and automobiles no longer affords time for novels to be written and read²⁴.

An obsolete genre, the novel was about to fade, just like the epic, the fable or the ancient epigram, being replaced by the theatre. Convinced, in turn, that the novel “no longer belongs to our era”, Ion Vinea predicted in 1925 its substitution with the reportage or the poem-novel²⁵. Pericle Martinescu, convinced that the readers’ standards had risen, went even further, recommending the replacement of the genre with music, which was much more appropriate to the modern taste²⁶. The discrediting of the novel as a sovereign literary genre and its replacement with the short story were also foreshadowed by Ovid Densusianu in 1921, who blamed this on the reading public, more precisely on the predominantly female readership. With the emancipation of women and their participation in real life, the critic explained, escapist reading would inevitably lose its appeal²⁷.

Thus, in the opinion of many writers and theorists, the novel was nearing its end, because of its numerical precarity or because of an overabundance of published works, because of an audience that was either unfit for culture or too evolved to be content with mere reading. In the same decade, in a 1932 note, G. Călinescu complained that the “Romanian youth do not read literary books of any kind”²⁸. On the contrary, Mihail Sebastian expressed his dissatisfaction that reading was such a widespread phenomenon of the times that it had come to replace living itself²⁹.

Whether or not there were good novels, readers and critics remained, for the time being, uncertain. The fact is that there was no consensus between writers and society. Neither did the creator enjoy favourable conditions for creation, nor did society benefit from the active and effective participation of the creator. The work

²⁴ Camil Petrescu, “Între dramă și roman” [“Between Drama and Novel”] (1918), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, I, p. 513.

²⁵ Ion Vinea, “Romanul” [“The Novel”] (1925), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 49.

²⁶ Pericle Martinescu, “Improvizații pe tema crizei romanului” [“Sketches on the Crisis of the Novel”] (1938), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 505-506.

²⁷ Ovid Densusianu, “Viitorul romanului” [“The Future of the Novel”] (1921), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 23-25.

²⁸ G. Călinescu, *Gâlceava înțeleptului cu lumea. Pseudojurnal de moralist* [The Quarrel of the Wise Man with the World. Pseudo-diary of a Moralist], I (1927-1939), București, Minerva, 1973, p. 95.

²⁹ Mihail Sebastian, “Scurt pamflet împotriva omului literar” [“A Short Pamphlet against the Man of Letters”] (1931), in *Eseuri, cronici, memorial* [Essays, Chronicles, Memorial]. Edited and foreword by Cornelia Ștefănescu, București, Minerva, 1972, pp. 683-685.

of the novelist, Iorga warned in the 1890s, demands sacrifice, time, consistency and requires a certain way of life, i.e., “a time to write, a specific number of pages to be written every day, some rest for the animal machine, and nothing else”³⁰. According to Cezar Petrescu, the reason why we had so many talented storytellers but no novelists was because the novel involved contact with life, and Romanian writers were usually divorced from society, isolated in the world of cafes or literary soirees. Unable to make a living from writing, they were forced to do journalism, “to doze off in an office, to waste their energy and freshness of thought, elsewhere than in literature”, saving only “the crumbs” for creation³¹. There could be added other vices as well, such as the mirage of luxury and the noisy glory that had replaced genuine intellectual concerns, a phenomenon that was to be exposed by G. Călinescu almost ten years later³² or the envy and petty rivalry between the writers, incited by Camil Petrescu³³. As for the Romanian society and its adherence to aesthetic values, the situation seemed to be really worrying, not only in the view of modernists, but also in that of more conservative spirits. Advocating for the social novel, meant to mirror the future development of our literature, G. Ibrăileanu lamented in 1919 the simplicity of our social life, the insufficiently broad cultural horizons and the lack of a Romanian literary tradition³⁴.

Was, then, the social novel the sole chance of our literature? Was the Romanian society mature enough to support the rise of the novel? Did our novel stand to gain from a reality pact? The sociological arguments advanced by Mihai Ralea in his well-known essay of 1927, “Why don’t we have a novel?”, provide an answer of perfect sceptical clarity. Analysed in terms of its psychological, ethnic, social and cultural determinants, the novel would have little success in our literature, according to Ralea the critic. In his opinion, we lacked a tradition of the genre, namely the epic; the cultural framework was non-existent, and the social one left much to be desired. If the novel appeared as a result of the invention of printing and the dominance of the middle classes, in Romania this class did not exist before the end of the nineteenth century. The Oriental-agrarian structure of our society, devoid of a cultivated public and indebted to a primitive, collective, gregarious mentality, had rendered impossible the development of a genre that favoured the individual over the masses, complexity over uniformity, and character development over atmosphere. To all this would be added elements characteristic of our ethnic psychology. By its nature, the novel presupposed a dramatic conflict that

³⁰ Nicolae Iorga, “De ce n-avem roman?”, p. 248.

³¹ Cezar Petrescu, “Roman românesc” [“Romanian Novel”] (1923), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 35.

³² G. Călinescu, “Romanul și viața modernă” [“The Novel and the Modern Life”] (1932), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 236.

³³ Camil Petrescu, “Scriitorii între ei” [“Writers by Themselves”] (1925), in *Opinii și atitudini*, p. 172.

³⁴ G. Ibrăileanu, “Literatura de mâine” [“The Forthcoming Literature”] (1919), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, I, p. 519.

determined the destiny of the hero, yet what predominated in our social life was not the struggle, but the “transactional spirit of compromise”. “We adapt and reconcile too easily”, the critic concluded, adding that we are “too kind-hearted, too weak, too easily forgetful or forgiving” and that life in our country is limited to being “easy, comfortable, enjoyable”³⁵. Such a society is naturally reflected in the world of literary characters, critiqued especially by modernist writers such as by Camil Petrescu:

One cannot produce novels or even literature if all there is are heroes who eat five olives for three weeks or who smoke a cigarette for two years, a tavern in a mountain borough and a three-coop household of a teacher from Moldova. Literature naturally tackles problems of conscience³⁶.

“A snobbery that is characteristic of our rural nation” lay at the origin of these claims, as G. Călinescu polemically added³⁷, although on other occasions he himself condemned the mundane mentality of Romanian literature and the writers’ lack of interest in ideal values.

Another indictment of the characters that prevailed in Romanian novels was undertaken by Mircea Eliade in the next decade, to support the need for a theoretical consciousness of the world:

I do not know if there is in Romanian literature a single character who committed suicide out of despair or because of a simple metaphysical drama. But there are many who have committed suicide out of love, or boredom, or hunger. In the Romanian novel, there is no mystic, no exalted or cynical man. The drama of existence does not descend to the roots of being. Romanian characters are still far from fighting in the great contemporary battle for freedom, human destiny, death and failure³⁸.

In Eliade’s opinion, the solution would be myth-characters, exemplified solely by Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion*. Thus, the novel would not have much to gain on the social field, in the context of our culture’s “anti-urban” mentality, as Șerban Cioculescu called it in a polemical text on the gallery of local Romanian characters, composed of “boyars and boyars’ wives, draped in kindness and philanthropy, peasants who rejoice that the scale of justice is well-balanced, greedy townsmen alienated from their peasant roots, clerks turned into automatons by their routine jobs and intellectuals without moral support, etc.”³⁹. It was not the theoretical consciousness of the world that the hero or the author lacked, in the opinion of the

³⁵ Mihai Ralea, “De ce nu avem roman?”, pp. 121-129.

³⁶ Camil Petrescu, “De ce nu avem roman” [“Why We Don’t Have a Novel”] (1936), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 130.

³⁷ G. Călinescu, “Camil Petrescu, teoretician al romanului” [“Camil Petrescu, Theorist of the Novel”] (1939), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 513.

³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Fragmentarium* (1939), București, Humanitas, 2008, p. 91.

³⁹ Șerban Cioculescu, “Romanul românesc 1933” [“The Romanian Novel of 1933”] (1934), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 336.

critic, but much less than that: the elementary lucidity necessary for seeing the world clearly. The only Romanian writer who could have been a truly talented novelist was Ion Luca Caragiale. Unfortunately, he did not write novels, Cioculescu concluded⁴⁰. In his plea for the subjective novel, Pompiliu Constantinescu also believed that the social novel did not represent the future, but the past of the Romanian novel⁴¹.

Most disputes were waged between the objective and the subjective model, between the realistic and the psychological novel (with different variations), in line with the distinction proposed by G. Ibrăileanu. As a rule, modernist writers and critics leaned towards the Ionic model of the novel, while traditionalists opted for the Doric⁴². However, there were many exceptions and visions that transcended this separation. Marcel Proust, for example, much discussed in Romanian literary journalism, was the novelistic model par excellence for Camil Petrescu, while for Felix Aderca – also a modernist writer – he was the main culprit for the demise of the novel⁴³. While some authors adopted the Proustian conception early on, others, like Al. Philippide, believed that the psychological novel “is against the nature of our literature, therefore against the nature of the Romanians, who resolutely reject the dry and precise analysis” and “metaphysical-moral speculations”⁴⁴. G. Călinescu’s reluctance to embrace Proustianism is well known. In the opinion of the great critic, what the Romanian writers lacked was not analytical virtuosity, but contact with life:

It would seem that the Romanian writer does not live his life and, in most cases, this is true. Our novelist is a man of letters, a craftsman who takes a theme, just like the blacksmith takes a rod of iron, heats it, beats it, twists it, finally gives it a regular form, but the metal with which he works is a substance inadequate to the object he makes, so everything boils down to the level of an abstract exercise⁴⁵.

It is difficult to ascertain the situation of the Romanian novel between the two World Wars and to identify what its alleged precarity in relation to other literary species and the Western novel resided in⁴⁶. Was it a phenomenon of decay and agony, or one of overabundant creation? Did people read too much or too little?

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Pompiliu Constantinescu, “Realism și construcție epică în roman” [“Realism and the Narrative Construction of the Novel”] (1943), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 562-564.

⁴² According to Nicolae Manolescu in *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [Noah’s Arch. Essay on the Romanian Novel], I–III, București, Minerva, 1980–1983, the “doric” stands for the traditional model of the novel, while the “ionic” represents the psychological modern novel. The third model of the novel, namely the “corintic” one, is specific to the fragmentary and relativist postmodern fiction.

⁴³ See Felix Aderca, “Descompunerea unui gen literar”, pp. 153-155.

⁴⁴ Alexandru Philippide, “Tradiția literară românească” [“The Romanian Literary Tradition”] (1936), apud *Romanul românesc interbelic*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ G. Călinescu, “Romanul și viața modernă”, p. 235.

⁴⁶ See also Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Review*, 28, 2019, 1, pp. 55-71.

Did we or did we not have a competent set of literary reviewers and a readership that was receptive to aesthetic values? Can we speak of a certain primitivism of Romanian culture, reduced to the problem of “brigandry”, in Nicolae Iorga’s terms, in a literary context marked by debates about Proustianism, Gideanism, existentialism and phenomenology? Did the Romanian novelist lack experience, contact with life, the support of the state, lucidity, character, culture or the theoretical consciousness of the world? Modernists generally accused our “rural” traditionalism, conservatives ridiculed the “fashion” of Europeanism and the “evils” of the modern world; philosophers speculatively reconstructed the decline of the genre, starting from the era of German idealism, and sociologists described a Romanian world that did not lend itself easily to fictionalisation in the novel. Nihilists like Emil Cioran or Eugen Ionescu denounced in metaphysical terms the relativity of the novel – inevitably impure genre and stated that, ultimately, any creation belonged exclusively to the divine.

In parallel with the discussion about the conditions of possibility for the Romanian novel, the prospect of a return to the forms of the pure epic was advanced, in light of the exhaustion of innovative, metaphysical or analytical formulas. Cezar Petrescu, for instance, pleaded for a return to the chronicle type of novel⁴⁷; like Mircea Eliade, Paul Zarifopol suggested the detective novel, which could be the “saving solution for a humanity that is administered, in marketable doses, flaccid literature under the pretext of psychological depth”⁴⁸; Al. Philippide noted that the traditional adventure novel was the only species not cultivated in our literature. For Al. Philippide, as for Ovidiu Papadima, the absence of the great Romanian city from the novel was one of the drawbacks of this form of narrative⁴⁹. In the opinion of Mihail Sebastian, the lack of representations of the province in the Romanian novel was another major problem⁵⁰.

Besides the solutions addressing the typology, framework and themes of the novel, other suggestions as to how to put an end to the crisis of the novel were aimed at changing the narrative perspective as a whole and revising the entire novelistic concept. For instance, Mihail Sebastian recommended, inspired by André Gide, the pure novel of the free acts, that is, “the event without consequences, without teachings, without poems, without any other meaning than that of mere anecdotal relationships”⁵¹. He explained that the erotic, historical, pastoral, naturalistic, realistic or romantic novel had all laid emphasis to a far

⁴⁷ Cezar Petrescu, “Romanul cronică, roman trăit” [“The Novel as Chronicle, the Novel as Experience”] (1934), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 348-349.

⁴⁸ Paul Zarifopol, “Literatura onestă” [“Honest Literature”] (1934), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, p. 346.

⁴⁹ Alexandru Philippide, “Romanul de aventuri și societatea românească” [“The Adventure Novel and the Romanian Society”] (1938), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 468-469.

⁵⁰ Mihail Sebastian, “Dosar de creație. Jurnal de roman” [“Creative Report. A Novel’s Log”] (1929), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 182-184.

⁵¹ Mihail Sebastian, *Eseuri, cronici, memorial*, p. 46.

greater extent on “psychology, moral, idyll, poetry, philosophy and history than on story and storytelling”⁵². In a different register, Vladimir Streinu proposed the solution of the so-called “novel novel”, likely to strike the right balance between inner and outer dynamics, between psychological analysis and pure narrativity⁵³. “Confessionalism”, the “penchant for analysis”, “resolutive” and “observative” literature, pure novel, novel-poem, and the novel novel were just some of the formulas that contradicted G. Călinescu in his conviction that the Romanian novel itself was missing from Romanian literature or that Romanian criticism was petty, “full of personal insults, conventional and disproportionate adulation, ignorance or blatant bad faith”⁵⁴. The critic complained about the “negative storms” that ravaged our literary press and recommended a breath of “understanding and generosity”⁵⁵. As regards the question of the crisis of the novel, he ironically suggested a specific theme, derived from the great literary works and treatises, namely: the history of the young man who wanted to get to live by all means and subordinated all his emotions to this passion, the history of the ambitious, idealistic man, ready to face any set-backs on his road to glory, the history of the unsatisfied woman, the history of the middle-aged man tired of his marriage, etc.⁵⁶. Even more acerbically, Tudor Arghezi offered a recipe for the novel that would guarantee its success: a novel “must feature at least two people of the opposite sex, forming a couple, mixed with a comic character, plus a tragic one, with a prodigal man and a miser, and among them some fish, some saints and some rascals and a great virtue”. Then, the presentation of extras, the furniture, the scenery, a psychological analysis and, at the end, “suicide, accident, madness or regrets”⁵⁷.

Constantly oscillating between seriousness and playfulness, between affirmative impulses and passionate scepticism, the analysis of the novel undertaken in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century fully confirmed the existence, variety and magnitude of the epic creation itself. Neither the novel, nor the criticism or the reading public were missing from our literature; neither the great city, nor the province were nowhere to be found; neither the inventiveness, nor the analytical or the metaphysical spirit were absent from the novels of this period. Romanian writers did demonstrate they possessed lucidity and humour. All those discussions about the non-existence of the novel simply affirmed the existence of the novel, in a spirit of “discord” that proved to be very favourable to Romanian novelistic endeavours.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Vladimir Streinu, “Romanul roman” [“The Novelistic Novel”] (1935), in *Opinii românești despre roman*, II, pp. 387-391.

⁵⁴ G. Călinescu, *Gâlceava înțeleptului cu lumea*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁵⁶ G. Călinescu, “Câteva cuvinte despre roman”, p. 498.

⁵⁷ Tudor Arghezi, “Roman, roman...”, p. 309.

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THE ROMANIAN INTERWAR NOVEL.
DEFINITIONAL ATTEMPTS AND CONTROVERSIES
(Abstract)

Inspired by the European debates, Romanian literary theory focused on the problem of the novel during the fourth and the fifth decades of the twentieth century. Critics and prose writers representing different artistic directions came together to disapprove of the Romanian novel from a philosophical, social or ethnical perspective rather than from a literary one. While both traditionalists and modernists brought into question the very existence of the local epic creation, the latter succeeded in illustrating most of the modern trends and reached full maturity. Therefore, the theoretical dispute on the conditions of the novel seemed to suggest a nihilist passion specific to both traditional and modern Romanian literary thinking.

Keywords: novel, interwar, polemics, nihilism, literary theory.

