

## THE POLITICAL DIMENSION IN ROMANIAN NOVELS OF THE COMMUNIST PERIOD (1965–1989): A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

### *Introduction: Defining the Political Novel*

It is almost taken for granted that literature and politics are linked when discussing the artistic production of the Romanian communist period, so much so that politics is often referred to as the driving force behind literature. In fact, even when opposes politics, literature profoundly conditioned by it<sup>1</sup>. However, the representation of the political in literature is also closely related to the emergence of a political consciousness in everyday life, which began in the twentieth century and became particularly pronounced in Romania with the establishment of the communist regime. This change led to a shift in the relationship between the individual and society or state institutions, as well as the individual's relationship with history, and thus in the way these relationships were filtered through literary representations.

The label “political novel” was widely used in conjunction with the best-known works of post-war Romanian prose, as evidenced by the numerous debates in the leading literary journals of the time<sup>2</sup>, even though these novels often display

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<sup>1</sup> See Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism [Romanian Literature under Communism]*, București, Editura Fundației Pro, 2006, p. 11: “Nothing that happens in the course of a literature developed under totalitarian rule has a natural explanation. Directly or indirectly, everything is an imitation, a reaction, a recoil, a defensive, a desperate or inventive form of adaptation, a strategy of survival”. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Liviu Petrescu, “Literatura politică” [“Political Literature”], *Tribuna*, XV, 1971, 7, p. 3; Eugen Uricaru, “Șansele romanului politic” [“The Chances of the Political Novel”], *Steaua*, XXV, 1974, 4, pp. 6-7; Aurel Sasu, “Vocația politică a romanului” [“The Novel’s Political Vocation”], *Steaua*, XXV, 1974, 4, pp. 7-8; Valentin Tașcu, “Politicul și unele romane contemporane” [“The Politics and Some Contemporary Novels”], *Steaua*, XXV, 1974, 4, pp. 8-9; Nicolae Manolescu, “Romanul politic” [“The Political Novel”], *România literară*, XI, 1978, 4, p. 19; Pompiliu Marcea, “Romanul politic românesc” [“The Romanian Political Novel”], *Viața românească*, XXXIV, 1981, 4-5, p. 27-31; Radu G. Țeposu, “Fețele romanului politic” [“The Faces of the Romanian Political Novel”], *România literară*, XVII, 1984, 6, p. 3. For a discussion on the perspectives on the “political novel” that have emerged in the literary magazines of the years, see Viorel Nistor, *Pactul ficțional și istoria: repere ale romanului politic românesc postbelic [The*

strikingly disparate characteristics. For example, Eugen Barbu's *Princepele* [*The Prince*] (1969), Alexandru Ivasiuc's analytical novels or Marin Preda's *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* [*The Most Beloved of Earthlings*] (1980) have all been read as belonging to this category, despite their evident structural and discursive differences.

Consequently, when attempting to define this type of novel, critics' interpretations proliferate, often resulting in conflicting perspectives. In the view of Marian Odangiu, for example, the political novel has a "documentary quality" and includes novels that deal with current problems, even if related to a distant context in time, offering "ideal models of the individual's relationship with the world"<sup>3</sup>. In Nicolae Manolescu's opinion only the novels that represent the relationship between the individual and power, but at a universal level, are political; conversely, novels that refer to current events or recent history, such as the novels "of the obsessive decade"<sup>4</sup>, are only "political" in theme, but can be assimilated to the social or historical novel<sup>5</sup>.

Similarly, while some critics consider the setting and the presence of political characters to be the defining elements of the political novel (such as Pompiliu Marcea<sup>6</sup>), others argue that the political attribute is linked to a broader political consciousness, to the human quest for truth and freedom, and to the consideration of man's role in society, or, as Ion Simuț put it, to "a keen sense of the present and a feeling for the future"<sup>7</sup>.

This oscillation and indefiniteness of what constitutes a novel as "political" persists even in the present and transcends the boundaries of Romanian literature. As Viorel Nistor notes,

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*Fictional Pact and History: Milestones of the Post-war Romanian Political Novel*], Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012, pp. 92-105.

<sup>3</sup> Marian Odangiu, *Romanul politic* [*The Political Novel*], Timișoara, Facla, 1984, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> This category represents an "ephemeral genre" associated with the political novel, which emerged in Romania during the Thaw period as a response to socialist realist novels. As a result, it can be considered a negative *roman à thèse*. This kind of novel has a specific poetics that distinguishes it from other genres. These include the criticism of the Stalinist period from the standpoint of a more humanist communism, the presence of a reflexive character (who was once an activist), the multiplication of points of view, the back and forth between the present (the 1960s or the 1970s) and the past (the 1950s), and so forth. See Alex Goldiș, "A Possible Poetics of the Subversive Prose Under Communist Regimes", in *RiCOGNIZIONI*, 2017, 7, pp. 57-64; See also Alex Goldiș, "Pentru o morfologie a romanului 'obsedantului deceniu'" ["For a Morphology of the 'Obsessive Decade' Novel"], *Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, 2017, 3, pp. 494-502.

<sup>5</sup> See Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [*Noah's Ark. Essay on the Romanian Novel*], București, Cartea Românească, 2018, pp. 470-472.

<sup>6</sup> See Marcea, "Romanul politic".

<sup>7</sup> See Ion Simuț, *Reabilitarea ficțiunii* [*The Rehabilitation of Fiction*], București, Institutul Cultural Român, 2004, p. 73.

literary science, like the science of classification, has not been very generous to the species of the political novel. Although it is an established and easily recognizable term, although it defines a sufficiently coherent literary reality, although it has a certain consistency and density in world literature, the political novel, at any attempt at systematization, dilutes its identity, distributing itself generously to other novelistic species<sup>8</sup>.

While the relevance of such a category for understanding the novelistic production of the communist period – and especially of those years in which the literary text, moving away from a dogmatic vision, proposed new ways of representing the relationship between man and power, society or history – is undeniable, the focus has so far been mainly on those works considered by critics to be of the greatest value (in terms of literary, ethical or documentary value), while the rest of the literary production of the period has not been analyzed and its scope in relation to this production has not been assessed.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, this article does not attempt to propose new interpretations or definitions of the genre. Rather, it responds to recent research on the subgenres of the Romanian novel, which, based on the theories and practices of “distant reading” and quantitative analyses carried out by scholars like Franco Moretti (to mention one of the most well-known names) promote a rereading of the entire literary production: rather than focusing on the select few names typically recalled by critics, quantitative analysis offers the potential to consider the “great unread” of the period, which would be inaccessible through *close reading* alone<sup>9</sup>.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the political dimension in the Romanian novel, which encompasses not only the genres typically

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<sup>8</sup> Nistor, *Pactul ficțional*, p. 86. For an account of the international critical debate on the subgenre, see Ștefan Firică's study on the Romanian interwar political novel, “Political Fiction or Fiction about Politics: How to Operationalize a Fluid Genre in Interwar Romanian Literature”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2020, 7, pp. 164-181. Another discussion and categorization of Romanian political novel can be found in Marius Miheț, “Types of Political Novel: The Romanian Political Novel vs. the Ideologization of Happiness”, *Analele Universității din Oradea. Fascicula Limba și Literatură Română*, 2021, 28, pp. 11-26.

<sup>9</sup> Recent quantitative studies on the subgenres of the Romanian novel are grouped in the dossier edited by Alex Goldiș, Cosmin Borza, “The Subgenres of the Romanian Novel: Imports, Backdrop, Hybridizations”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2020, 7, pp. 5-234, from which we will cite individual works. We have also referred to: Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Rreview*, XXVIII, 2019, supplement 1, pp. 55-71; Denisa Bud, “Romanul social românesc între conformism și autonomie. O analiză cantitativă a evoluției subgenului între 1965 și 1989” [“The Romanian Social Novel between Conformism and Autonomy. A Quantitative Research of the Evolution of the Subgenre (1965–1989)”], *Transilvania*, 2020, 7, pp. 1-11; Denisa Bud, “The Romanian Novels of the ‘Obsessive Decade’ as Subversive Literature. A Macroanalysis (1971–1979)”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 5, 2019, 1, pp. 192-212.

associated, in different ways and for different reasons, with such a dimension, such as the socialist realist and the political novels, along with the subcategory of the novel of the “obsessive decade”, but also its intertwining with other genres, such as the social, the parabolic, or the psychological genres.

As in the studies previously mentioned, the starting point for this analysis will be the *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 2000* (from here on DCRR)<sup>10</sup>: an exhaustive database that indexes all the novels published in Romania from 1844 to 2000. In addition to the primary metadata, including author, title, year of publication, number of pages, and publishing house, each novel is provided with a subgenre based on its primary theme and/or narrative structure, as well as a description of variable length, to which we will refer. Given the heterogeneity of the synopses, however, the data that will emerge are exposed to a certain margin of subjectivity and error<sup>11</sup>. Nonetheless, the results are telling about a certain conformation of the genres involved and encourage a continuation and a deepening of the research: what we propose here is but a preliminary investigation into a body of work that is still in progress.

The article is divided into two sections. In the initial section, we will employ a quantitative approach to examine the occurrence of novels associated in the DCRR with a political label within the corpus of novelistic production throughout the entire period of the communist regime (1948–1989), focusing particularly on the emergence of new political forms during the period spanning 1965 and 1989. The second section of this study is intended to provide an account of the novels that constitute the principal subgenres associated with a political dimension in this latter period.