ROMANUL ROMÂNESC INTERBELIC.
ÎNCERCĂRI DE DEFINIRE ȘI CONTROVERSE

(*Rezumat*)

Inspirată de dezbaterile din spațiul cultural occidental, teoria literară românească din deceniile al patrulea și al cincilea ale secolului trecut ia în discuție problema romanului. Critici și prozatori de orientări din cele mai diverse se întâlnesc pentru a-și exprima reticența față de această specie, mai curând din punct de vedere filosofic, social și etic decât literar. În timp ce tradiționaliștii și moderniștii pun sub semnul întrebării însăși existența romanului, acesta își află maturitatea deplină, abordând majoritatea formulelor narative la modă. Astfel, disputa teoretică pe marginea condițiilor de posibilitate ale romanului sugerează mai degrabă o vervă nihilistă specifică deopotrivă tradiționalismului și modernismului românesc.

Cuvinte-cheie: roman, interbelic, polemică, nihilism, teorie literară.

LILIANA BURLACU

LE GHETTO DANS LE ROMAN ROUMAIN DE L'ENTRE-DEUX-GUERRES

Le roman urbain roumain, qui s'intéresse aux espaces marginaux tels que le bidonville, le quartier, la périphérie, les banlieues, n'est pourtant pas le seul à les explorer : le roman des mystères, plus tard celui des mœurs, puis le roman réaliste disposeront du même topos. La métropole, dont le processus rapide de modernisation a été observé dans la littérature dès le début du XX^e siècle, se révèle, non seulement pour les sociologues, mais pour les écrivains aussi, comme « organisme », pas comme « création humaine inerte »¹ dans le roman des décennies suivantes, les années 1930–1950, par G.M. Zamfirescu (*Maidanul cu dragoste* [*Le terrain vague avec amour*], 1933) et Eugen Barbu (*Groapa* [*La fosse*], 1957) ; les communautés périphériques représentées dans les romans, des faubouriens aux allogènes, révèlent des typologies et des interrelations singulières qui pourraient bien être influencées par la culture et la moralité urbaines, mais aussi l'influencer, à leur tour.

Sélectionnée pour son impact métonymique, l'image de la rue devient un symbole de la ville par excellence : de Cezar Petrescu à George Călinescu, l'Avenue de la Victoire de Bucarest exprime, dans de nombreux romans de la première moitié du XX^e siècle, l'essence même du centre : « le creuset de la noblesse de premier rang de Bucarest »². Lorsqu'un autre romancier, I. Peltz, entend redonner à une communauté « fermée » de la visibilité en prose, il oppose l'image d'une rue apparemment dénuée de symbolisme, l'Avenue Văcărești, au même « espace privilégié par excellence », de l'Avenue de la Victoire. « Pour le lecteur peu initié, et même pour le bon lecteur, avoue l'écrivain dans une interview, l'Avenue Văcărești représente un quartier ordinaire, qui s'ouvre à la plaisanterie ou à l'ironie. L'Avenue de la Victoire est bien connue par l'Avenue Văcărești ; l'Avenue Văcărești, en revanche, est ignorée par l'Avenue de la Victoire et pas seulement par elle, mais par tout le monde »³. I. Peltz s'engage à une radiographie

¹ Robert E. Park, « Prefață » [Préface], in Louis Wirth, *Ghetoul* [*Le Ghetto*]. Traduit par Lăcrămioara Juverdeanu. Étude introductive de Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, Iași, Editura Universității « Al. I. Cuza », 2012, p. 35.

² Ovidiu Morar, *Scritori evrei din România* [*Ecrivains Juifs de Roumanie*], București, Hasefer, 2014, p. 122.

³ Camil Baltazar, « De vorbă cu d-l I. Peltz, cu prilejul apariției romanului *Calea Văcărești* » [*Entretien avec M. I. Peltz, à l'occasion de la publication du roman *L'Avenue Văcărești**], *România literară*, 2, 1933, 87, p. 3.

complète de l'Avenue Văcărești, ouvrant, en 1933, la série des romans qui mettra en premier plan une communauté minoritaire, qui venait d'être incluse légalement dans la nation roumaine depuis peu de temps⁴, la communauté juive. Le romancier fixe ainsi l'image de l'artère emblématique du quartier juif de Bucarest, en utilisant, à l'intérieur de l'intrigue, le réseau complexe de rues des quartiers Văcărești-Dudești⁵, dans une reconstitution monographique de la communauté elle-même. Et même si on peut délimiter sans effort les quartiers sensibles à l'antisémitisme chez Peltz, sa cartographie conserve, tout de même, des frontières lâches, minées par la perméabilité ethnique⁶ et par la mobilité de ses membres⁷. Ainsi, dans le ghetto illustré par l'écrivain roumain, deux des éléments considérés comme représentatifs dans la conception de Loïc Wacquant sont annulés : l'augmentation de l'homogénéité ethnique et les frontières imperméables⁸.

A comparer les définitions offertes par deux dictionnaires⁹ de l'entre-deux-guerres, on constate qu'on ne considère pas le ghetto comme une réalité roumaine, mais comme une réalité étrangère, italienne ou orientale (Lazăr Șăineanu), alors que la définition proposée par August Scriban insiste, une décennie plus tard, sur le caractère volontaire de l'agglomération qui caractérise le quartier juif.

Cela explique probablement pourquoi le concept de « ghetto » reste assez usité dans le texte littéraire : il est présent dans la prose roumaine de la troisième décennie du XX^e siècle seulement dans deux titres (Ury Benador, *Ghetto Veac XX* [*Ghetto XX^e Siècle*] et I. Ludo, *Ghettouri* [*Ghettos*]). Ici, de même, le ghetto renvoie à sa signification historique¹⁰, générale¹¹, difficile à repérer sur le plan local, plutôt métaphoriquement associée à une réclusion sentimentale, chez I. Peltz et Ury Benador. Jusqu'aux valences atroces qu'il va prendre la décennie suivante,

⁴ L'émancipation de la population juive se produit à la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale, par le Traité des minorités (1919), suivie de son inscription dans la Constitution roumaine, en 1923.

⁵ Les rues Lazăr, Olteni, Traian, Carol, auxquelles correspondront, en miroir, Lipsani, Smârdani, Gabroveni, Bărăție, Sf. Apostoli, du roman *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* [*Feu à l'Auberge aux Tilleuls*], de 1934. L'information devient encore plus précieuse dans le contexte où la zone est fortement affectée par les démolitions de la période communiste.

⁶ La communauté des quartiers évoqués est plutôt multiculturelle, l'auteur rajoutant à la majorité juive des personnages d'origine roumaine, grecque, tsigane, albanaise.

⁷ Camelia Crăciun, « Représentations de la vie et de l'espace juifs dans la littérature roumaine de l'entre-deux-guerres. Le Bucarest juif reflété dans les œuvres d'Isac Peltz », *Etudes Balkaniques*, 2010, 17, pp. 93-94.

⁸ Loïc Wacquant, « Repenser le ghetto. Du sens commun au concept sociologique », *Idées économiques et sociales*, 2012, 167, p. 18.

⁹ Lazăr Șăineanu, *Dicționar universal al limbii române* [*Dictionnaire universel de la langue roumaine*], IV^{ème} édition, București, Scrisul Românesc, 1929 ; August Scriban, *Dicționarul limbii românești* [*Le dictionnaire de la langue roumaine*], București, Institutul de Arte Grafice « Presa Bună », 1939.

¹⁰ I. Ludo, *Ghettouri* [*Ghettos*], București, « Cartea », 1939, p. 21.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

le ghetto de I. Peltz se rapproche sensiblement de ce que Loïc Wacquant appelle le « quartier ethnique », dont les habitants étaient liés plus par des « affinités culturelles et une concentration socioprofessionnelle » que par « des préjugés et des discriminations inflexibles »¹². Des études démographiques identifient, à partir de 1878 et jusqu'à la fin du XIX^e siècle, à Bucarest, pas moins que cinq de ces zones avec une concentration considérable de population juive¹³, admettant, cependant, l'existence de cette population en dehors des zones d'intérêt résidentiel et commercial. I. Peltz, à son tour, fait mention des rues vers lesquelles se dirige la bourgeoisie juive¹⁴.

Assumée par l'engagement de l'auteur de rester authentique, l'option de Peltz pour Văcărești-Dudești, l'un des quartiers résidentiels les plus pauvres, est naturelle, le quartier représentant son lieu de naissance. Si l'identification du quartier juif avec les banlieues roumaines, et, dans une certaine mesure, avec les « banlieues de partout »¹⁵, est, selon certains chercheurs, la preuve claire de son acculturation¹⁶, pour Peltz, le terme reste inapproprié, ne couvrant pas la complexité existentielle de sa communauté (« les profondeurs de la vie »).

Affirmant à un coreligionnaire à propos de *L'Avenue Văcărești* que ce ne serait pas « seulement du faubourg juif, mais de la vie ici, dans le ghetto », Peltz ne se contredit qu'en apparence¹⁷. Son ghetto n'est pas *de jure*, les réalités vont malheureusement changer seulement dans quelques années¹⁸, mais *de facto*, le terme de « faubourg » n'ayant pas la capacité d'exprimer sémantiquement les dommages moraux et les conséquences psychiques d'une telle coexistence, bien que la pauvreté et la marginalisation restent des dérivés constants dans le cas de la banlieue comme du ghetto. Le panoptique des personnages de I. Peltz du roman *L'Avenue Văcărești* reste, à cet égard, impressionnant :

L'Avenue Văcărești rassemble ses habitants. Du lointain du centre, ils retournent dans les rues étroites, débordantes de ténèbres et de mystère, de hauts boutiquiers couronnés de souffrance, des filles minces en blouses légères, étonnées et fatiguées, des vieux jetons, torturés au tour de taille, des matrones aussi vastes que des armoires... Les salons de thé se sont rallumés une fois de plus... Les garçons aux longs

¹² Loïc Wacquant, « Repenser le ghetto... », p. 23.

¹³ Radu Ștefan Vergatti, « Dinamica demografică și aspecte socio-profesionale ale obștii evreiești din București (1810–1939) » [« La dynamique démographique et quelques aspects socioprofessionnels de la communauté juive de Bucarest (1810–1939) »], *Revista de Istorie Socială*, 1997–1998, 2-3, pp. 184-185.

¹⁴ I. Peltz, *L'Avenue Văcărești*, Bucarest, ESPLA, 1957, p. 276 : « Ces Juifs n'habitaient pas vraiment l'Avenue Văcărești ou les rues du quartier. Ils s'étaient échappés vers le centre, vers Doamnei, Smârdan, Șelari, Rahovei, et même vers Batiște et Polonă ».

¹⁵ Camil Baltazar, « De vorbă... », p. 3.

¹⁶ Camelia Crăciun, « Représentations de la vie... », p. 94.

¹⁷ Camil Baltazar, « De vorbă... », p. 3.

¹⁸ Sur ce sujet, voir le numéro thématique de la *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah*, 194, 2011, 1, « L'horreur oubliée : La Shoah roumaine ».

cheveux flottant sur les épaules sont revenus, les yeux minés par les rêves, aux lèvres livides, perdus dans leur totale rêverie, pour assouvir leur faim d'autre chose à la table tachée pendant des années... Ils vont façonner, comme hier, comme avant-hier, comme toujours, le nouveau monde... Devant les tavernes aux grilles et aux violons, des mendiants se figeaient dévastés par les années avalées avec difficulté ; ils gémissent sur leurs orbites en se grattant les mains. Bouches hilaires, fronts tordus, jambes tremblantes – L'Avenue Văcărești est un immense panoptique imaginé par un esprit échappé des brides. Il y a des âmes ici, vers lesquelles, pour les approcher, il faut monter quelques marches ; il y en a d'autres auxquelles, pour les comprendre, il faut descendre des marches... L'amertume grandit en lui, il le noie. La vie, dans L'Avenue Văcărești, est affectée par les mites¹⁹.

Cependant, ce qui était considéré comme le résultat d'une « discrimination typologique »²⁰, la galerie des « saints et martyrs » de Peltz, contrairement à celle des stéréotypes sémitiques, marque le début de la longue confession sans ressentiment des écrivains juifs « sur les juifs ». Peltz étant le premier à assumer l'impartialité, désirant être « un stylo qui écrit à froid »²¹. Chez Ion Călugăru, G. Călinescu appréciera la même objectivité sans « douceur »²² dans la restitution du monde juif dans le roman *Viața unui netrebnic* [*L'enfance d'un vaurien*], tandis que Ury Benador donne, avec *Ghetto Veac XX* [*Ghetto XX^e Siècle*], « le livre hébreu le plus typique » qui est apparu « dans la littérature roumaine, depuis *Manasse* de Ronetti Roman »²³.

Entre le moment du doute sur l'existence d'une littérature juive de langue roumaine²⁴ et l'apparition du volume qui ouvre la suite des romans représentatifs sur le ghetto (I. Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, 1933), deux années se succèdent. Jusqu'à la montée politique de la droite radicalisée, aboutissant à l'ostracisme de la population juive, et culturellement, à l'indexation de sa création littéraire, apparaîtra *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* [*Feu à l'Auberge aux Tilleuls*] (1934) du même I. Peltz, *Ghetto XX^e Siècle* de Ury Benador et *L'enfance d'un vaurien* d'Ion Călugăru (1936). Depuis L'Avenue Văcărești d'une métropole en pleine émancipation de la Grande Roumanie (Bucarest), en passant par le quartier juif d'une importante ville du Danube (Brăila), à la « ruelle de Țipra » d'un anonyme bourg moldave (Dorohoi), le roman roumain du ghetto tend à compléter la fresque de la communauté juive de l'entre-deux-guerres à contretemps, phénomène dont l'envergure reste à deviner à partir des projets littéraires entamés, certains

¹⁹ I. Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, p. 329.

²⁰ G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*L'Histoire de la littérature roumaine dès origines jusqu'au présent*]. Édition et préface d' Al. Piru, București, Minerva, 1982, p. 793.

²¹ Camil Baltazar, « De vorbă... », p. 3.

²² G. Călinescu, *Istoria...*, p. 795.

²³ Pompiliu Constantinescu, *Scrisori* [*Écrits*], I, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1967, p. 203.

²⁴ A.L. Zissu, « Literatura evreiască din România » [« La littérature juive en Roumanie »], *Adam*, 3, 1931, 38, pp. 10-12.

abandonnés après le premier volume. De la trilogie de Ury Benador, *Ghetto Veac XX*, seul le volume *Germinări* [*Germinations*] ²⁵ apparaît, sans *Mâl și beznă* [*Vase et ténèbres*] et *Urcuș în gol* [*Montée vide*]. D'autres projets littéraires ont été finalisés : dans le prolongement de *l'Enfance d'un vaurien*, Ion Călugăru signe également *Trustul* [*Le Trust*] ²⁶ et *Lumina primăverii* [*La lumière du printemps*] ²⁷.

L'inédit de la démarche des écrivains juifs de langue roumaine ne le représente pas autant la source d'inspiration, la communauté « contribuant », bien avant, à la mise en place dans la littérature populaire de vigoureux stéréotypes²⁸, que l'hypostase de raconter cette communauté de l'intérieur, du milieu presque inconnu et contraignant pour la plupart des lecteurs. L'entretien de Peltz avec Camil Baltazar, juste avant la publication de son roman, en 1933, laisse voir comment il conçoit son lecteur²⁹, et rend explicite, en même temps, son objectif : lutter contre les stéréotypes³⁰, point qui se retrouve dans la poétique des autres écrivains juifs en Europe³¹. Des engagements tels que le rejet de l'artificiel, l'objectivité, l'expérience personnelle guident la démarche narrative de l'écrivain juif dans le découpage temporel de la troisième décennie : vu dans son ensemble le roman du ghetto convainc d'abord par son caractère biographique. Buiumaș (*L'Enfance d'un vaurien*), Baruch Landau (*Ghetto XX^e Siècle*), Ficu (*L'Avenue Văcărești*) sont des protagonistes et, en même temps, des *alter ego* des écrivains, de multiples similitudes avec leurs biographies étant repérées par des histoires littéraires et des monographies : des noms et des années de naissance, chez Ion Călugăru, des familles entières, chez Isac Peltz, tout descend directement de la réalité du ghetto dans la fiction. D'ailleurs, Peltz avait affirmé dans une interview de la revue *Rampa* qu'il avait rencontré, personnellement, « tous les héros » de son roman³², après avoir même présenté, auparavant, à Cicerone Theodorescu, un d'entre eux³³.

²⁵ Le roman connaît trois éditions : 1934, 1937 et 1947.

²⁶ Ion Călugăru, *Trustul* [*Le Trust*], [București], Editura « Națională Ciornei », [1937].

²⁷ Ion Călugăru, *Lumina primăverii* [*La lumière du printemps*], București, Socec, [1939].

²⁸ Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română. Studiu de imagologie în context est-central-european* [*L'image du Juif dans la culture roumaine. Étude d'imagologie dans un contexte d'Europe centrale et orientale*], III^{ème} édition, révisée et illustrée, Iași, Polirom, 2012.

²⁹ Camil Baltazar, « *De vorbă...* », p. 3 : « à mes amis connus et inconnus, de Bucarest et Vințul de Jos, de Ploiești et Sighetul Marmației, d'Odorhei et de Storojineț ».

³⁰ *Ibidem* : « Je voulais montrer à tout le monde [...] que le Juif n'est pas seulement un objet d'anecdote, que son type n'est pas monopolisé par le courtier bavard du café ou le marchand obèse de tous les centres commerciaux ».

³¹ Nadia Malinovich, « Littérature populaire et romans juifs dans la France des années 1920 », *Archives Juifs*, 39, 2006, 1, p. 50.

³² I. Podeanu, « Douăzeci de minute cu d. I. Peltz » [« Vingt minutes avec M. I. Peltz »], *Rampa*, 17, 1934, 5001, p. 1.

³³ Iacob Saltzman, alias Șulâm Șoț, in Cicerone Theodorescu, *Cu I. Peltz pe Calea Văcărești...*, p. 721.

Pour beaucoup de personnages de la communauté juive, la perception du ghetto comme un « micro-univers [...] fermé et suffisant à lui-même »³⁴ limite souvent l'action du roman à un espace exclusif, de sorte que cette « unité de lieu » s'impose comme une particularité ; d'autre part, le ghetto synthétise, en substance, le même déracinement des personnages, et à cet égard il peut être considéré comme identique à n'importe quel autre ghetto évoqué par Peltz, Călugăru ou Benador. Le personnage de ce dernier, Mendl, évoque, à la veille de son départ pour une nouvelle destination, qui est toujours un ghetto, le pèlerinage infatigable de la nation :

Il aimerait dormir aussi, mais son sommeil ne colle pas à ses yeux : ainsi, la route mène en descente, de plus en plus en bas. Mon père, de Sadagura à Tchernivtsi et Rădăuți, puis de Rădăuți à Dorohoi et maintenant à Brăila »³⁵, un voyage repris par son fils, Baruch Landau, à Bucarest, et, enfin, en Palestine, considérée comme « le début du chemin du retour vers le premier Canaan »³⁶.

Si pour les personnages adultes l'évasion se fait en substituant un ghetto par un autre, se sauver par la nature est la solution trouvée par les personnages des jeunes : Buiumaș l'utilise, mais aussi l'adolescent Baruch :

Sans un but, il part en avant, loin jusqu'au bout, puis repart à droite, sur la ligne de tramway sortant de la ville jusqu'à ce qu'il entre dans la jeune forêt du Monument. Ici, sur le banc où il est assis, il s'est assis peut-être tant d'années avant Ștefan Petică³⁷, le poète des vierges en blanc. Par sa simple évocation, il se ressuscite. Et lui aussi, Baruch Landau, revivra dans la mémoire de je ne sais quels rêveurs, au fil des décennies et des siècles. Ici, dans cet espace, se trouvait la tête de Ștefan Petică. Regarde ici. Il s'était allongé sur le banc face au soleil. Pourquoi ses yeux lui font-ils mal ? Il les ferme. Il restera comme ça toujours, toujours. Sans pensées, sans soucis³⁸.

Présence rare dans la métropole de Bucarest, la nature résonne trop peu avec l'idée du refuge salutaire : on refuse à la malade Esther même la joie de la contempler à travers la fenêtre, et à la beauté gratuite du petit jardin fleuri de Țipra (la mère de Buiumaș), on ne peut opposer que le minuscule, mais rentable vignoble, le coing et le prunier de Șulăm Șolț. Dans le périmètre surpeuplé du ghetto, l'espace vert, inévitablement associé au bien-être, est, pour cette raison, quasi inexistant. Pourtant, la nature hante les souvenirs des personnages de

³⁴ M. Bahtin, *Probleme de literatură și estetică* [*Problèmes d'esthétique et de littérature*]. Traduit par Nicolae Iliescu. Préface de Marian Vasile, București, Univers, 1982, p. 455.

³⁵ Ury Benador, *Ghetto Veac XX* [*Ghetto XX^e Siècle*], București, Editura Librăriei « Universala » Alcalay&Co, [1934], p. 39.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

³⁷ Ștefan Petică (1877–1934), poète symboliste, journaliste, dramaturge. Le volume *Fecioara în alb* [*La vierge en blanc*], publié en 1902, contient les cycles : *Fecioara în alb* [*La vierge en blanc*], *Când vioarele tăcură* [*Quand les violons se sont tus*], *Moartea visurilor* [*La mort des rêves*].

³⁸ Ury Benador, *Ghetto Veac XX*, pp. 96-97.

L'Avenue Văcărești, dans le regret d'Esther de ne pas avoir installé sa maison « quelque part à la campagne » ou dans « le parfum d'une époque éteinte : des parcs urbains, avec des filles contournant les ruelles d'automne ».

Faisant partie de la réalité urbaine, le ghetto surprend la ville dans des hypostases et des étapes distinctes : métropole multiethnique en pleine émancipation (Bucarest), prospère ville portuaire (Brăila), anonyme bourg provincial (les critiques croient y reconnaître Dorohoi, le lieu de naissance de l'écrivain). Dans tous les cas, la ville survit exclusivement à travers le ghetto, ce dernier changeant la vision de la compréhension urbaine. Par sa position dans la géographie de la ville, le ghetto sera toujours marginal dans la prose de l'entre-deux-guerres, et sa délimitation sera d'autant plus précise, lorsque la superficie de la ville est réduite. La fluidité des quartiers de la communauté juive de Bucarest chez Peltz ne se prolonge que partiellement dans le canevas des rues de Brăila, chez Ury Benador, elle manque pourtant chez Ion Călugăru, où, dans une description détaillée des espaces de vie et de leurs habitants pauvres, une fracturation imaginaire à la moitié de la rue délimite brutalement les Juifs de leurs voisins : « Ce n'est pas loin jusqu'au facteur, bien qu'il semble aux confins de la Terre. Car la rue est divisée en deux : une moitié, c'est-à-dire de l'usine de soda à la maison de la laitière Basia, habitée par des Juifs, et l'autre moitié jusqu'au pré, par les faubouriens ».

C'est sous le regard neutre d'un protagoniste âgé de cinq ans, Buium, que les principes qui organisent un shtetl³⁹ traditionnel du nord de la Moldavie sont recomposés pour la décennie 1907–1917 : pauvreté désolante – faim – misère. Bien que la coexistence des Juifs avec d'autres ethnies, à l'intérieur du ghetto, oscille, chez Ion Călugăru, entre tolérance relative et ignorance totale, les allusions aux événements de 1907 (quand plusieurs attaques sont enregistrées contre des membres de la communauté) accentuent leur vulnérabilité, leur isolement, enfin, leur résignation devant le danger extérieur. Un autre moment antisémite, enregistré quelques décennies plus tard et évoqué par Peltz dans *L'Avenue Văcărești*, surprend la communauté armée et décidée de défendre à tout prix son quartier devant la menace venant, désormais, de l'intérieur de la ville ; la ségrégation spatiale se réalise, cette fois, par les zones envahies par des « hommes en vêtements verts »⁴⁰ et de leurs sympathisants, « marchands des quatre saisons et faubouriens » (« d'Obor et Belu, de Philanthropie et des fosses de Ouatu, de Ștefan cel Mare et Jianu »).

Chez Ury Benador, la ville de Dorohoi est un personnage plutôt absent, avec un minimum d'éléments indiqués de sa géographie urbaine : le terrain vague de la foire, dans le voisinage de la maison louée par la famille du tailleur Mendl Landau,

³⁹ Terme désignant, en Europe de l'Est, une localité urbaine à population majoritaire juive.

⁴⁰ Les membres du parti fasciste roumain, « La Légion de l'Archange Michel » (1927–1941), dénommés « légionnaires » ou « chemises vertes » à cause de leur uniforme.

et la gare d'où elle part pour Brăila. Aucune image commune, cependant, avec celles évoquées par Ion Călugăru. La richesse de la vie spirituelle de ce qui fut autrefois le shtetl, récupérable largement chez Peltz, dans *L'Avenue Văcărești*, est placée, chez Ion Călugăru, dans *L'enfance d'un vaurien*, en arrière-plan, parmi les rares repères en ce sens restant la préoccupation constante pour l'éducation de l'enfant Buiumaș.

Si Ury Benador reconstruit le ghetto de Brăila de la périphérie au centre, à l'aide de son personnage Mendl Landau qui force le centre, pour lui l'équivalent de la périphérie étant la pauvreté, la maladie, la disparition et, au pôle opposé, le succès, la prospérité, le respect, Peltz l'assemble de « l'intérieur », de la maison surpeuplée de la couturière Esther, insalubre et misérable, où l'auberge, dont elle fait partie, n'est qu'une réplique en miniature du ghetto.

Après tout, l'interrogation rhétorique de la grand-mère Leia : « Mais qui est heureux dans l'auberge ? Qui y est vraiment heureux ? », ne présume pas une réponse affirmative de la part d'aucun de ses nombreux locataires⁴¹, ni même de la part des autres, à l'extérieur d'elle, « mendiants, affamés, vaincus par la vie » ; à l'exception, peut-être, des personnages extraits de la petite bourgeoisie de la même communauté, qui bougent dans le roman *Feu à l'Auberge aux Tilleuls*. La suspension du spectaculaire, ancrée dans le quotidien fruste, mais aussi l'annulation de toute intrigue significative fait de *L'Avenue Văcărești* « une chronique de l'existence anodine de la communauté juive dans les faubourgs de Bucarest »⁴².

À travers le drame multiplié (celui de l'équité, de la dévotion, le drame de l'impuissance, de la survie – et Peltz est, à cet égard, un comptable assidu) et le supplice sisyphéen de ne rien faire d'important ou de définitif, la petite communauté de l'auberge (et, à travers elle, *L'Avenue Văcărești*), personnifie une forme de résistance héroïque par le simple fait de survivre. Extrêmement rare, le cours prédestiné de la communauté est perturbé par une abdication temporaire du « devoir » (c'est le cas du personnage qui vend des craquelins ronds et qui refuse, un beau jour, devant ses garçons « pétrifiés par la peur », de vendre ses produits), ou par une abdication permanente (le cas de la famille du tailleur Mendl qui choisit le néant, intoxiquée au manganèse). Interprété uniquement comme une démission et une condamnation définitive, le geste final du descendant sensible et surdoué d'Esther de se marier et de rester dans le ghetto, alors que tout le monde le croyait capable de sortir de cet environnement, pourrait être considéré, à son tour, comme son refus d'abdication... au devoir. Les tribulations de l'auteur dans des différents quartiers, reconstituées par Rodica Lăzărescu, dans la monographie qu'elle

⁴¹ Madame Sura avec son fils Alfred, le tailleur Feldman avec les six enfants, la veuve Katz, la famille de l'artiste Huna, avec huit enfants, le vendeur de craquelins ronds avec dix garçons, la femme pianiste avec son mari paralysé, la famille d'un ancien combattant de cirque.

⁴² Ovidiu Morar, *Scritori evrei...*, p. 125.

consacre à Peltz, *Viața cu haz și fără a numitului Peltz* [*La vie avec et sans humour du nommé Peltz*], et son retour définitif dans la communauté, où il s'impliquera en aidant les plus humbles, converge vers une interprétation similaire.

L'attention au détail, la reconstruction du quotidien, la reprise du fait anodin, l'effort de récupérer la vie communautaire juive de l'entre-deux-guerres dans son intégralité, représentent la caractéristique la plus précieuse du roman du ghetto roumain. Néanmoins, on ne connaît toujours pas beaucoup sur la Shoah roumaine. En raison de son objectivité, *L'Avenue Văcărești* de Peltz reste parmi les sources les plus crédibles dans la reconstruction des quartiers juifs des villes roumaines, aujourd'hui disparus.

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THE GHETTO IN THE ROMANIAN INTER-WAR NOVEL

(Abstract)

Two years pass between 1931, when A.L. Zissu, one of the most important representatives of the Jewish community in Romania, voices publicly his doubt regarding the existence of the Romanian-language Jewish literature, and the moment of publication of the volume opening the series of the ghetto-illustrating novels (I. Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, 1933). By the time of the political rise of the radicalized right wing, which concluded with the ostracizing of the Jewish community, and, in the cultural sector, with the blacklisting of their literary creation, *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* [*Fire in the Linden Tree Inn*] (1934) by the same I. Peltz, *Ghetto veac XX* [*20th Century Ghetto*] by Ury Benador, and *Copilăria unui netrebnic* [*A Wretched Man's Childhood*] (1936) by Ion Călugăru were published. From the Văcărești Route of Greater Romania's growing metropolis, through the Jewish neighborhood of an important town by the Danube (Brăila), to "ulicioara Țiprei" in the anonymous Moldavian bourg of Dorohoi, the ghetto novel tends to complete out of time the fresco of the inter-war Jewish community; the scope of this phenomenon can be guessed by looking at the started literary projects, some of them abandoned after the first volume (Ury Benador's trilogy, *Ghetto veac XX*), some other completed (continuing *Copilăria unui netrebnic*, Ion Călugăru writes *Trustul* [*The Trust*], 1937, and *Lumina primăverii* [*The Light of Spring*], 1939). From the very beginning, the frequency of the phrase in the literary text is insignificant, despite the fact that it has been present in the Romanian prose writing since the third decade of the 20th century in two of the titles, at Benador (*Ghetto veac XX*) and Ludo (*Ghettouri* [*Ghettos*]). Here, too, the ghetto refers to its historic meaning of elsewhere, its local pinpointing being challenging; and when referenced, it is done metaphorically, linked with a state of sentimental isolation, at I. Peltz and Ury Benador. By the time of the terrible connotations it would acquire in the following decade, the "ghetto" painted by the Romanian-language Jewish writers would grow perceptively close to what Loïc Wacquant calls the "ethnic neighborhood", and the idea is backed by a flexibility of its boundaries and an incipient intrinsic cultural diversity. Commitments such as the rejection of the artificial, objectivity, personal experience guide the Jewish writer's narrative endeavor in the temporal cut-out of the third decade: overall, the ghetto novel resounds, first of all, owing to its biographic nature, while some other particularities include the "harmony of space", by keeping the plot within the exclusive perimeter of the ghetto and by anchoring it in everyday life.

Keywords: marginal space, minority community, ghetto, shtetl, everyday reality.

GHETOUL ÎN ROMANUL ROMÂNESC INTERBELIC (Rezumat)

Între momentul îndoielii exprimate public privind existența unei literaturi evreiești de limbă română de către unul dintre cei mai importanți reprezentanți ai comunității evreiești din România, A.L. Zissu, în 1931, și apariția volumului ce deschide suita romanelor reprezentative ale ghetoului (I. Peltz, *Calea Văcărești*, 1933) se succed doi ani. Până la ascensiunea politică a dreptei radicalizate, culminând cu ostracizarea populației evreiești, iar în plan cultural, cu punerea la index a creației ei literare, vor apărea *Foc în Hanul cu Tei* (1934) al aceluiași I. Peltz, *Ghetto Veac XX*, al lui Ury Benador și *Copilăria unui netrebnic* (1936) de Ion Călugăru. Din Calea Văcărești a metropolei în plină emancipare a României Mari, prin cartierul evreiesc al unui important oraș dunărean (Brăila), la „ulicioara Țiprei” din anonimul târg moldav al Dorohoiului, romanul ghetoului tinde să întregască fresca comunității evreiești interbelice în contratimp, fenomen a cărui anvergură e intuibilă din proiectele literare demarate, câteva abandonate după primul volum (trilogia lui Ury Benador, *Ghetto veac XX*), altele, definitive (în continuarea *Copilăriei unui netrebnic*, Ion Călugăru semnează *Trustul*, 1937 și *Lumina primăverii*, 1939). Chiar din debut, sintagma face dovada unei frecvențe nesemnificative în textul literar, deși prezentă în proza românească din deceniul trei al veacului XX în două dintre titluri, la Benador (*Ghetto veac XX*) și Ludo (*Ghettouri*). Și aici, ghetoul trimite, mai curând, la semnificația sa istorică, de aiurea, dificil reperabilă local, și atunci metaforic, asociat claustrării sentimentale, la I. Peltz și Ury Benador. Până la valențele atroce ale deceniului următor, „ghetoul” scriitorilor evrei de limbă română se apropie sensibil de ceea ce Loïc Wacquant numea „cartier etnic”, în susținerea ideii venind o flexibilitate a frontierelor sale și o incipientă diversitate culturală în interior. Angajamente precum respingerea artificialului, obiectivitatea, experiența personală ghidează demersul narativ al scriitorului evreu în decupajul temporal al deceniului trei: privit, în ansamblu, romanul ghetoului convinge, în primul rând, prin caracterul său biografic, printre alte particularități aflându-se „unitatea spațiului”, prin menținerea tramei în perimetrul exclusiv al ghetoului și ancorarea în cotidian.

Cuvinte-cheie: spațiu marginal, comunitate minoritară, ghetou, ștetl, realitate cotidiană.