### *The Political Dimension in the Romanian Novel*

If one wished to divide the phases of Romanian literature during the forty-one years of the regime, the most straightforward approach would be to separate them into two sections: one (1948–1964) in which literature serves mainly as an instrument of power, and another (1965–1989) in which, although still under the control of the State, it regains its aesthetic autonomy and thus fulfills other literary

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<sup>10</sup> See Adrian Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până în 2000* [*Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins to 2000*], vol. I-II, revised and expanded edition, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> See Daiana Gârdan, Emanuel Modoc, “Mapping Literature Through Quantitative Instruments. The Case of Current Romanian Literary Studies”, *Interlitteraria*, 2020, 1, p. 55 “Being a collective endeavor, it [DCRR] lacks a cohesive ‘style guide’ for the elaboration of the descriptions. Genre-specific details are heavily dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher that worked on each batch of novels”.

functions. In these two phases, the political manifests itself in literary texts in distinct ways.

Since the change that came with the establishment of the regime primarily affected the way literature and its role in society were perceived, socialist realism, far from being a simple literary formula, highly schematic and politicized, as has often been pointed out, changed the functions of literature itself<sup>12</sup>. As a form of popular literature, socialist realist novels were intended to be formulaic, to serve a didactic function, and to become an “official repository of state myths”<sup>13</sup>, thus performing a “strategic and collective”<sup>14</sup> role.

But if its purpose is to faithfully represent reality and its revolutionary development, having to capture not only the past and present of society, but to do so in the light of the future Marxist reality, effectively transforming reality into the illusion of the revolutionary ideal, socialist realism is, as Alex Goldiș has put it, “pure theory, hardly applicable to the literary phenomenon”: “How can the fact that literature has to obey the dictates of propaganda in its entirety be expressed in terms that can be assimilated to an aesthetic?”<sup>15</sup>

The “conceptual improvisations” of the proponents of socialist realism in an attempt to find a balance between these two poles are no different from the writers’ attempts to put this impossible *mimesis* into practice<sup>16</sup>: it is difficult at this point to speak of a “socialist realist recipe” applicable to two literary decades, at a time when literary creation proceeds through constant revisions and course corrections. Although the Party came with very specific demands for the production of literary works in line with its ideology, a certain mobility in the rendering strategies adopted is evident: the standardization characteristic of socialist realism, as Baghiu states, “was primarily accomplished *along the way*, through various mechanisms of verification and critique and in accordance with often changeable strategies”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> See Gary Saul Morson, “Socialist Realism and Literary Theory”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 38, 1979, 2, pp. 121-133.

<sup>13</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as a Ritual*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. xii.

<sup>14</sup> Costi Rogozanu, *Naratorul cel rău. Un studiu despre realismul românesc: Rebreanu, Preda, Dumitriu* [*The Ruthless Narrator. A Study on the Romanian Realism: Rebreanu, Preda, Dumitriu*], Cluj-Napoca, Tact, 2024, p. 261.

<sup>15</sup> 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. 20.

<sup>16</sup> As Goldiș recalls, it was Régine Robin who first pointed out the “esthétique impossible” of socialist realism, its “bad polysemy” and paradoxical nature, whose “will to reduce meaning to a common denominator goes hand in hand with the fundamental ambiguity of the Stalinist current” (Goldiș, *Critica*, p. 20). See Régine Robin, *Le réalisme socialiste: une esthétique impossible*, Paris, Payot, 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Ștefan Baghiu, “The Socialist Realist Novel in Romania between 1948 and 1955. Novelistic Genres and Subgenres”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2020, 7, p. 57.

If the political climate of the time produced a great number of dogmatic works, it also comprised texts that strike a balance between ideology and aesthetic realization: if instead of considering *Moromeții* [*The Moromete Family*] (1955), *Cronica de familie* [*Family Chronicle*] (1956) or *Groapa* [*The Pit*] (1957), as “exceptions” to a monolithic period of bleak dogmatism, we consider them as part of this system, perversely ambiguous in its developments, we get a much more complex and nuanced picture of the impact of socialist realism on Romanian culture. The social changes that took place in the 1950s forced writers to come to terms with a new reality: reading *Moromeții*, for example, without taking into account the new perspective from which it was written, by an author who was aware of his new social role and according to a realism “with a class consciousness that had never existed before in Romanian literature”, would mean missing a piece of the puzzle<sup>18</sup>.

The political dimension in the socialist realist novel resides, we might say, in the very ideological stances that generated it and therefore it is deeply rooted in the tension described earlier. This trait actually transcends novelistic subgenres and thus we can speak of the “socialist realist novel” as an “umbrella term for multiple subgenres”<sup>19</sup>, characterized by a certain standardization in plot, style and tone, but at the same time with composite thematic declinations.

From 1965 onward, the uniformity imposed by socialist realism was reduced to a few works, allowing for diversity in the development of literary genres: it is in this new phase that the category of “political novel” captured the critics’ attention, becoming somewhat representative of this new literary era. Its characteristics diverge considerably from those of the socialist realist novel: freed from its agitational function, the novel begins a new aesthetic quest to represent the events, both past and present, that have changed Romanian reality, the existence of individuals and their everyday experience of life.

By looking at this remarkable change in a broader context that also involves the translation system, we can shed more light on the “macro logic” of the local production<sup>20</sup>. On this account, a study by Ștefan Baghiu not only nuances what we

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<sup>18</sup> Rogozanu, *Naratorul cel rău*, p. 281.

<sup>19</sup> Baghiu, “The Socialist Realist Novel”, p. 57. The category counts various critical interventions, we will limit ourselves here to mentioning Ion Istrate’s (also a contributor to DCRR) systematization in *Panorama romanului proletcultist (1945–1964)* [*Panorama of the Proletkult Novel (1945–1964)*], Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 2003, and, from a recent and innovative perspective, Daiana Gârdan’s study, “What Makes a Socialist-Realist Novel? Style, Topics, and Development in Romania (1948–1964)”, in Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, pp. 45-60.

<sup>20</sup> Ștefan Baghiu “Strong Domination and Subtle Dispersion: A Distant Reading of Novel Translation in Communist Romania (1944–1989)”, in Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 63-84.

have identified as the first period, between a phase in which translations of Soviet literature dominated (1948–1955), and the one (1956–1964) he calls “the East-West equalizer”, in which the balance of translations on the East and West sides of the Iron Curtain was restored, but also shows how 1964 marks the beginning of a phase of massive synchronization with the main Western literary trends.

In this period, and especially until 1975, there was a substantial recovery of Western literature of the interwar and contemporary period. French existentialists, American modernists and Italian neorealists were abundantly translated, contributing, not only numerically, to broadening the landscape of Romanian literature, distancing it increasingly from the socialist realist framework<sup>21</sup>. Although it is impossible to define here the number of texts with a clear political theme, they certainly offered a different perspective on the representation of reality, on the contradictions and doubts of individuals in the process of dealing with great historical events, along with a different kind of social engagement. To these texts must be added, then, the translations from Latin-American literature, which experienced a worldwide boom between the 1960s and 1970s and which, as has been pointed out by Goldiș, were a catalyzer, both ideological and technical, in the renewal of Romanian literature. Again, the political element is not indifferent: “what sets the Latin-American novel apart [...] is its politically engaged nature”<sup>22</sup>. The possibility of this novel, using Asturias’ words, to be “both a testimony and a weapon at the same time”, through “a tactile, plural prose, irreverent towards entrenched forms, which seeks new and hidden roads [...] to engage with human actions in the name of solidarity with human problems”<sup>23</sup>, will be welcomed with interest in the Romanian context.

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<sup>21</sup> As noted by Ștefan Baghiu, “Quantitative Translationscapes and Chronological Constellations: French, Soviet, and American Novels in Communist Romania”, *World Literature Studies*, 13, 2021, 3, p. 127: “many modernist or existentialist figures of interwar French literature were redeemed against socialist realism in the sense that they entered Eastern Europe as counter-canonical narratives that replaced the Soviet shadow canon”, while “the American novel, alongside the Latin American experimental novel, constitutes the contestatory translationscape that follows in the footsteps of the French hypertranslationscape only to contest its dominance, not through quantity, but through its subversive potential”.

<sup>22</sup> Alex Goldiș, “The Functionality of Literatures Translated within the Romanian Thaw Polysystem”, in Baghiu et al. (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain*, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 255. On the fortune of Latin-American novels in Romania see Ilinca Ilian, “Destinul literaturii latino-americane în România regimului comunist (1948–1989)” [“The Destiny of Latin-American Literature in Communist Romania (1948–1989)”], *Philologica Jassyensia*, 15, 2019, 1, pp. 165-176; See also Ilinca Ilian, Emilio J. Gallardo-Saborido, “Desde los ‘scritorii progresiști’ al boom: Rumania y la mundialización de la literatura latinoamericana en el orbe socialista (1964–1971)”, *Anclajes*, XXVII, 2023, 3, pp. 61-83.