DOCUMENT

COSMIN BORZA
ALEX GOLDIȘ
ADRIAN TUDURACHI

SUBGENURILE ROMANULUI ROMÂNESC. LABORATORUL UNEI TIPOLOGII

Prezentarea laboratorului: Adrian Tudurachi
Realizarea tipologiei: Cosmin Borza, Alex Goldiș, Adrian Tudurachi

„those mentioned seem to be true subgenres.
And there are others, waiting to be named”
Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*

Scurtă istorie a unei tipologiei

Când am fost cooptați, în urmă cu doi ani, în echipa însărcinată cu pregătirea unei noi ediții a *Dicționarului cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până în 2000*, partea cea mai provocatoare ni s-a părut, de la început, revizia definițiilor tipologice ale romanelor. Adică să refacem „etichetarea” generică a tuturor titlurilor înregistrate în dicționar: să raționalizăm și să sistematizăm seria de „romane sentimentale”, „de senzație”, „de aventuri”, „de moravuri” etc.. Sigur că erau multe alte lucruri de făcut, unele care au impus intervenții pe suprafețe largi și completări masive. S-au adăugat titluri, s-au rescris caracterizări, s-au adus la zi bibliografiile. Dar între toate operațiunile, această scurtă sintagmă „roman de”, plasată la începutul descrierii istorico-literare, implica cele mai multe resurse teoretice, cele mai multe discuții, cele mai grele decizii și – aș spune – antrena cele mai serioase consecințe.

Dacă evaluăm dicționarul publicat în 2004 într-un orizont actual al studiilor literare, ceea ce se vede e tensiunea care îl străbate, între programul exhaustiv, de cuprindere integrală a producției culturale a unui gen, și valorizarea implicită a acestei producții. Ca să o spun mai simplu, autorii dicționarului nu credeau în semnificația celei mai mari părți a materialului pe care îl tratau. Cam în aceeași epocă în care se demarau lucrările la dicționar, echipa care urma să îl redacteze a fost implicată, între 1975 și 1978, într-un proiect de sociologie a romanului românesc. Publicat sub forma unei antologii de studii câțiva ani mai târziu, în 1982, cu o introducere a lui Paul Cornea, volumul nu conține decât analize ale unor autori de primă mărime: Nicolae Filimon, Duiliu Zamfirescu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Liviu Rebreanu, Camil Petrescu, Papadat Bengescu, Gib Mihăiescu, Anton Holban, Mateiu Caragiale, G. Călinescu. Sunt vârful romanului românesc. Niciun scriitor

de raftul al doilea, niciun studiu care să privilegieze convenția estetică sau programul ideologic al romanului în detrimentul autorului, nicio biografie a unei forme: nimic inspirat de diversitatea și impersonalitatea producției culturale pe care o expune tabloul integral al romanului românesc. În mod simptomatic, abordarea romanului „târgului de provincie” într-un articol despre Mihail Sadoveanu vizează strict reinterpretarea personală a codului generic. Experiențele scriitorului și materialul psihologic particular care hrănesc imaginarul românesc sunt mult mai prețioase decât filierele sociale și culturale care constituie subgenul, făcând din ceea ce ar fi trebuit să fie reprezentarea unui grup de romane o genealogie a creativității individuale.

Cele câteva cuvinte de la sfârșit sintetizează, credem, o temă a deșurării, putându-se vedea ușor cum ea nu s-a născut din aderarea la o ideologie de grup, care a dus doar la o literatură factice, superficială. Pentru a explica integral apariția deșurării ca un leitmotiv în proza sadoveniană, va trebui însă să mai amintim și un alt eveniment care l-a marcat profund pe prozator, devenind astfel hotărâtor pentru întreaga literatură a „târgurilor de provincie”¹.

Dacă e sociologie aici, ea se orientează spre personalitățile accentuate și spre capacitatea lor de a domina codurile culturale, nu spre numerele mari ale producției românești. Paul Cornea, chemat să patroneze această întreprindere, avea să observe interesul echipei pentru o „sociologie a creației”², subliniind în același timp absența preocupărilor pentru o „sociologie a pieții” care să vizeze romanul ca „marfă” și producție industrială. Cuprinderea circuitelor de consum rămâne fără îndoială marea noutate pe care o aduce proiectul dicționarului în peisajul lexicografic românesc de la sfârșitul anilor '70, însă nu e totuși deloc sigur că deschiderea sensibilității critice spre romanul popular ar fi fost suficientă pentru cristalizarea diferită a tabloului de subgenuri. În fond, nu calificarea speciilor de consum pune probleme în dicționar, ci gama subgenurilor sociale, multiplicitatea calificărilor, ezitarea „nominală” în alegerea cuvântului just care să califice un grup de texte. Există o nesiguranță în evaluarea și descrierea producției proliferante de roman, și dacă autorii dicționarului se agață de ghidul ierarhiilor literare e pentru că le lipsesc alte resurse ordonatoare. În fond, ei au fost pionieri – fără voia lor – într-un teritoriu pe care critica românească nu era interesată să îl exploreze. În acei ani, nici măcar Nicolae Manolescu, autor al unei istorii sociologizante a romanului românesc, nu se desfășurase de canonul literaturii române, selectându-și exemplele din bibliografiile curente ale criticii. Nimeni nu căuta încă răspunsuri la fenomenul pe care îl viza dicționarul: literatura română văzută nu ca instituție critică, nici ca

¹ Ion Istrate, *Dimensiunile epice ale amintirii în romanele târgurilor de provincie de Mihail Sadoveanu*, în Paul Cornea (ed.), *De la N. Filimon la G. Călinescu. Studii de sociologie a romanului românesc*, București, Minerva, 1982, p. 75.

² Paul Cornea, *Căi și perspective în sociologia contemporană a romanului*, în *De la N. Filimon la G. Călinescu*, pp. X, XLI-XLIV.

piață de consum, ci ca un câmp deschis traversat de forme, modelat de coliziuni, brăzdat de fracturi sau de filiere, pulverizat în infinite contacte și antrenând în jocurile lui autori și teme.

Ca să înțelegem mai bine ce a lipsit în acel moment o să fac o comparație cu studiile actuale care ating problema genericității în roman. Când Margaret Cohen³ a încercat în 1999 să reconstituie sistemul de subgenuri în care acționează romanul sentimental, ea a recurs la dispozitivul câmpului literar dezvoltat de Pierre Bourdieu, al cărui volum apăruse cu doar cinci ani mai devreme. Astfel, capitoul introductiv se numește „Reconstructing the literary field” și propune o extindere „regulilor câmpului” la domeniul genurilor românești. De ce Bourdieu? În primul rând, mobilizarea ipotezelor bourdieusiene îi permite lui Cohen să situeze genul în relație cu alte instanțe sociale care se definesc prin ocuparea unei poziții și să îndeplinească astfel destinul convențiilor estetice cu cel al unor instituții fundamentale, cum sunt figurile subiectului: „the writers use poetics which both benefit and benefit the social determinants of their subject positions”⁴. În al doilea rând – și cel mai important – Bourdieu oferă o reprezentare conflictuală a ocupării unei poziții: „câmpul” e un teren de luptă, care definește orice nouă intrare în raport cu forțele dominante care saturează deja spațiul simbolic, precum și în conflict cu acestea. Altfel spus, genul ca relație socială nu se lasă descris decât în funcție de un raport tensionat, atât în emergența, cât și în exploatarea sa. Și acesta e un lucru semnificativ pentru necesarul său teoretic – pentru ceea ce reclamă ca să poată fi gândit. Există variații în reprezentarea scării conflictului, a mobilurilor sale sau a punctelor de referință – rămâne însă constantă căutarea unui dispozitiv pentru amenajarea unei „dramaturgii” a genurilor. Echipa de la Stanford Literary Lab angajează, pe lângă teoriile bourdieusiene, și teoriile lui Axel Honneth despre „lupta pentru recunoaștere”⁵, introducând noi determinări, legate de stimă socială și atașament, ca să explice acțiunea corelativă a genurilor. Wai Chee Dimock contestă raportul cu pozițiile dominante⁶, căutând în schimb să descrie coliziunile de mult mai mică anvergură, provocate de intermediari, de contacte întâmplătoare și de intersecții culturale infime, insinuând conflictul în micro-țesătura codurilor generice: de aceea, evocă un „câmp ionizat”⁷, în locul câmpului literar cu poziții dominante și poziții subalterne conceput de Bourdieu. Aici nu e de observat atât conținutul teoriilor invocate, cât schema de gândire, tiparul conceptualizărilor de care e nevoie ca să fie gândită arhitectura câmpului de subgenuri. Ceea ce justifică

³ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 6-7.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁵ Sarah Allison et alii, *Quantitative Formalism: an Experiment*, Stanford Literary Lab, 15 January 2011, p. 18, <https://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet1.pdf>. Accesat în 20 decembrie 2020.

⁶ Wai Chee Dimock, „Weak Theory: Henry James, Colm Tóibín, and W.B. Yeats”, *Critical Inquiry*, 39, Summer 2013, 4, pp. 734-736.

⁷ Wai Chee Dimock, „Migration across Genre”, in Robyn Warhol (ed.), *The Work of Genre. Selected Essays from the English Institute, Cambridge, The English Institute*, 2011, p. 162.

transferul, adopția sau bricolajul de instrumente teoretice e încercarea de a imagina jocuri de limbaj suficient de puternice cât să antreneze în dinamica lor intențiile indivizilor sau ale grupurilor. În fond, e vorba de a instaura o autonomie a genurilor, de a le proiecta ca forțe și de a le investi cu o capacitate mobilizatoare.

Din aparatul teoretic al dicționarului lipsea așadar nu o sociologie a consumului, ci o perspectivă asupra conflictelor sociale care mobilizează formele literare; altfel spus, o sociologie a „intereselor” economice, morale, simbolice – și a luptelor purtate în numele lor – legate de caracteristicile formelor și de locul ocupat în sistemul cultural sau în circuitele care le vehiculează. Ca să poată reconstitui destinul unui gen pe teren românesc, dicționarul avea nevoie de un strat suplimentar de reprezentare a literaturii române, înțelegând că, alături de autori, opere și școli, terenul e populat și de forme care se animă în infinite confruntări locale.

Patologii ale „etichetării”

De ce „etichetarea” romanelor e atât de complicată și discutabilă? Ce înseamnă când categoriile în care intră un roman sunt multiple, sau nuanțate, sau perifrastice? De pildă, când pentru romanul Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu, *Drumul ascuns* (1932) apar două determinări în aparență contradictorii, „roman de investigație psihologică și socială”, sau când pentru romanul lui Camil Petrescu, *Patul lui Procust* (1933), sunt reținute calificări extrem singularizante: „roman «demonstrativ», de «superioară emoție polițistă»”. Ce ne spun asemenea „etichetări” indisciplinate: că identificarea subgenurilor la scara producției românești a unei culturi nu e posibilă – sau, mai rău, că e inutilă?

Ceea ce vrem să înțelegem de fapt ține de complexitatea romanului, adică de imposibilitatea de a-l comprima și de a-l reduce la „idee”, și de felul în care această caracteristică afectează poziționarea lui generică. Sunt câteva dimensiuni ale acestei proprietăți – evidente și mult comentate – de care ar trebui să ținem cont.

Prima vizează relația cu realitatea. În raport cu lumea, romanul este ghidat de un ideal al completudinii, propunându-și, prin poetica sa, să reprezinte o totalitate, alături de întreprinderile enciclopedice, sistemele filosofice sau de marile sinteze istorice. Judith Schlanger, care a dedicat o reflecție asupra variațiilor de densitate în formele literare, a observat impactul direct al acestui raport cu realul specific romanului asupra genericității⁸. Multiplicitatea realului se rezolvă prin eterogenitate discursivă: completudine înseamnă din perspectiva genului romanesc un grad ridicat de ocupare neomogenă a spațiului discursiv. E un program romanesc care generează aglomerare de personaje și situații, acumulare de forme,

⁸ Judith Schlanger, *Trop dire ou trop peu. La densité littéraire*, Paris, Hermann, 2016, pp. 13-17. Despre complexitate ca suport al interesului ficțional, precum și despre raportul între complexitate și reprezentarea realității, la Vincent Jouve, *Pouvoirs de la fiction. Pourquoi aime-t-on les histoires ?*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2019, pp. 44-50.

cum se întâmplă în configurarea arborescentă a romanelor care aglutinează documente și comentarii, sau disponibilitate de transformare a structurii romanești, cum se întâmplă în romanul foileton sau în romanul-fluviu. Rețin din demonstrația lui Judith Schlanger și o altă observație, mai subtilă, referitoare la aceeași relație a romanului cu lumea. Pe lângă densificarea ficțiunii, aspirația spre completitudine împinge spre senzațional: e tot o consecință a poeticii supraabundenței, dar în planul figurilor, nu al formelor. Pentru că în reprezentarea lumii, romanul se confruntă cu incomensurabilul ireductibil și cu contradicțiile, fie că e vorba de reprezentarea tulburărilor sociale, a industrializării sau a vieții urbane. Construcția romanului în raport cu un univers fără plan armonic, reclamă, ca tonalitate, marcarea intensă a trăirilor și a sentimentelor, antrenează explicitarea hipertrofiată și accentele nemăsurate. De la sinuciderea Anei în *Ion*, până la botnița pentru struguri din *Descult*, melodrama devine un registru de spunere a realității, calificând senzaționalul ca un fel de categorie *by default* care acompaniază romanescul și asigură un fond tulbure al genericității.

Cea de-a doua dimensiune a complexității privește principiile de construcție: materia unui roman nu se ordonează în cadrul aceluiași regim pe toată lungimea textului. Într-un studiu despre compoziție, Michel Charles pune în evidență faptul că expoziția unui roman se modulează generic în funcție de traseul biografic al personajelor⁹. Regimul dominant se poate menține câtă vreme participarea eroilor la o scenă se petrece în prezent, ca un act dramatic; în schimb, analepsele, incursiunile în istoricul protagonistului au un potențial disruptiv. Concret, e vorba de capacitatea fiecărei istorii de viață de a aduce o tonalitate caracteristică. Personajele nu sunt doar purtătoare ale unui sociolect propriu, cum spunea Bahtin în demonstrarea celebră a dialogismului, ci și a unui „roman” propriu sau, mai precis în sensul în care ne interesează aici, a unui gen propriu. Iar Michel Charles nu ezită să formuleze „tare” și vorbește despre „cărți în plus”¹⁰, despre „un adevărat roman înainte de roman, care nu poate fi controlat”¹¹ sau despre „text fantomă”¹². Trecutul bântuie prezentul și, ca în povestirile gotice, suprapopulează ficțiunea cu prezențe generice spectrale. Într-o analiză aplicată unui roman balzacian, Michel Charles identifică, în incipitul textului, nu mai puțin de patru schimbări de regim legate de fișele biografice ale personajelor: un program de vodevil, o comedie burgheză, un program alcătuit în jurul unor interese economic-financiare, un program tragic.

L'histoire ancienne donne une nouvelle une nouvelle lumière à la scène actuelle.
Le roman en amont nourrit le roman que je lis. À mesure que le narrateur prolix me

⁹ Michel Charles, *Composition*, Paris, Seuil, 2018, pp. 32-52.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 38.

nourrit d'informations, les couleurs se modifient. Le discours des causes joue un rôle capital dans les changements de régime¹³.

Motivul pentru care Michel Charles investighează această calitate a textului romanesc e o interogație asupra unei ipoteze genetice: textele literare generează identități paralele care se mențin doar în stare embrionară, ca texte posibile, „sacrificate” sau ascunse, prin diverse tehnici, de regimul dominant al operei. Însă ceea ce stabilește astfel, printr-o combinație de teorie cu *close reading*, e faptul că multiplicitatea generică rezidă chiar în miezul narațiunii românești. Concurența dintre convențiile estetice este legată de legea romanului și de vocația lui de a angaja și intersecta filiere multiple (eroi, situații, intrigi, lumi). Există și o confirmare empirică a acestei realități. Cercetările de „formalism cantitativ” care au testat prin studii statistice proprietățile generice s-au izbit de eterogenitatea materialului care constituie textele din clasa romanelor. Nu în sensul că asemenea particularități lingvistice sau stilistice asociate unei convenții estetice nu pot fi atestate, ci în sensul că existența lor nu poate fi verificată decât episodic. Particularitățile măsurabile ale textului sunt specifice mai multor regimuri care acționează secvențial, limitate la anumite porțiuni:

The overlap among different genre might turn out to be limited to specific portions of the text (beginings, or endings); if that were so, and genre become more distinctive – more „themselves”, as it were – at specific moments in the plot, that one could focus on those moments and magnify their separation¹⁴.