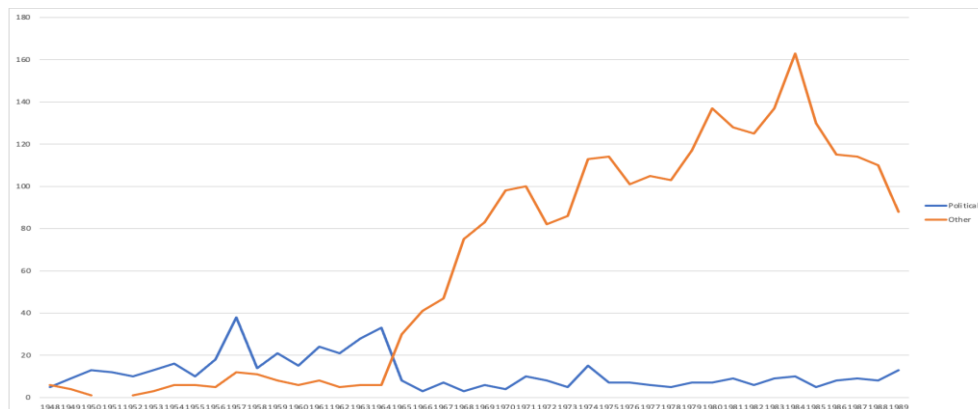


Fig. 1. The evolution of political genres (1948–1989)

Given the context of the literary ferment of these years, it is quite surprising that, if we compare (Fig. 1) the data corresponding to the two different “modes” of the political dimension identified so far, the socialist realist one and the one that developed in the second period, for which we have so far considered those labelled as “political”<sup>24</sup> and of the “obsessive decade” (in blue), with the development of all the other novelistic subgenres (in orange), we find that, from 1965, the year that coincides with the beginning of the second rise of the Romanian novel<sup>25</sup>, their presence, in relation to the other subgenres, is not as dominant as one might have thought from reading the literary debates of the time. As Denisa Bud pointed out when discussing the novel of the “obsessive decade” (1971–1979)<sup>26</sup>, there seems to be a glaring discrepancy between the category’s critical reception and its actual scope.

Furthermore, when we separate the data on the socialist realist novels that continue to be published in this period, from the other two categories, we discover that the distribution between the two groups is almost symmetrical (Fig. 2): while the former accounts for 3.6 %, the latter represent around 3.2 % of the total<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> In approaching the category, we must be aware that many of these texts, while not overtly propagandistic, represent only an intermediate point between total acceptance of the communist political vision and a more questioning stance towards it.

<sup>25</sup> Terian, “Big Numbers”, pp. 64-65.

<sup>26</sup> See Bud, “The Romanian Novels”, p. 202: “The critical claims according to which the 8<sup>th</sup> decade was one in which the novel of the ‘obsessive decade’ proliferated are thus disproved by this factual information. This generalization was possible due to the prominence of several of the period’s significant novels (belonging to authors such as Augustin Buzura, Constantin Ţoiu or Marin Preda), who, both through their literary impact and through the critical reception they received, gave the impression that this type of novel constitutes a richer category”.

<sup>27</sup> It is necessary to point out that while for some novels the socialist realist framework is indicated, even after 1965, for many others it can only be inferred from their descriptions, or it cannot be inferred at all. For the purposes of this research, we mainly considered genres with social and political



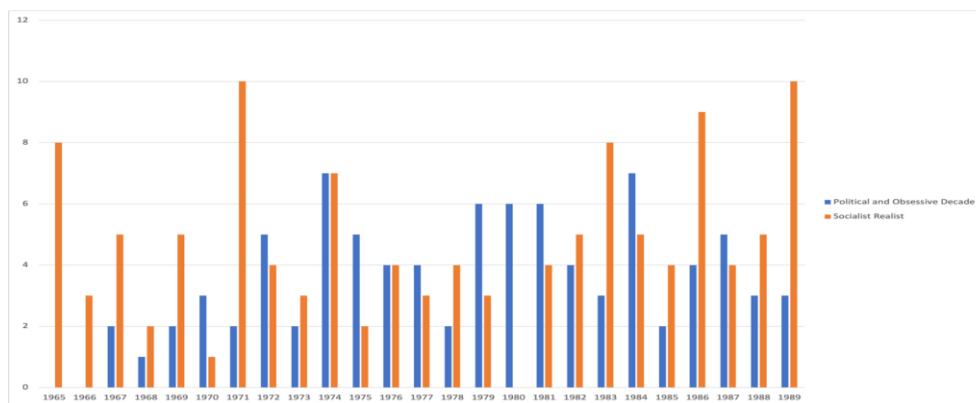


Fig. 2. Socialist Realist Novels vs. Political and “Obsessive Decade” Novels between 1965 and 1989

It seems, therefore, that although the scope of socialist realism is enormously reduced compared to the earlier period, it still competes, if not in notoriety, at least numerically, with writings that directly address a political issue outside the pattern of the socialist *roman à thèse*. This is a further confirmation of what Terian has already stated when analyzing the general evolution of the Romanian novel production of this period:

the degree of dispersal of valuable works is now much higher than in the interwar period (either in the sense of a small number of “masterpieces” per year, or in the sense of their being leveled by ballast). In these cases, quantity has not engendered quality. On the contrary, my hypothesis is that during this epoch, the former deliberately subverted the latter<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore, it can also be argued that the sheer number of texts that openly advance the Party’s vision, almost overlapping that of the political novel of other kinds, acts as background noise that interferes with the possibility of non-aligned messages.

An image of the role of dogmatic texts in the period can come from observing their distribution (**Fig. 2**): it can be noticed that the presence of this type of novel increased in years characterized by a tightening of the political grip on culture, such as 1971, the year of the “July Theses”, which, however, did not reverberate

implications, such as “social”, “rural”, “political”, “historical” or “family”, whose descriptions refer to elements such as “dogmatic”, “proletcultist”, “socialist realist” “with a thesis”, “schematic”, or “black-and-white”. Regarding other genres that were practiced at the time, such as the “detective” or “children’s and teen” novel, we did not delve any deeper. It is therefore advisable to approach the figure with caution. However, when compared with the production of the genres we are interested in here, it retains heuristic value.

<sup>28</sup> Terian, “Big Numbers”, p. 66.

on subsequent production, and the 1980s. In this last decade of the regime, there has been a proliferation of texts with an industrial theme, praising the impressive construction projects of the communist era. This phenomenon seems to be a deliberate choice, given that this period was characterized by a relentless focus on industrialization, even at the expense of the well-being of citizens.

However, despite not being as numerically dominant as critics have believed, if compared to the interwar publications of the subgenre – which accounted for 1.34% of the total output<sup>29</sup> – this category has doubled its presence in the literary field. While the political novel of the period constitutes 1.79% of the total, the main reason behind this outcome is the rise of the novel of the “obsessive decade”, accounting for 1.38% of the total<sup>30</sup>.

Another problem arises at this point because, as noted above, the categories of the DCRR resemble narrowly: literary subgenres are permeable, intertwined and overlapping in ways that are difficult to identify through a strict taxonomy; if the labels suggest a subgenre, it must always be understood in a dialectical and relational way to other aspects of the novel. Under the label “political novel” we can find only texts that have an explicit political theme, whether because of a political character, a political atmosphere or predominant political discussions. This is why, by taking into consideration just the “political” and “obsessive decade” labels, we won’t find the titles of a great number of novels that critics of the time perceived as political. Furthermore, the use of such a label hardly manages to take into account the ideological implications of the texts: novels such as Corneliu Leu’s *Viața particulară a lui Constant Hagiu* [*The Private Life of Constant Hagiu*], which can be read as propagandistic in a broad sense<sup>31</sup>, coexist in this category with novels such as Alexandru Ivăsiuc’s *Iluminări* [*Enlightenment*], which contain a different view of power.

Searching for political elements in other types of novels as well could be useful to gain insight into the political dimension embedded in the novels of the period, even outside the boundaries of the purely political genre. One of the characteristics of the category of the political novel, as previously discussed, seems to be that it “generously distributes itself to the other novelistic categories”, joining other thematic strands and narrative frameworks, and often creating narratives that are even more politically incisive than the novels framed in this category.

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<sup>29</sup> Andrei Terian et al., “Genurile romanului românesc (1933–1947). O analiză cantitativă” [“Genres of the Romanian Novel (1933–1947). A Quantitative Analysis”], *Transilvania*, 2021, 9, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> In this account, we have also considered novels that, although not explicitly labelled as such, can be ascribed at least in part to this category, such as Marin Preda’s second volume of his seminal novel *Moromeții* (1967).

<sup>31</sup> In the sense that it remained within the new ideological line promoted by the regime after 1965, which presented itself as a form of “socialism with a human face” in contrast to the Stalinist period.

The quantitative analysis on the DCRR labels shows us that the most common subgenre of the period is the social novel (16.5%), followed by the psychological novel (9.8%), the detective novel (9.4%), the historical novel (8.7%), the novel for children and youth (6.5%), the *Bildungsroman*, biographical and autobiographical novels (5.7%), the adventure novel (4.2%) and the parabolic novel (3.2%). All of them outnumber the political and obsessive decade novels, but how many of them intertwine their themes and reflections with those of these novels, thus presenting a political dimension?

To define these novels, we looked for the presence in their synopsis of political characters, representations of power relations, discussions and reflections with a political theme or interest in politics and the mechanisms of power. Nevertheless, a considerable number of potentially political writings are excluded from this analysis since, in the absence of an accurate synopsis, it is impossible to define a political dimension in lesser-discussed novels, as well as in categories such as “children’s literature,” “detective” or “sentimental” novels, which are typically summarized in a few lines or not described at all.