O să adaug la aceste condiționări ale complexității în roman și o a treia care ține de constituirea și circulația codurilor generice. Într-o reflecție teoretică asupra migrației genurilor, Wai Chee Dimock¹⁵ propunea o reprezentare a proprietăților codurilor generice prin două caracteristici inspirate din modul de organizare al sistemelor de operare pe calculator: „stackability” (posibilitatea de a menține mai multe ferestre deschise simultan) și „switchability” (posibilitatea de a comuta între mai multe ferestre deschise simultan). Cercetătoarea se referă astfel la resursele unui gen, la bazinele din care acesta se alimentează. „Ferestrele” denumesc situarea între culturile naționale, centrale sau periferice, dependente sau iradiante; și, de asemenea, situarea între culturile populare sau elitiste, canonizate sau consumeriste, deținătoare de capital simbolic sau economic. Însă accentul cade pe menținerea tuturor acestor bazine în actualitate – în „memoria” genului – și pe absența ierarhizării. Ferestrele nu se închid și nu își revendică supremația: dubla metaforă informatică, „stackability” și „switchability”, identifică abilitatea unui sistem de a opera în același timp cu mai multe resurse și de a le alterna fără a le ordona. În spatele fiecărui gen se găsesc umbrele genurilor din alte culturi naționale sau sociale, gata să îi ia locul și să îi redefinească regimul de utilizare sau

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

¹⁴ Sarah Allison *et alii*, *Quantitative Formalism*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Wai Chee Dimock, „Migration across Genre”, pp. 157-158.

conținutul: „Each window is shadowed by alternates, and by contrary usages”¹⁶, notează Dimock, apelând la rândul ei la imaginarul spectral al lui Michel Charles: „We might think of these linguistic windows as a ghostly ensemble, waiting to be summoned, waiting to be actualized”¹⁷. Ce mi se pare important e că genul apare în această perspectivă multiplu și reversibil, prin chiar condiția sa formală. Și poate că nu e exemplu mai bun decât revizitarea romanului haiducesc la Panait Istrati: grefat pe o veche literatură a proscrisilor și răufăcătorilor prezentă în toate marile culturi, inspirat de gustul romantic al elitelor pentru eroul folcloric, căzut în seria unui subgen de consum specific regiunii balcanice, romanul haiducesc a putut fi actualizat în spațiul parizian, fiind recuperat ca valoare în circuitul „republicii mondiale a literelor”. Toate planurile definitorii pentru genericitatea lui au continuat să existe ca „ferestre deschise”: vechiul gen occidental, genul folcloric romantic, seria balcanică de consum, genul pitoresc dintr-un spațiu literar central.

Ce concluzii putem trage de aici? Că genericitatea multiplă nu e excepția, ci vizează nucleul însuși al poeziei romanului, că numirea nesigură și schimbătoare a subgenurilor, precum și conținutul incert al noțiunilor în câmpul convențiilor estetice sunt firești. Trebuie să ne așteptăm la patologii ale „etichetării” – ceea ce nu înseamnă că subgenul e indecidabil sau inutilizabil, ci doar că nu funcționează după o idee platoniciană în măsură să îi normeze aplicația. Nu funcționează după o „lege”. Celebra reflecție a lui Jacques Derrida din 1980 despre „Legea genului” asta vrea să spună: că nu e vorba de o lege, ci de o difracție a ei, organizată de însuși evenimentul nașterii genului, actualizat în permanență. Că genul este contemporan cu propria lui emergență, menținând în stare de simultaneitate sursele sale multiple, conservându-și și jucându-și istoria, neuitând nimic. „The law, in its female element, is a silhouette that plays. At what? At being... born, at being born like anybody and no body. She plays upon her generation and display her genre, she plays out her nature and her history, and she makes a plaything of an account”¹⁸. Derrida numește „nebuie” această capacitate a genului de a-și ilustra neîncetat geneza, ieșirea la lumină: „For the law to see the day is her madness”¹⁹.

Din perspectivă practică, toate aceste inferențe teoretice înseamnă că genericitatea nu își conține raționalitatea necesară unui instrument istorico-literar. Ea nu oferă exclusivitate în aplicarea ei textuală, nici o identitate nominală univocă, nici, la scara unei culturi, un sistem. E o prezență reală dar care trebuie administrată. Ca să obținem echivalența dintre un roman și un subgen, ca să

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, „The Law of Genre”, *Critical Inquiry*, 7, Autumn 1980, 1, p. 79.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*. Observația stă în centrul reflecției lui Alastair Fowler despre subgenuri, chiar dacă nu are energia expresionistă a lui Derrida: „At the level of subgenre, innovation is life” (*Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 114); ea se regăsește, într-o formulare mai nuanțată, și la Wai Chee Dimock: „less an ontology than a field of incipience” („Migration across Genre”, p. 159).

controlăm sinonimia și suprapunerile dintre convențiile estetice, ca să elaborăm un nomenclator la scara culturii române sunt necesare strategii de gestiune a complexității. Sau, mai bine spus, e nevoie de o „economie” prin care să administrăm proprietățile generice, constelarea lor și modul în care acestea se aplică la materia romanului românesc.

O economie a subgenurilor

Cum se poate elabora tabloul de subgenuri ale romanului românesc? Aș compara strategia de management a „etichetelor” și a criteriilor de clasificare cu manipularea unui negativ fotografic într-o aplicație digitală. Imaginea are anumite proprietăți care vizează gama cromatică, contrastul, luminozitatea etc.; i se pot aplica și filtre, care să determine tonalitatea caldă sau rece a culorilor, tratarea sepia sau alb-negru. În raport cu felul în care aceste caracteristici sunt gestionate de utilizator se poate obține o imagine mai bogată sau mai săracă, mai clară, cu detalii, sau focalizată asupra unui singur aspect central. Chiar mai mult, în fotografie se vor putea distinge obiecte sau contururi în funcție de felul în care cursorul modifică, uneori subtil, curba unei variabile. Vizibilitatea va depinde de alegerile celui care manevrează parametrii imaginii – ceea ce nu înseamnă că lucrurile care ajung astfel să „se vadă” sunt invenții ale operatorului. Ca în raportul între negativul unei fotografii și versiunea ei pe hârtie, imaginea digitală conține latențe pe care realizarea poate să nu le activeze, fără ca reprezentările obținute astfel să fie mai puțin „reale”.

De această responsabilitate am ajuns să fim conștienți în revizia dicționarului. Realitatea subgenurilor, în enormitatea – „nebunia” – ei, continuă să existe într-un plan al latențelor, dar ce scoatem la suprafață, ce lăsăm să „se vadă” depinde de câteva alegeri. Tocmai datorită prodigioasei lor productivități, subgenurile angajează niveluri de detalieri care reclamă gesturi de management, responsabilitatea gestiunii, o „economie”. Iar principala decizie privește nivelul de fragmentare și palierul de definire al seriei: cât de fin se cerne filiația tematică și formală. În introducerea volumului de studii *Microgenres. A Quick Look at Small Cultures* se subliniază că pe platforma Netflix sunt utilizate aproximativ 77000 de subgenuri²⁰. Ele sunt organizate în serii variabile, de trei genuri și câteva calificări (*Balanța* e încadrată ca film „bazat pe o carte”, „dramă” și „dramă politică”, cu recomandări de tipul „îndrăzneț” și „întunecat”), care să permită algoritmilor să propună abonaților noi titluri, în funcție de preferințe deja exprimate. De altfel, chiar interesul recent pentru problematica microgenurilor, a căror istorie coboară în Evul Mediu și în Renaștere, nu poate fi desfăcut de noile posibilități de comercializare a ficțiunii. În istoria romanului, cifrele sunt mult mai mici. Pentru

²⁰ Molly C. O'Donnell, Anne H. Stevens, „Introduction”, in *Microgenres. A quick Look at Small Cultures*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, Loc. 255.

romanul britanic, Franco Moretti identifică, între 1740 și 1900, 44 de genuri²¹. În dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc, pentru un interval comparabil, între 1844 și 2000, folosim 51 de „etichete”. Evident, nivelul selecției depinde de realitatea pe care vrem să o surprindem în „fotografia” de grup. Istoria genericității romanului e o istorie a intereselor sociale și a conflictelor sale, ceea ce implică un nivel median de cristalizare. Interesele unei societăți, deși dinamice, nu se pulverizează indefinit, până la nivelul preferințelor individuale: modalitățile recunoașterii simbolice, raportul dintre dominație și dependență, obiectivele economice sau de clasă, agenda instanțelor de intermediere culturală constituie un număr limitat de dispozitive sociale care mobilizează literatura.

Un inventar de subgenuri ale romanului se poate obține din câteva tipuri, descrise deja de Alastair Fowler în 1982²²: pe baza unei convenții formale (epistolar, cu cheie, parabolic), pe baza unei puneri în scenă specifice (fantastic, poetic, documentar, psihologic), pe baza materiei tematice, a decorului și a acțiunii, în interiorul așa-zisului roman „central”, definit de prezumția verosimilității (*Bildungsroman*, rural, de război, polițist, politic, de aventuri, religios etc.). Din motive care țin de constituția specifică a instituției literaturii în spațiul românesc și de importanța grupărilor literare în configurarea câmpului autonom, la aceste tipuri am adăugat și subgenurile de „școală”, revendicate de unele programe estetice (romanul naturalist, romanul textualist, romanul postmodern). În centrul tipologiei rămân însă genurile definite pe baza materiei tematice, pentru că ele constituie profilul sensibil la social al tipologiei. Această preeminență a însemnat că am privilegiat încadrarea tematică altor încadrări posibile și că am acordat o atenție aparte tematicii sociale specifice culturii române. Astfel, am introdus subgenuri definite de un decor social particular sau de evenimente colective ale unei istorii locale. Așa s-au regăsit în tipologie romanul rural, al ghetoului sau al mahalalei, respectiv romanul răscoalei, al revoluției, al tranziției sau al emigrației. Chiar dacă în tipologie aceste categorii se vor găsi alături de romanul social, enumerate într-o singură ordine – ca și cum ar avea același rang –, ele întrețin în realitate raporturi de includere. Romanul rural sau romanul mahalalei nu sunt decât specificații de decor adăugate repertoriului caracteristic romanului social. Nu e singura situație în care un subgen care întreține raporturi ierarhice sau de includere cu alte subgenuri. Romanul de senzație se definește printr-o poetică melodramatică pe care o exploatează și romanul de mistere, și romanul „negru” sau romanul haiducesc, acestea din urmă nefiind decât particularizări prin acțiune sau personaje ale programului senzaționalist. Romanul pentru copii și tineret reprezintă adaptare a romanului de aventuri, a celui istoric și a celui sentimental la un cronotop specific. Romanul polițist sau de spionaj sunt varietăți ale romanului de aventuri. Cea mai

²¹ Franco Moretti, „Graphs, Maps, Trees. Abstract Models for Literary History”, *New Left Review*, 24, 2003, November–December, pp. 80-82.

²² Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 121-123.

extinsă plajă de subordonare o oferă romanul realist-socialist, care funcționează ca un cadru de reprezentare a realității în care sunt posibile multiple diferențieri tematice (roman rural, roman istoric, roman pentru copii și tineret etc.). Tipologia nu e, din acest punct de vedere, o listă neutră a unor „etichete” de același nivel, ci presupune o organizare multidimensională, constituită din relații orizontale și subordonări verticale (uneori în raport cu mai multe subgenuri). E vorba aici de multe moduri în care convențiile estetice ale romanelor funcționează împreună: prin contaminări, prin incluziuni sau încapsulări, prin împletiri, prin cuplări sau corelări. Toate aceste raporturi poziționează subgenurile și asigură coeziunea tabloului. Dar ele determină și modul în care trebuie citită tipologia, pentru că nicio cuantificare a datelor romanului românesc nu se poate face fără a lua în considerare etajarea, corelarea și contaminarea reciprocă a formelor sale.

Mai dificilă, în sensul angajării de implicații uneori greu de controlat, a fost „etichetarea” propriu-zisă a subgenurilor. Numele date claselor de roman au avut o dublă semnificație în alcătuirea tipologiei. Pe de o parte, ele au presupus un gest de raționalizare și unificare, dificil într-o cultură fără tradiții ale clasificării, care să fi încurajat stabilirea consensuală a terminologiei generice. Să ne gândim doar la variația liberă între roman de moravuri, roman social și frescă socială; sau la ezitățile de desemnare a romanelor de analiză psihologică; sau la imprecizia identificării romanului de senzație. De cealaltă parte, a fost vorba de asigurarea convertibilității: cu naivitate, am considerat la începutul operațiunii de revizie a tipologiei de subgenuri că traducerea denumirilor și identificarea echivalentelor franceze sau engleze va consolida tabloul romanului românesc. Or, nu a fost așa. Operațiunea, deși necesară, nu a făcut decât să pună în evidență multiplele „resturi” în procesul de adopție a unor forme internaționale. Formulele de import pot să circule sub un alt nume – sau chiar nenumite – în cultura română, pot să apară ca reprezentative pentru o întreagă familie de subgenuri, pentru care noua cultură nu are suficiente resurse de diferențiere, sau pot să genereze în spațiul de adopție mai multe varietăți decât în spațiul de origine. Avem de-a face cu disimetrii, de o parte sau de cealaltă, cu pierderi sau câștiguri „în traducere”, cu nume diferite până la a face subgenul nerecognoscibil. Iată câteva exemple în care aspecte de terminologie angajează probleme culturale și, uneori, afectează definiția și conținutul subgenului. Romanul de mistere: nici în Franța, de unde a fost preluată specia, nici în spațiul englez, nu s-a constituit o clasă denumită astfel pentru că termenul era deja ocupat cu „misterele medievale” în tradiția franceză și cu enigma detectivistică, numită „mystery”, în tradiția anglofonă. Astfel, printr-un paradox, găsim un plus de instituționalizare prin „etichetare” în cultura de adopție decât în cea de origine. Situația e inversă în cazul romanului sentimental. Percepută ca o „etichetă” peiorativă în spațiul românesc, sentimentalitatea nu a mai fost asociată unei poetici, fiind concurată în vocabularul critic de „romanul de dragoste”, denumire lipsită de conotații depreciative, dar mult mai vagă. În înfruntarea dintre cele două sintagme, ambele evaluate din perspectiva capacității lor axiologice, s-a creat un vid în calificarea ficțiunilor amoroase: în cultura română s-a răspândit o

noțiune omologată de critică, însă fără conținut, în vreme ce o alta a fost nu numai evitată, ci și decuplată de întreaga tradiție occidentală a romanțului („romance”), cu propriile sale coduri de reprezentare. Tipologia atrage atenția și asupra altor fenomene, mai complexe, în care se creează disimetrii între culturile de origine și cultura de adopție în virtutea tradițiilor și a instituționalizării formelor romanului. Romanului poetic îi corespund în spațiul occidental mai multe subgenuri, majoritatea de „școală” (roman decadent, roman suprarealist, romanul impresionist), pentru care cultura română nu are suficienți reprezentanți. În același sens, romanului satiric îi corespund tradiții și distincții care definesc genurile umorismului sau modul de funcționare a comicului (cum e *Romanul comic* al lui Scarron din 1651), depășind cu mult adâncimea de perspectivă a culturii române. În asemenea situații, versiunea românească e schematică și simplificatoare față de gama occidentală a formelor romanești. Mai nuanțat e cazul romanului existențialist, unde perspectiva restrictivă a spațiului francofon, care limitează ilustrările subgenului la intervalul 1945–1955, e diferită de aceea a spațiului anglofon, care trasează filiere lungi, coborând până la Dostoievski. În cultura română, am folosit „eticheta” pentru a identifica două categorii de roman având în centru problematici ale libertății umane inspirate de filosofia lui Kierkegaard, una interbelică (Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian), cealaltă postbelică, legată de asimilarea modelelor sartriene și camusiene în anumite romane ale lui Augustin Buzura, Marin Preda sau Nicolae Breban.

Dincolo de inconvenientele traducerii, operațiunea stabilirii „etichetelor” demonstrează și vitalitatea tabulaturii generice: prin echivalențe, cele aproximativ 50 de subgenuri din domeniul românesc se deschid spre alte 70 de genuri în domeniul anglofon, și spre tot atâtea în domeniul francofon (nu neapărat aceleași). Se puteau adăuga, desigur, și alte domenii de echivalare, unele regionale și parcelare. Mișcările semantice dintre aceste planuri sunt urme ale transferurilor între culturi, dar și semne ale unei activități continue de diferențiere sau unificare a filierelor generice: dacă romanul românesc face „sistem” prin subgenurile sale, el nu poate fi citit decât pe fondul rețelei de circuite transnaționale, ca un patchwork ale cărui fire se resorb într-o imensă canava, pe care e prins și întrețesut în același timp.

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E probabil un moment prielnic pentru o asemenea ordonare a tipologiei romanului românesc. Spre deosebire de echipa care a conceput dicționarul, am avut la dispoziție monografii, sinteze lexicografice, cercetări exhaustive dedicate unor subgenuri. Romanul politic, romanul existențialist, romanul rural, romanul polițist, romanul academic, romanul science-fiction, romanul de mistere, romanul haiducesc, subgenurile populare în general au fost în bună măsură cartografiate pe teren românesc. În plus, am știut cui ne adresăm și cum arată studiile literare care vor exploata rezultatele unei asemenea operațiuni de raționalizare tipologică. Am

asumat organizarea tabloului de genuri românești într-un context în care aveam suficient de multe instrumente la dispoziție pentru a exprima sensibilitatea formelor literare în raport cu interesele sociale. Iar din acest punct de vedere, „fotografia” romanului românesc pe care o restituie versiunea revizuită a dicționarului e fără îndoială mult mai atent și în detaliu controlată.