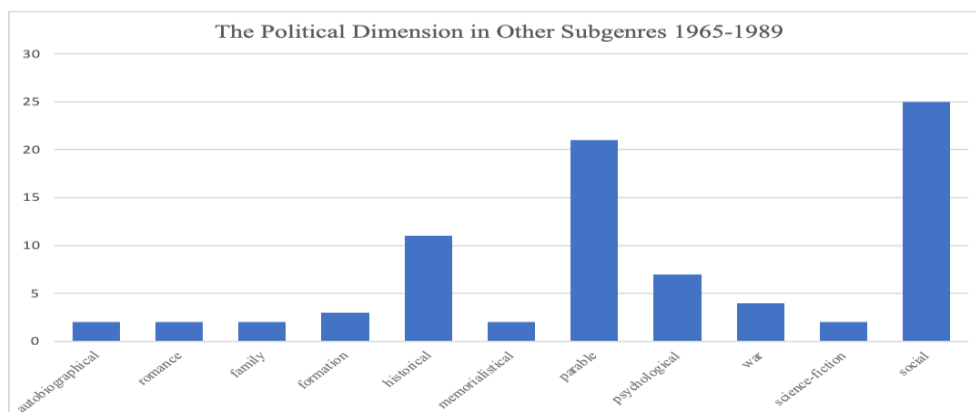


Fig. 3. Main subgenres with political elements and implications (1965–1989)<sup>32</sup>

From this perspective (Fig. 3), the subgenres most influenced by a political theme are the social novel (29.1%), the parable novel (24.4%), the historical novel (12.8%), the psychological novel (8.1%), and the war novel (4.6%). In total, these novels account for a further 2.8% of the total, which, when added to the other two figures, would place the category of the political novel in a much more competitive position (6%)<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> The graph displays only those categories represented by more than one novel.

<sup>33</sup> Although we are speaking in contrastive terms, it is necessary to emphasize that we are not ascribing *a priori* subversive values to this mode: both the category of the political and the “obsessive decade”, as well as all the other categories of novels that contain political references, contain texts

Of these figures, while the interference between the political, social and historical, which is widely represented, reflects already known configurations of the political novel – with a change, if anything, in the relationship between the parts – the most interesting figure comes from the parabolic novel<sup>34</sup>. Again, this is a genre traditionally porous to the political, in which the human condition and the relationship to power assume universal characteristics. Nevertheless, given that the political strand accounts for 52% of the total in this case, the figure is undoubtedly noteworthy. It most certainly corroborates what Marcel Corniș-Pop already posited in 1979<sup>35</sup>, namely that the political parable is one of the most successful forms of the political novel, with a constant production over the two decades. The disjunction between text and meaning inherent in this type of narrative is particularly well suited to the writing context of the communist period, as it allows for revelation through concealment. It is in this modality that we could perhaps identify the most important reworking of the Latin American lesson.

The following section will examine the main novels within each category previously discussed. With regard to subgenres that encompass a political dimension but are not explicitly identified as political, we have chosen to present the two primary categories: the social novel and the parabolic novel.

*The Faces of the Political: An Overview on the 1965–1989 Period  
Socialist Realist Novels*

Although largely ignored by critics, the production of socialist realist novels continued in considerable numbers after 1965. Even if they don't have a political plot or political characters, their ideological stances allow us to see them as part of a political dimension that continues in this period even after the downfall of the socialist realist primacy. Under this “umbrella category” the most popular subgenres are the social fresco and the historical novels, which, as Baghiu stated, “display an obsession with the past or contemporaneity as seen in the process of exposing current historical events”<sup>36</sup>. The main thematic declinations of the 1950s are continued: we have the novels about WWII and the struggles of the illegal

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that are more or less in line with the Party's position on a given issue, as well as texts that can be interpreted as criticism of the regime, but these aspects must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and cannot be deduced without a careful reading of the works, paying attention not only to the content but also to the formal tools that the authors use to convey certain messages.

<sup>34</sup> See Laura Pavel, “A Fictionalist of the 1960s–70s – the ‘Total’ Novelist”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2021, 8, pp. 91-105.

<sup>35</sup> Marcel Corniș-Pop, “Romanul politic – forme și etape” [“The Political Novel – Forms and Stages”], *Orizont*, XXX, 1979, 5, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Baghiu, “The Socialist Realist Novel”, p. 66. For an analysis comparing, from a *distant reading* perspective, the socialist realist novel thematically and stylistically with other novels of the period, see Gărdan, “What Makes a Socialist-Realist Novel?”.