Totuși, în final, cred că prudența, nu optimismul metodologic trebuie să ne conducă în exploatarea acestui rezultat. Fascinanta demonstrație prin care Franco Moretti arată cum ordonează cu ajutorul celor 44 de genuri istoria romanului britanic, care ne-a sedus probabil pe mulți la vremea ei, e însoțită de o precauție „Notă asupra taxonomiei formelor”²³. Sunt mai multe avertismente acolo: că în schema evoluției genurilor nu s-au luat în calcul revenirile și supraviețuirile²⁴, că nu au fost redate raporturile ierarhice dintre forme, că nu s-a lăsat loc pentru echivoc sau pentru interpretări concurente în stabilirea limitelor temporale ori a identității generice. Și că atunci când asemenea fenomene au apărut, cercetătorul le-a eliminat:

...there were some dubious cases, of course, and some (not very significant) disagreements in periodization; and although this is still very much work-in-progress, especially at the two ends of the temporal spectrum, the forty-four genres provide a large enough set to support some reflections”²⁵.

Poate că, la douăzeci de ani distanță, mai putem adăuga la neliniștile lui Moretti alte câteva: legate de transferul intercultural al genurilor, de diferențierea lor moleculară, de vertijul unei productivități generice care e prin natura ei transmedială, intersectând artele, genurile tradiționale sau practicile cotidianului. Nu cred că mai putem ignora aceste avertismente. Tabulatura generică a romanului nu e un instrument univoc și nu vorbește de la sine: e mai degrabă o intrare posibilă într-un univers al complexității, o poziție din care să putem contempla felul în care formele, literatura și societatea se confruntă și se ritmează împreună. Utilitatea acestui instrument depinde de înțelegerea limitelor lui și de măsura în care vom vedea aici nu răspunsuri, ci o platformă inedită pe care ne putem situa ca să punem noi întrebări.

²³ Franco Moretti, „Graphs, Maps, Trees”, p. 91.

²⁴ Istoricitatea subgenurilor și modul în care acestea se înscriu în duratele medii și lungi a fost intens disputat de cercetările recente, cu argumente din sfera formalismului digital și cantitativ. Aș evoca aici cercetările lui Ted Underwood care au pus în evidență dinamici de supraviețuire și de revenire ale unor subgenuri populare care nu confirmă ipoteza generațională în funcție de care Franco Moretti a organizat tabloul formelor romanului britanic („The Life Spans of Genres”, in *Distant Horizons. Digital Evidence and Literary Change*, Chicago – London, Chicago University Press, 2019, pp. 34-66, și „Genre Theory and Historicism”, *Cultural Analytics*, 2016, October 25, <https://culturalanalytics.org/article/11063>. Accesat în 20 decembrie 2020).

²⁵ Franco Moretti, „Graphs, Maps, Trees”, p. 80.

Subgenuri folosite în
*Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până în 2000*²⁶

		Echivalențe. Domeniul anglo-american	Echivalențe. Domeniul francez
1.	Roman autobiografic	<i>Autobiographical Novel</i>	<i>Roman autobiographique</i>
2.	Autoficțiune	<i>Autofiction</i>	<i>Autofiction</i>
3.	<i>Bildungsroman</i>	<i>Bildungsroman</i>	<i>Roman d'apprentissage</i> <i>Roman d'éducation</i> <i>Roman de formation</i> <i>Roman d'initiation</i>
4.	Biografie romanțată	<i>Biographical Novel</i> <i>Biofiction</i>	<i>Biographie romancée</i> <i>Fiction biographique</i>
5.	Roman de aventuri	<i>Adventure Novel</i> <i>Thriller</i>	<i>Roman d'aventures</i> <i>Roman exotique</i> <i>Robinsonnade</i> <i>Roman colonial</i>
6.	Roman de campus	<i>Academic Novel</i> <i>Campus Novel</i>	<i>Roman de campus</i>
7.	Roman de călătorie	<i>Travelogue</i> <i>Travel novel</i>	<i>Roman de voyage</i>
8.	Roman cu cheie	<i>Novel with a Key</i>	<i>Roman à clef</i>
9.	Roman pentru copii și tineret	<i>Young Adult Novel</i> <i>Children's Novel</i>	<i>Roman pour la jeunesse</i>
10.	Roman-document	<i>Documentary Novel</i>	<i>Roman-témoignage</i> <i>Roman reportage</i>
11.	Roman al emigrației	<i>Migration Novel</i>	
12.	Roman epistolar	<i>Epistolary Novel</i>	<i>Roman épistolaire</i> <i>Roman par lettres</i>
13.	Roman erotic	<i>Erotic Romance Novel</i> <i>Erotic Novel</i> <i>Amatory Novel</i>	<i>Roman érotique</i>
14.	Roman al exilului	<i>Exile Novel</i>	

²⁶ Ca surse principale pentru elaborarea tabloului de „echivalențe” s-au folosit, în domeniul anglo-american, două enciclopedii ale romanului: Peter Melville Logan, Olakunle George, Susan Hegeman, Efrain Kristal (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*, I-II (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2011) și Paul Schellinger, Cristopher Hudson, Marijke Rijsberman (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, I-II (London – New York, Routledge, 2014), iar în domeniul francez, dicționarul lui Yves Stalloni, *Dictionnaire du roman* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2012).

15.	Roman existențialist	<i>Existentialist Novel</i>	<i>Roman existentialiste</i>
16.	Roman de familie	<i>Family Novel</i> <i>Family Saga</i> <i>Domestic Novel</i>	<i>Roman familial</i> <i>Roman-fleuve</i>
17.	Roman fantastic	<i>Fantastic Fiction</i>	<i>Roman fantastique</i>
18.	Roman <i>fantasy</i>	<i>Fantasy Novel</i>	<i>Fantasy/ Fantaisie</i>
19.	Roman filosofic	<i>Philosophical Novel</i> <i>Novel of Ideas</i>	<i>Roman philosophique</i>
20.	Roman al ghetoului	<i>Ghetto Novel</i>	
21.	Roman haiducesc	<i>Hajduk Novel</i> <i>Outlaw Novel</i>	
22.	Roman istoric	<i>Historical Novel</i>	<i>Roman historique</i>
23.	Roman al mahalalei	<i>Slum Novel</i>	
24.	Roman al memoriei	<i>Novel of Memory</i>	<i>Roman de la mémoire</i>
25.	Metaficțiune	<i>Metafiction</i>	<i>Métafiction</i>
26.	Metaficțiune istoriografică	<i>Historiographical Metafiction</i>	
27.	Roman de mistere	<i>City Mysteries Novel</i> <i>Urban Mysteries</i>	<i>Roman social des bas-fonds</i>
28.	Roman naturalist	<i>Naturalistic Novel</i>	<i>Roman naturaliste</i>
29.	Roman „negru”	<i>Gothic Novel</i>	<i>Roman noir</i>
30.	Roman al „obsedantului deceniu”	n/a	n/a
31.	Roman oniric	<i>Oneiric Novel</i>	<i>Roman onirique</i>
32.	Roman parabolă	<i>Parabolic Novel</i>	<i>Roman parabolique</i>
33.	Roman poetic	<i>Surrealist – Avantgarde Novel</i> <i>Poetical Novel</i>	<i>Roman décadent</i> <i>Roman surréaliste</i> <i>Roman poétique</i>
34.	Roman politic	<i>Political Novel</i>	<i>Roman à thèse</i>
35.	Roman polițist	<i>Detective Novel</i> <i>Crime Novel</i>	<i>Roman policier</i> <i>Polar</i>
36.	Roman postmodern	<i>Postmodernist Novel</i>	<i>Roman postmoderne</i>
37.	Roman psihologic	<i>Psychological Novel</i>	<i>Roman moderne analytique</i> <i>Roman d’analyse</i> <i>Roman psychologique</i>
38.	Roman al războaielor	n/a	n/a
39.	Roman de război	<i>War Novel</i>	<i>Roman de guerre</i>
40.	Roman al revoluției	n/a	n/a

41.	Roman realist-socialist	<i>Socialist Realist Novel</i>	
42.	Roman religios	<i>Religious Novel</i> <i>Spiritual Novel</i>	<i>Roman religieux</i>
43.	Roman rural	<i>Rural Novel</i> <i>Farm Novel</i> <i>Regional Novel</i>	<i>Roman rustique</i>
44.	Roman satiric	<i>Satirical Novel</i> <i>Comic Novel</i>	<i>Roman satyrique</i> <i>Roman gai</i> <i>Roman comique</i>
45.	Roman de senzație	<i>Sensation Novel</i> <i>Melodrama</i>	<i>Roman populaire</i> <i>mélodramatique</i>
46.	Roman de spionaj	<i>Spy Novel</i> <i>Spy Thriller</i>	<i>Roman d'espionnage</i>
47.	Roman sentimental	<i>Sentimental Novel</i> <i>Romance</i>	<i>Roman sentimental</i> <i>Roman à l'eau de rose</i> <i>Roman d'amour</i>
48.	Roman social	<i>Social Novel</i>	<i>Roman social</i> <i>Roman de mœurs</i> <i>Roman réaliste</i>
49.	Roman științifico-fantastic	<i>Science Fiction Novel</i>	<i>Roman science-fiction</i>
50.	Roman textualist	n/a	n/a
51.	Roman al tranziției	<i>Novel of Transition</i>	

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THE SUBGENRES OF THE ROMANIAN NOVEL.
THE LAB OF A TYPOLOGY
(Abstract)

The revision of the *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from its Origins to 2000*, a project conceived in the late 1970s and published in a first edition in 2004, had to reconsider and reorganize the subgenre taxonomy used for the complete labelling of the Romanian novel production between 1884 and 2000. This article presents the theoretical framework that substantiates such a literary historiographical instrument, the list of subgenres, its criteria, as well as the cultural relevance of the proposed classification system.

Keywords: *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel*, subgenres, genre theory, the history of the Romanian novel 1844–2000, social history of literature.

DELIA UNGUREANU, *From Paris to Tlön. Surrealism as World Literature*, New York and London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 354 p.

A common theme shared by recent Romanian studies in humanities is the advancement of the Romanian literature as a product beyond borders, a purpose likewise embraced and promoted by the book *Romanian Literature as World Literature*. Even if such approaches to the internationalization of the local literature usually stem from a periphery complex, these systematic investigations prove that a cultural, literary phenomenon or a literature considered to be minor partakes (directly or indirectly) in the major global movements of the cultural fields. *From Paris to Tlön. Surrealism as World Literature*, edited in 2018 by Bloomsbury Publishing and signed by Delia Ungureanu, is one of these studies.

With an approach methodologically-based on the concept of network theory borrowed from social anthropology, the author investigates the manner in which surrealism became an international and influential phenomenon, while also analysing certain similarities with the movement that can be found in the literary work of a few writers who were not primarily associated with the movement's pioneers: Vladimir Nabokov, Orhan Pamuk, Jorge Luis Borges and Mircea Cărtărescu. Throughout her research, Delia Ungureanu develops a map of the surrealist movement and its heritage by reconstructing the paths taken by various artists and writers from different countries as well as the cultural milieu and their relations with the artwork of major surrealist representatives such as André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Louis Aragon or Philippe Soupault.

In her attempt to restore the literary history of the surrealist movement, Delia Ungureanu tactfully handles extra-literary instruments. By making use of methods such as visual arts, analysing and drawing connections between the biographical destiny and the artists' creative activity, the aim of this book is to retrace the routes through which the surrealism became "a mutually productive exchange among different cultural capitals around the world" (4). Consistent with the increasingly varied attempts to approach literature from a viewpoint beyond rigorous geographical and temporal delimitations, Delia Ungureanu adopts a transnational perspective regarding surrealism, whose international character was "inborn in the movement" (7).

First of all, the author picks as the starting point of her research the well-known break between André Breton and Salvador Dalí, whence the two major directions of surrealism start: "Breton's orthodox, more purely autonomous surrealism and Dalí's more hybrid, market-oriented one, opened to the mechanisms of recognition and cultural establishment" (10). In fact, the main difference of outlook originates in the way that the two artists conceived the "surrealist object": whereas Dalí was permanently attempting to commercialize and use it for self-promotion, Breton was interested in preserving it as a pure result of an artistic consciousness. Hence, surrealism, a phenomenon born in Paris, will continue to have two dimensions until André Breton, "the Pope" of the movement, becomes aware of the necessity to renew and establish it in order to keep it alive and align it with the American cultural progress. Starting with the playful experiments of the surrealists and their strategies of creation rooted in collective practices ("inventing their own Tarot game", "reading the Tarot cards", "Exquisite Corpse", "One Inside the Other"), Delia Ungureanu has already crystallised the marketing spirit of the Spanish painter Salvador Dalí by showing the similarities between him and Lewis Carroll – by way of example, the appearance of Salvador Dalí as White Rabbit in *Vogue* magazine. Beyond this purposeful tendency to commercialize art, there is "a very surrealist act of history: the White Rabbit started as a fictional character, then became a part of a game and came closer to life, only to become real with the apparition of Dalí, for again to go back to the playful reality of cartoons in the pages of *Vogue*" (19).

Besides outlining the artistic creeds of these two artists and their different natures, one of the major concepts of this book is the "surreal object", which becomes the main instrument through

which Delia Ungureanu re-establishes the connections within the surrealist global network. If Dalí recontextualizes the fictional character of Carroll for the purpose of self-promotion and art commercialization, Breton imagines the surrealist object like “a dreamy glass house” distinguished by such transparency that it has the power to transcend into a surrealist world. Besides, the two versions of surrealism, which were initially in opposition, prove two lines of thought: “one [Breton] refused to grow old in the practice of the game, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, and the other [Dalí] wanted to gain immediate consecration and transform the symbolic into social and economic capital, using both short-term and long-term strategies” (20).

Secondly, Delia Ungureanu continues her research by investigating the importance and the efficacy of three institutions thanks to which surrealist artists (especially writers) succeeded in promoting their work both in France, the motherland of this movement, and beyond national territory: the salons, the bookshops and the literary magazines. The two bookshops that constitute the core of the French and foreign intellectuals’ network are surprisingly directed by two women who are not known as writers or visual artists: Adrienne Monnier (La Maison des Amis des Livres) and Sylvia Beach (Shakespeare & Co.). Even though surrealism has been eminently shaped under the impact of the French language, these bookshops are the key points in remodelling an autochthonous current into an international one due to marketing strategies and to the readiness of bringing together different generations of artists (from those already canonized, such as Paul Valéry, to the new avant-garde) from different cultures: “The most numerous communities of émigré artists and writers in interwar Paris were Germans, the Russians, and the North Americans, clustering in the symbolic center of Montparnasse” (31). The literary magazines (*Littérature*, *La Révolution surréaliste*, *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, *Minotaure*, *VVV*, and *Sur*) also had a major impact on the internationalization of surrealism, being both the place where Breton published the two surrealist manifestos and an instrument of “self-legitimation” of the group. Thus, aware that they need a refreshing of the surrealist ideas to extend beyond the French barriers, André Breton writes *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929), whose content was not radically different from the first one, but “it was more of a political declaration emphasizing the surrealists’ leftist position grounded in Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, and a reinforcement of the imperative to rediscover the irrational, the dream, and sexuality as instruments for fighting against the comfortable world of the bourgeoisie” (50). The most significant difference between the first and the second manifesto resides precisely in the political dimension enforced by the latter: Breton’s anti-bourgeois dimension contrasts with Dalí’s bourgeois and more commercial version. Furthermore, whereas Breton had proposed a cooperative approach to keeping surrealism alive and disseminating it abroad to its full extent, Dalí embraced an individualistic attitude, succeeding in conquering the commercial New York. Borrowing the main surrealist concepts from the French writer – “surrealist object”, “automatic writing”, “chance encounter”, “convulsive beauty” – the Spanish artist invents “the method of critical paranoia” and he relies on shocking and scandalising the audience through his art. The establishing of the surrealist movement was attained using two different strategies, one carried out by Dalí through his successful collaborations with the fashion industry and modern art exhibitions such as those of MoMA; the other caused by Breton’s self-exile in New York in an attempt to save his principles and own vision of the phenomenon. Simultaneously, but more resonantly so for the Spanish painter – “the star of the group” (127) –, the two artists wanted to coin surrealism as an international and polarizing movement. For Breton, it encompasses especially an anticolonial and antinationalist character, whereas for Dalí surrealism is the gateway for trading and making his art famous: “whereas Dalí’s sexual objects are oriented toward the past, Breton’s are future-oriented and visionary” (192).

Another relevant aspect of the book consists in the attentive reconstruction of the genesis of certain texts that reclaim surrealist ideas, concepts and techniques such as Lautréamont’s plagiarism. There are two cases that display a major influence mainstream surrealism had on authors who didn’t officially belong to the movement: Vladimir Nabokov with *Lolita* and Jorge Luis Borges with the short story *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*. As regards the first one, the idea of a nymph named Lolita comes from Dalí’s Dulita, the main character from *Rêverie*, a story signed by the Spanish artist. As for the Latin American writer, Delia Ungureanu believes that Borges’ fictional Menard is

constructed “from different characters – Lautréamont, Valéry, and Dr. Pierre Menard – whose common denominator is the person of André Breton” (122). Beyond the real existence of the French graphologist Dr. Pierre Menard, who had analysed Lautréamont's handwriting, the research manages to unthread the network through which Borges was connected to surrealism in its borderless, uncontained form.

The last chapter, named “The Ghosts of Surrealism in the World Novel”, brings together two writers from (semi)peripheral cultures, the Turkish Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk and the Romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu, whose novels (*The Black Book* and *The Museum of Innocence* by Pamuk, *Nostalgia* and *Solenoid* by Cărtărescu) assimilate concepts as the “surrealist object”. By using the same method of biographical research, Delia Ungureanu reconstructs the professional paths of these two novelists, relying on their books. Aragon's *Le Cahier noir* represents the fundament for Pamuk's *The Black Book*, while “transparent objects” conceptualized by Breton became “innocent objects” as in the Turkish writer's second novel mentioned. It is interesting that a writer from the Orient like Pamuk has adopted Breton's version of surrealism, when Nabokov, naturalized as American, appropriated Dalí's more eccentric perspective.

In the case of Mircea Cărtărescu, “from his poetic beginnings, as Delia Ungureanu observes, [he] developed a specific literary formula, his hallmark today: dream literature that challenges the boundaries of genre, creating a new type of fiction” (288). *Nostalgia*, a five-story book, is “mapping an oneiric childhood Bucharest” (290). In *Gemini*, for example, Andrei, one of the two protagonists, was “a great reader of the surrealists' predecessors” (291). Also, Cărtărescu's metamorphosis of the surrealist object is based on the ambiguous Romanian term “carte de joc” meaning “both playing card and playing book” (292), which proves the relevant presence of the surrealism heritage, but, perhaps even more significantly, Cărtărescu's own way of assimilating and fitting it within local culture.

Briefly, in spite of some less-defined conclusions, Delia Ungureanu argues throughout her book that the internationalization of the surrealist current has taken place by means of two major and different standpoints: one regarding the internal dynamics of this phenomenon and the other targeting the external and fruitful influences of surrealism on writers and creators outside of the main group.

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ȘTEFAN BAGHIU, VLAD POJOGA, and MARIA
SASS (eds.), *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, Berlin, Peter
Lang, 2019, 311 p.

The quality and quantity of the home-grown rural literature has been the topic of long-lasting aggressive and, one might argue, groundless debates among the literary critics and ideologues for the most part of Modern Romania's history. These polemics, which almost always bear an ideological purposefulness, are responsible for the distortion of the image of the rural world in the Romanian cultural environment, the village world finding itself caught between the image of a restored Arcadia, unproblematic and mythical, and that an existential inferno, bereft of psychological depth, subject to the laws of endless physical labour and brute force. One after another, N. Iorga, E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, N. Manolescu, to name only the most significant Romanian literary historians, refer to what is, in fact, the same ideologically-crafted rurality (as demonstrated by Cosmin Borza in the case of the first three aforementioned critics in “The National No Man's Land. Imagining Rurality in the Romanian Literary Histories”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2019, 6, pp. 170-180 – an article which is not regrouped in the present volume, but which can be seen as complementary to the project). All of them either discriminate or zealously exalt what has constituted until rather recently (the 1980s-1990s) the largest section in the national population distribution. This image of the autochthonous rurality

extracted from the national literary histories, serving either the multiple urges to urbanize the country (on the grounds that the rural majority was to be blamed for the country's "backwardness" and its culture alike), or the periodic comebacks of the (neo)sămănătorist spirit, hinders what constitutes, in fact, one of the truly fertile and catalytic areas in the landscape of a national literature.

Having such an intimate relationship with identity and the national element, being at the centre of so many quarrels and enrolments, one would expect the "peasant question" in literature to avail itself of a serious theoretical background in Romania's academic and critical environment. Unfortunately, here is to be seen the persistence of the cliché and the high risk of its being imposed as an axiom on the critical consciousness. In fact, before the collective volume *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, the home-grown specialized literature counts only two more studies that deal with the evolution of autochthonous rural literary production. These are *Universul rustic în literatura română [The Rustic Space in the Romanian Literature]* (1985) by Sultana Craia and *Ipostaze ale modernizării prozei rurale. Pavel Dan, Marin Preda, Sorin Titel [Aspects of Rural Prose Modernization. Pavel Dan, Marin Preda, Sorin Titel]* (2009) by Nicolae Bârna. They have the merit of dismantling several prejudices towards the compatibility of the Romanian "rural material" with a well-synchronized and qualitative literature, without the help of a significant amount of concrete data, which bear the sign of newer practices of literary research – to be found in the volume published at Peter Lang in 2019.

Right from the introduction to *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, Ștefan Baghiu and Vlad Pojoga identify at least two main causes for the misconception regarding the presumed rural monopoly in Romanian literature's topography: the general distribution of population in Romania throughout its history, and the official Romanian (high-school) literary canon. The rest of the volume is divided into three main sections. The first and the most massive of the sections is dedicated to the novel. The second one is called "Literary Criticism and Social Action", and the last part deals with poetry.

Concerning the novel, the revelatory chapters, in the sense of successfully combating the rushed and cynical replies of E. Lovinescu regarding the rural material, belong to Cosmin Borza and Daiana Gârdan. At the end of the quantitative analysis undertaken by Cosmin Borza, the rural novel seems to occupy only 7% of the Romanian production between 1896 and 2000. Out of the total of 6,290 published novels, only 430 are rural in a period that spans more than a century. This realisation makes the researcher conclude: "during its history, Romanian literature has discriminated against its most numerous social class" (35-36). Even more so, the conclusion seems to be valid for the Romanian novel of the 19th century as well. The article "Geografia internă a romanului românesc în secolul al XIX-lea" ["The Internal Geography of the Romanian Novel in the 19th Century"] (authored by Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, Teodora Susarenco, Radu Vancu, Emanuel Modoc, and published in *Transilvania*, 2019, 10, pp. 29-43), which is referenced in the volume without literally being part of it, clarifies the picture for the 1844-1900 period, where the numerical supremacy of the novel stems from the urban environment: "Out of the 157 novels which form the corpus of our quantitative analysis, 46 of them take place, either partially or entirely, in the village; the remaining 112 have their action restricted to cities or urbanized areas – which means that 71% of the Romanian novel of the 19th century is, contrary to the dominant perception of the literary history, a profoundly urban novel in what concerns its internal geography" (35-36). Just as welcome are the contributions of Daiana Gârdan, who, likewise, makes use of quantitative analysis doubled by geo-criticism and genre theory. Her study deals a final blow to a rather reductive dichotomy (rural against urban) in the interwar Romanian novel by drawing attention to the *interstitial* spaces, an instrumental metaphor "whereby light is shed on a statistical reality" (75). These so-called interstitial spaces dominate the interwar novelistic production in terms of setting, by reaching a total of 40%, more than the fully rural or urban counterparts. Thus, Diana Gârdan is right to proudly believe that the "chapter's initial ambitions of reviving an otherwise stagnant conversation about the rural novel is fully achieved" (77). Such data should have a clarifying effect regarding the autochthonous rural literature.

However, it is far from my intention to suggest that this is the only merit of the volume, or that this particular opus revolves only around "rural literature". As stated in the "Introduction", the goal of this work is to "propose a series of world literature and transnational frames for the debate of what

seems to be the *most autochthonous topic*, namely *rural life and ruralism within a national literature*" (13). That is why the research project covers an area much larger than what can be labelled as Romanian rural literature. A good example for this is Maria Sass' interesting study on "The Image of the Transylvanian Village...", where the traditional Romanian village of Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion* is compared to Paul Schuster's Saxon village from the novel *Fünf Liter Zuika*, in order to highlight two rather similar authorial attitudes, especially with regard to the refusal of bestowing the novels with elements of the populist spirit of the age. Both works complement the multi-dimensional image of the Transylvanian village (Romanian, Saxon) built with much narratological knowledge by the two novelists (66). Not as "ideologically innocent" is the case of the Romanian-German/German-Romanian ethnic group and its literature analysed by Ovio Olaru in his study which makes use of Benedict Anderson's concept of "diaspora nationalism". In Olaru's study, placed in the second section of the collective volume, it is clear that in the German literature from Romania, rural life is never portrayed as a mere setting, but is strongly ideologized and subdued to successive political imperatives (261). Thus, authors such as Eginald Schlattner, Herta Müller, Hans Bergel or Richard Wagner fall under the attention given to Western anti-communist narratives, sparking an effect similar to other isolated counter-canonical phenomena within the international literary market in the course of history, such as Latin American Magical Realism, African and Carribean Literature, the Icelandic sagas and so on.

Moving on to the shortest section of *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, dedicated to poetry, the three studies displayed by Emanuel Modoc, Radu Drăgulescu and Mihnea Bălici, so different from each other, manage to reflect a somehow harmonious existence between multiple methodologies and perspectives. This is, indeed, a strong point of the volume in general, visible in all its main chapters, actually. A balanced attitude (although not lacking a certain polemic nuance) seems to mark the study "Negotiating the Rural and the Rustic in the Romanian Avant-Garde", where Emanuel Modoc is demonstrating, somewhat contrary to the programmes of the militant artist of the extreme modernism, that the rural component is not to be neglected or simplified, focusing on several representative works by Tristan Tzara, B. Fundoianu and Geo Bogza. As the young researcher is trying to prove, "not only are the initial stages of Romanian historical avant-garde marked by rural imagery and imagination [...], but its entire development throughout the 1920s and 1930s is determined by a consistent process of negotiating the rural, the rustic and the natural within its subsequent theoretical and artistic programmes" (272). The study is remarkable due the author's visible mastery of the Romanian (and European) Avant-Garde subject, yet if I were to find a "flaw", I would point out that Modoc's almost categorical dismissal of interpreting Fundoianu as an expressionist poet, a problem that he chose not to dwell on, may have been worth defending. For in my perspective there are enough arguments to point towards a clear compatibility between his poetry and expressionism, without necessarily asking the poet of Herța for an expressionist creed. However, that is hardly a flaw and more of an invitation to further interesting debate, because, after all, advancing conversations which have reached a point of stagnation is indeed one purpose of the volume and of the newer research tools in general.

Closing the volume, Mihnea Bălici's "New Ruralism: From Village to Globe" brings the discussion on ruralism to the extreme contemporaneity by focusing on the works of contemporary poets such as Matei Hutopila, Anatol Grosu, Ștefan Ivas, Ion Buzu, Victor Țvetov and Marius Aldea. These poets belong to what the Romanian contemporary critics coin New Ruralism, and Mihnea Bălici decides to offer Andrei Doboș a distinct place within this emerging niche. The young researcher identifies several important traits that characterise New Ruralism, of which the mobilization of the rural environment to emphasize the shortcomings of the project of modernization and globalization after Romania's official entry into the international system (303) is a key one in understanding this facet of the relation between the village and literature. The urban areas do not represent a space of refuge and safety either, and, as Bălici aptly notes "the fact that neither the village nor the city offer viable lifestyles is the reason why, in all the projects of New Ruralism, there is a distrust of the beneficial effects of current globalization" (306).

These are only a handful of the numerous profoundly innovative and undisputedly professional studies to be found in *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*. The volume is a much needed one in the Romanian cultural environment, not only because it brings justice to a lately underrated (if not ignored) topic, but because it sets an example of virtuosity in handling multiple methodologies, most of which are right up-to-date. The various research tools mastered in the volume vary from distant reading, geo-criticism, quantitative studies, genre theory, critique of ideology, non-anthropocentric reading, to socio-criticism, skopos theory in translation, transnationalism, and the list may go on.

Thus, *Ruralism and Literature in Romania* represents a model of professionalism in Romanian literary research, while also successfully introducing a topic so identity-related, and therefore so complex, to an international public.

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MIHAI IGNAT, *O istorie antroponimică a romanului românesc [An Anthroponymic History of the Romanian Novel]*, Braşov, Editura Universităţii Transilvania din Braşov, 2019, vol. I, 332 p. + vol. II, 309 p.

The concern for the symbolic potential of the names of literary characters has been a long one for Mihai Ignat. Originally a doctoral thesis, his monographic study *Onomastics in the Romanian Novel* appeared in 2009, followed by the first volume of *An Anthroponymic History of the Romanian Novel* in 2016, and the second one in 2019, belonging to the same “simile-history”, as the author calls it. It is not necessary to further tackle the meaning of “history” in terms of the methodology and the panoramic principle that the scope of a “legitimizing meta-narrative”, in the words of Angelo Mitchievici¹, brings about. In fact, Ignat’s *Anthroponymic History of the Romanian Novel* underlines the “collector spirit” that Mitchievici proposed for the “new” literary histories signed by Mihai Zamfir (2011/ 2017), Petre Anghel (2014), Monica Lovinescu (2014), Răzvan Voncu (2014), Mircea Angheliescu (2019) or Antonio Patraş (2019).

Mihai Ignat’s *History* starts from “the idea that the proper names of the characters provide a particular access path into the universe of a literary work, being a sufficiently interesting, rich and profitable object of study from an exegetical angle” (vol. I, 5). It can be stated that the demonstrations in the volumes support the author’s approach, being quite convincing in this respect. The arrangement of the novels analysed from the perspective of anthroponymy in Ignat’s *History* follows the chronological order. Thus, the first volume deals with books published between 1705 and 1945, while the second volume covers the period 1946-2000.

The selection, from Dimitrie Cantemir’s *Hieroglyphic History (1705/1965)* to *The Story of the Great Brigand (2000)* by Petru Cimpoeşu, was motivated primarily by the representativeness of the characters’ onomastics, in the attempt to highlight the “meanings, the aesthetic (expressive) value, the functions (narrative, descriptive, characterological, etc.) of literary anthroponymy. Another goal was that of determining the way characters are named or relate to their names or those of other characters, discovering the fictional or extra-fictional universe of using proper names, description and interpretation among the proper names of the literary imaginary, the stylistic, sonorous, semantic or even etymological characteristics...” (vol. I, 5). Consequently, the hermeneutic success of the

¹ Angelo Mitchievici, “Viaţa criticii şi istoriei literare” [“The life of literary criticism and history”], *România literară*, 2020, 14, <https://romanaliterara.com/2020/04/viata-criticii-si-istoriei-literare/>. Accessed September 5, 2020.

incursions into the meanings of literary anthroponyms is determined by the relevance and richness of the onomastic elements within the fictional discourse. We therefore find both analyses, presented in the form of listings of the names of the characters introduced through retelling, to be innovative, engaging and fascinating interpretations.

Another selection criterion that Mihai Ignat claims, especially suitable for the second volume, is that of the “unfortunate ideological contamination” that motivates the absence of certain novels. Even in the case of certain novels with thesis tendencies, Ignat ironically sanctions any slips without, however, ignoring the strengths of the novels: “Lisandra’s little girl is called, eccentrically, ‘Fiameta’ (which does not quite fit in with the communist mentality of the character). In fact, we learn from the daughter herself that her name is ‘Dolores-Anda’, but her mother calls her ‘Fiameta’. We must also note the over-cosmopolitan onomastic taste of someone called Lisandra Olt who fights on the barricades of communism for a living [...]. This novel is part of a series of those which, ‘infected’ by the ideology of its writing, without bearing a special aesthetic value, find compensation at least in terms of onomastic expressiveness” (vol. II, 45-46).

Almost without exception, the analyses begin in an axiological key. The introductions to the atmosphere of the novels provide both macro level hierarchies, illustrating a general positioning in the field of Romanian literature, and particular ones, within the entire work of the author. Through case studies, Ignat also aims, on the one hand, to recover some novels fallen into “unjust obscurity”, such as Ioana Postelnicu’s *Bogdana* (1939) or Iulia Soare’s *The Calaff Family* (1956), and, on the other hand, to reveal some overestimations: “far from being a ‘quick prose’, Mircea Ciobanu’s *Witnesses* is neither the work of an ‘exceptional prose writer of the inner life’ or an ‘eminent stylist’, but a rather gray, monochord and carefully supervised (from a narrative standpoint) book about a book, encompassing an obvious parabolic dimension” (vol. II, 52).

In fact, “the integrated interpretation”, or “contradicting or supplementing previous exegetical interventions” (vol I, 5-6) is the basic method employed by Ignat. Arguing with other critics by appealing to the meanings involved in the anthroponymic layer is common: “A novel overqualified in point of aesthetic-hermeneutic value and, implicitly, in terms of proper names, insofar as it is speculated that ‘Ion [John]’, ‘Marcu [Mark]’ and ‘Luca [Luke]’ would have evangelical connotations. [...] Ion Bogdan Lefter’s comment in this respect becomes friable not only because it is a single argument or moment / event [...], but also because that ‘apostolic’ connotation is related to the assumption made by Luca’s character that the taxi driver would look at him as a prophet or enlightened person” (vol II, 234).

It is clear, however, that the onomastic register, as revealed by case studies, is not strictly determined by the aesthetic successes of the novels. This does not mean that a structural unity between the aesthetic, ethical and anthroponymic dimension is not possible, as is the case of the Romanian novel signed by Matei Călinescu (*Viața și opiniile lui Zacharias Lichter [The Life and Opinions of Zacharias Lichter]*) which “remains original even by onomastics or at least by the name of its eccentric (and difficult to follow) main character, an example of standing against the communist regime which the book avoids through an original formula of sui-generis, parable-portrait biography” (vol. II, 69). An impressive analysis through the totalizing perspective proposed by the author – treating the plans of the novel through the prism of coherence and structural unity – is to be found in the study dedicated to the names in the novel *Moromeții [The Morometes]*: “... the impression in reading is that the names, bearing a joyful sonority, are very suitable: Nilă is a bit heavy-minded, Bircă is honest and stubborn, against a background of common sense, Țugurlan is tough, fierce, Bâldea is ugly. The role of the text seems to be to round the first impression, the phonetic one, by adding semantic elements, i.e. through portrait features which provide the names with ‘roots’ in the imaginary of the work [...] *Moromeții* is a realistic and monographic novel, aiming at accounting for the world as a whole by including not just a few, but all the features and problems of the interwar Romanian village. Thus, the existence of respectable doses in each category of proper names is not purely coincidental (even if unconsciously materialized), because a copy of the world must necessarily contain all its components, including the nominal aspect” (vol. II, 24-31).

The diachronic arrangement proposed by Mihai Ignat has the advantage of clearly capturing the evolution of the Romanian genre and, at the same time, of the three “traditions” or predominant onomastic regimes: “explicit denomination, with semantics”, “discreet, unostentatious denomination” and “sound-type onomastics with special acoustics”. From the process of “autochthonizing” Western models through Romanian onomastics in the pioneering novels of our literature, to the use of initials, cryptonyms, hypocorism, enclitic articulations of names, feminine use of masculine names, acronyms, nicknames or sophistry, Ignat observes the tendency of anthroponyms to adapt to the illustrated genre. As a consequence, the subsumption of various assumptions on other dimensions of the epic is outlined in the argumentative approach: “We can easily homologate S. Damian’s glosses on farce and satire as implicit comments on the carnival of onomastics in Călinescu’s last novels” (vol. II, 19). In the commentary dedicated to the novel *Lunga călătorie a prizonierului* [*The Long Journey of the Prisoner*] (1971) signed by Sorin Titel, Mihai Ignat reinterprets well-known hermeneutical perspectives on the parabolic character, Kafkaesque lineages, depersonalization and identity-emptying or allegorical implications, premises launched by Petru Mihai Gorcea, Eugen Simion, Cornel Ungureanu and Valeriu Cristea to support the coherence and motivations of the onomastic void.

In addition to assigning anthroponyms to a certain literary genre, Mihai Ignat also discusses the stylistic particularization of the names of the characters from the perspective of the imprint of originality and the specificity of novelists. While “Rebrenization” would involve a harsh acoustics, “the hardness of the component vowels of many of the names, their greyness and their load of ‘lead’” (vol. I, 50) echoing the anti-polished style adopted by the author, the euphony of Hortensia Papadat Bengescu’s character onomastics accompanies the text’s phraseological musicality. An interesting analogical analysis is also offered by Mihai Ignat when he distinguishes between the onomastic layers employed by Marin Preda and Liviu Rebreanu.

As the case studies are very numerous, a systematization of the functions of the names that Mihai Ignat identifies would require a lot of space. I shall only mention a few of the attributes I find relevant. Thus, onomastics can convey feelings such as malice, affection and snobbery, various habits, picturesqueness, authenticity, aesthetic expressiveness, emphasis on the parabolic dimension, allegorical intentions, marking the rupture with the world, or, on the contrary, the integration into it, the achievement of stylistic originality, the comic or tragic effect, symbolic meanings, the parodic allusion, landmarks of the hermeneutic horizon, a particular rhythm or sonority, a form of manifestation of the obsession with identity, etc.

Certainly, for the present fictional space under analysis, *An Anthroponymic History of the Romanian Novel* convincingly illustrates the possible meanings and materializations of the Latin dictum with which Mihai Ignat opens his volume, namely *nomen est omen*. Moreover, even after reading the possible connotations of proper names or nicknames, it is impossible for the reader not to be aroused, at least for a fraction of a second, by curiosity about his/her own name.

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ȘTEFAN FIRICĂ, *Autenticitatea, sensuri și nonsensuri*
(*Teorii românești interbelice în contexte europene*)
[*Authenticity, Sense and Nonsense (Romanian Interwar*
Theories in European Contexts)], București, Editura Tracus
Arte, 2019, 412 p.

None of the waves of criticism that discuss the concepts, evolution, and typology of the Romanian novel has triggered a more heated debate than the phases of evolution of the genre in the

interwar context, which would be characterized by the journey from objectivity to subjectivity and authenticity, in a rapid process that burns the stages.

The volume of Ștefan Fircă therefore deals with a long-discussed topic – the theories about the authenticity of Romanian interwar novels, but it defines itself first and foremost as a critique of criticism, adopting a chronological approach to identify the hermeneutics, literary historians and writers' reactions to the authenticist generation, a record of how it was received and perceived. Furthermore, the author paints a much larger picture than that. He starts from these Romanian literary and hermeneutic landmarks, continues with the exploration of the rallying of the autochthonous theories to the European ones, and ends the second half of the volume by redefining authenticity through its very wide cultural contextualization.

Once the critical establishment is ruled by Lovinescu's theories (synchronism, the maturation of literature through the evolution from subjectivity to objectivity in a prose-irreversible process with axiomatic value, aestheticism and a predominantly stylistic type of criticism), the author emphasizes the fact that the authentic Romanian mainstream overturns this literary bet: from the heterodiegetic novel, the transition is made, following the European models of Proust, Gide or Papini, to *panlyricism* and the homodiegetic novel. The self-legitimation of the authenticists, by opposition with the literary establishment, is achieved according to the desideratum of creating anti-literature, characterized by anti-aesthetics and anti-refinement of style. Once the interwar standings are clarified, Ștefan Fircă presents the major waves of reception of authenticity by Lovinescu, Călinescu and Crohmălniceanu who, in different critical idioms, maintain the same reluctance towards subjective prose. Nicolae Manolescu changes this exegetical vision in *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [*Noah's Ark. Essay on the Romanian Novel*] (I–III, 1980–1983). By means of the distinction between the three types of novel and using the relations emphasised by Manolescu between author-narrator and character in accordance with the (post)structuralist theories proliferated in the French space (1960–1970), the author discusses, quoting Alex Goldiș, the debates of the sixties between “liberalists” and “dogmatists” about the erasure of the author from the text. In *Întoarcerea autorului* [*The Return of the Author*] (1981), a visionary Eugen Simion discusses the relationship between the author and his/her work and the biographical grid of interpretation, in Dobrovskyan fashion, against Barthes and the “intransitiveness of writing”, opening the debate on terms such as “autofiction”, the idea of “anti-art for art's sake”, the life-art relationship and the two types of Ionic novel – the artistic novel and the novel of „living”.

We embark on a trip around the perspectives of various literary figures: Șerban Cioculescu, Vladimir Streinu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Mircea Zăciu, Dinu Pillat, Lucian Raicu and Adrian Marino (who gives new meanings to the term “authenticity” in his *Dicționar de idei literare* [*Dictionary of Literary Ideas*]). There are also Gheorghe Crăciun (who contextualizes the term according to the postmodernist trend), Liviu Papadima, Ion Bogdan Lefter, critics of the 1980s for whom (the above-mentioned Eugen Simion included) there is a change in sensibilities in what regards the reception of a text. It is not spontaneity, anti-refinement and genuineness, but rather the Corinthian, the artifice, the sophistication of a novel's architecture and the intricately directed voices of the protagonists that are sought after. The addendum to the reception file also lists the ages of modernism, stated by Liviu Petrescu, the vision of Mircea Zamfir, the volumes of Radu G. Țeposu, Gheorghe Glodeanu, Simona Popescu, Paul Cernat and Oana Soare, the conclusion being that the period 1980–2006 (and the hermeneutics researchers who follow them) no longer follows in the interwar desideratum of subjectivist novelists, and tends to equate authenticity with a disguised form of rhetoric, a convention.

The second part of Fircă's volume represents a vast excursion in the contextualization and characteristics of “authenticity” at a culturally international level, from Adorno's theory stipulating the instrumentalization of authenticism in Nazi ideology, to Trilling, who descends into a history of it (surprising one, in the first instance, by the dichotomy of sincerity/ conformity, to an objective morality- authenticity/ nonconformism and self-transcendence, taken over and developed by Golomb), to Alessandro Ferrera, Guinon and Varga and even to the coloring of “authenticism” in *self-helping* writings. Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus from the existentialist ranks, then Nietzsche and

Heidegger, are quoted by cultural theorists (and, implicitly, by Fircă) as influential models for the literary-cultural path of authenticity. The author also captures the forms of ideological militancy that vary from a Europe in which authenticity seems to have mostly right-wing coloration, to the American hippie generation, in which “authentic” becomes left-wing. The overlap with psychology and pop culture allows the author to quote and analyse the documentary *Status Anxiety*, made after Alain de Botton’s bestseller, as well as the movie *Todo sobre mi madre*, which embodies Ferrera’s “exemplary universalism” in the transsexual protagonist. Also, in the same chapter are mentioned the means used by psychotherapy based on authenticity (Karl Jaspers) and the pedagogically seductive abilities of the philosophers of authenticity – Heidegger, Ortega y Gasset, Nae Ionescu, who Fircă comments on by recalling the discursive “authenticity”.

I believe that the great merit of Ștefan Fircă’s volume lies in the contextualization of authenticity at a European level (the atmosphere of the Great War and totalitarian ideologies *in statu nascendi*, as well as of the elitist factor, very prevalent in the Romanian interwar environment) and its “territorialization”: the *sincerity* and Gide, the Russian emigration (which underlies the idea of cosmopolitanism, also promoted by Ortega y Gasset) with Shestov and Berdiaev, the Romantic heritage in German culture, Heidegger and German fascism, the Spanish authenticity of Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset and, finally, the Italian Papinism. Although great ideas achieve international circulation and show a form of cultural synchronism, authenticity also exhibits a form of ethnic-vernacular coloration, as demonstrated by this territorialization.

The issue of intellectual responsibility is an ardent one in relation to the writers and theorists of authenticity (referring to the ideological problems echoing in the case of Romanian legionarism of the criterionist generation), and the balanced position that the author adopts in this case is essential. He details the relationship between literature, culture and ideology in Romania in the third part of the volume, which consists of portraits of Nae Ionescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Eugen Ionescu, Emil Cioran, of a terminological glossary of interwar authenticity jargon and of an epilogue which demonstrates its relationship with posterity.

In conclusion, we can say that the volume built on the foundation of Ștefan Fircă’s doctoral thesis manages to treat, almost exhaustively, the subject of the theories and colours of authenticity, offering a very rich panorama of its meanings and keeping in balance the book’s elaborate construction, in which the chapters form communicating vessels.

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COSMIN CIOTLOȘ, *Elementar, dragul meu Rache. Detalii mateine sub lupă* [*Elementary, My dear Rache. Mateiu’s Details Seen through Lenses*], București, Humanitas, 2017, 137 p.

In the historiographical discourse about Mateiu I. Caragiale and his work, reference is always made to biographical aspects, the writer being always linked to the name of his father, I. L. Caragiale. In *Elementary, My Dear Rache*, Cosmin Ciotloș exposes a series of new reading tips, aspects that come as a continuation of the literary criticism already existing on the subject and which, according to the critic, have not been highlighted before. At the same time, the study has no monographic intentions, and the (almost inevitable) references to the name of I. L. Caragiale have the intention of identifying the links between Mateiu’s texts and those of other authors, and the relationships between them. The critic will highlight only the novelty elements that he has identified, only the cracks at the level of the internal and external logic (of elaboration) of the texts, all aspects he will support through complex arguments, with a stable, safe and logical construction.

The approach followed by Cosmin Ciotloș is a meticulous one, representing, according to his words, a “lucid analysis”, supported by numerous close-reading sequences, by rigorous detective demonstrations, sometimes even mathematical (“let’s do a simple calculation”). Often, the writer will highlight the fact that the text was “coldly read”, in a detached manner, almost taken out of context, precisely in order to be able to gaze at its full potential and to analyse its meaning through the links it allows.

The critic’s attention follows, first of all, the internal logic of the texts. The narrative thread is schematically reconstructed and the moments of clumsiness in the behaviour of characters whose decisions involve the development of actions are highlighted. Such a case concerns, for example, Rache: “this luxury detective is fundamentally wrong”, notes Ciotloș, following an explanation of the reported mistake in relation to the epic thread already illustrated.

In order to be able to observe such cracks in the narrative logic, Ciotloș must have allowed himself to be carried closer and closer to the character, even to put himself in the character’s shoes, in order to be able to follow precisely, on a narrative level, inside the epic text, the connection between character and context, decisions, lines, etc. It is an attempt, successful from my point of view, from the critic to overcome the contours and the barriers between the literary text and life itself.

Secondly, through the very detailed analysis that Cosmin Ciotloș pursues, not only does he aim at the internal logic of the text, but he also gives the impression that he follows the actual writing act, the choices Mateiu I. Caragiale makes regarding the elaboration of the texts, the way the contexts are presented, the characters and the decisions they make. In addition to the careful analysis of the characters and the action, the critic also insists on the way in which the narrative plans criss-cross and whether or not these intersections show cracks. Ciotloș is constantly looking for evidence (“apart from these remarks, which must be taken as mere adjuvants, the last passage has probative value”) and justifications for all the actions and decisions of the characters, just to support their analysis. What is more, new approaches start catching the eye of the readers. Such approaches are hardly, if at all, discussed by the critics.

The revelation of the incongruities in the characters’ actions or in the act of writing itself is added to the presentation of the whole literary system which places at its centre Mateiu I. Caragiale and his own writings. Works are mentioned that are present in the texts connected to the above-mentioned author, or to the influences of everyday life. By stating these connections, the critic shows his deep understanding and knowledge of the works and critical texts which address Caragiale’s work in his own time and, more than once, his life is corroborated by the close observation of everyday life at the turn of the century. Ciotloș is looking for similarities between the characters in these works and the characters with whom they might be identified. Hence, the critic is able to discuss almost all the critics (if not all) who managed to talk about Caragiale’s work, the terms in which the relationship between I. L. Caragiale and Mateiu I. Caragiale should be looked at, whether one could point out a sort of influence of the first over the latter, or any attempt of the son to surpass his father or to continue his father’s work. When referring to the father’s work, Ciotloș believes that “the analysis of the possible relationships of the novel [*Craii de Curtea-Veche*] shows exactly the contrary: Mateiu is not running from the contagion, he is looking after it, he triggers the contagion”. Therefore, the writer would have been fully aware of the pressure exerted by the context in which he found himself and he would have chosen to fight with the weapons placed at his disposal.

The critic works not only with Mateiu Caragiale’s writing, prose or poetry, but he also addresses the author’s correspondence. In a whole chapter the stress falls on the unusual theft of the poem called *Noapte valahă* [*Wallachian night*]. Mateiu brings clarification to the so-called mystery. Cosmin Ciotloș does not seem to trust the author’s declaration and offers an assumption which is more appealing from the point of view of the author. Based on the letter sent by Mateiu Caragiale, he starts a case and begins to solve it like a detective. Thus, he places that scene in real life as if he were himself publishing at that time. This observation made by Ciotloș points to a writing pattern that Mateiu Caragiale does not apply only to fiction, but also to life, meant to demolish the borders between reality and literature, so that the line between them can no longer be distinguished. From this point of view, the tackling of the issue by the critic, his judgement of the logic behind the actions, the

decisions and the conclusions to which the characters come to, is even more justified, coming precisely from *the inside* of the fictional world.

Through his laid-back style, Ciotloș directly signals all the nuances of the undiscussed aspects he has identified about the chosen topic and, in addition, his own version of interpretations or assumptions. The critic's wish to make the reader understand his reasoning is backed by logical demonstrations that make his exposition trustworthy.

Elementary, My Dear Rache. Mateiu's Details Seen through Lenses is a critical text characterized by the unity given by its constant, rigorously built, logical approach. Although the intention was not monographic, the critic switches from fiction to reality, albeit in a justified manner, from inside Mateiu's writing position, while the author himself often crosses over, or alternates playfully, between these two domains.

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