communist groups such as *Cândva, niște oameni* [*Once, Some People*] (1967) by Alexandru Șipenco, *Condamnat la moarte* [*Sentenced to Death*] (1971) by Dumitru Ignea, the autobiographical novel *Aveam optsprezece ani* [*I Was Eighteen Years Old*] (1971) by Ecaterina Lazăr on the antifascist struggle, *Fața lumii* [*The Face of the World*] (1971) by Stelian Păun, *Ani de cumpănă* [*Years of Hardship*] (1971) by Aurel Petri, *Anotimpul posibil* [*The Possible Season*] (1971) by Al. Simion, *Arde Prahova* [*Prahova Is on Fire*] (1974) by Mihail Drumeș, *Evadarea* [*The Escape*] (1974) by Dumitru Ivanovici and Alexandru Guțan, Petru Vârlan's *Sărutul meu pentru întreaga lume* [*My Kiss to the Whole World*] (1982), *Dincolo de ziduri* [*Beyond the Walls*] (1983) by Francisc Munteanu, on the organization of an illegal printing press, *Calea Griviței* [*Griviței Alley*] (1984) by Tudor Ștefănescu, in which two other themes much exploited by this type of novel appear, namely the Grivița strike and the strikers' imprisonment, while in Titi Câmpeanu's *Nevăzuta față a lunii* [*The Unseen Face of the Moon*] (1974) and Teodor Marian's *Întoarcere la dragostea dintâi* [*Back to the First Love*] (1989) the lives of two sons of illegalists are showcased.

These are intertwined with the events of August 23, 1944, covering the period before or immediately after this day, novels such as *Hotel Ambasador* (1967) by Maria Arsene, *Primăvara timpurie* [*Early Spring*] (1969) by Aurel Mihale, *Arde marea* [*The Sea Is on Fire*] (1969) by Jean Nedelcu, *Și a fost ora "H"* [*And It Was "H" Hour*] (1971) by Haralambie Zincă, *Insurecție în cetate* [*Insurrection in the Fortress*] (1973) by Șerban Nedelcu, *Focul alb* [*The White Fire*] (1977) by Aurel Mihale, *Romanul unei zile mari* [*The Novel of a Great Day*] (1979) by Corneliu Leu. The years following the war and the building of socialism are depicted in novels such as *Muntele II* [*The Mountain II*] (1967) by Radu Theodoru, *Cheia inimii* [*Key to the Heart*] (1977) by Dumitru Almaș, *Dragostea și Revoluția* [*Love and Revolution*] (1981) by Dinu Săraru, presenting the typical figure of the activist with a human face, also explored by Platon Pardău in *Limita de vârstă* [*Age Limit*] (1982). The new man of the socialist type is also the focus of *Intermediarii* [*The Intermediaries*] (1985) by Nicolae Țic and *Misiunea de investigare* [*Investigation Mission*] (1987) by Ecaterina Țarălungă.

The other two large subcategories are those of the industrial and of the rural novel. Their production decreases in the 1970s – when the political and the historical subgenres develop the most – and increases in the 1980s, with a striking predominance of the industrial novel that focuses on plans, factories and mining and promotes the great socialist constructions, such as *O, Prometeu* [*O, Prometheus*] (1982) by Mihai Tunaru, *Tronsonul B.N.* [*Section B.N.*] (1983) by Ion Aramă, about the construction of the Danube-Black Sea canal, *Cu fața spre oameni* [*Facing the People*] (1983) by Romeo Popescu, in which the construction site is presented as a factor of political education, *Preavizul* [*The Notice*] (1984) by Ion Strătescu, *Fântâna cu apă vie* [*The Fountain of Living Water*] (1985) by Mircea Șerbănescu, *Roagă-mă orice* [*Ask Me for Anything*] (1986) by Ilie

Tănăsache, *Dorana* (1987) by Vasile Bogdan, *Impact* (1987) by Smaranda Jelescu, *Șantierul* [*The Building Site*] (1988) by Tudor Băran, *Beton și Pâine* [*Concrete and Bread*] (1989) by Ion Dianu, and *Trepte* [*Stairs*] (1989) by Florin Logreșteanu.

Among the novels with a rural theme a special place is taken by those which present the collectivization and the process of “clarification of consciousness”, which took place in the 1950s, and which was also represented by a number of novels of the “obsessive decade”, presenting a different perspective on the event<sup>37</sup>: *Zi de vară până-n seară* [*Summer Day till Evening*] (1966) by Marin Bucur, *Bănuiala* [*The Hunch*] (1973) by Chiril Tricolici, *Neîmpăcați în mânie* [*Unbound in Anger*] (1974) by Ion Almăjan, *Moartea faraonului* [*The Death of the Pharaoh*] (1979) by Romeo Popescu, *Pământ, Pământ...* [*Earth, Earth...*] (1983) by Aurel Mihale, *Să ajungi înaintea răsăritului de soare* [*Arrive before Sunrise*] (1989) by Pavel Pereș.

### *Political Novels*

While the novels of socialist realism belong to different subgenres and are united by the ideological approach promoted by the Party, the political novels, as noted above, constitute a novelistic subgenre in their own right. In these novels the political dimension is preponderant: they have an explicit political theme and plot, the characters - if not political figures themselves - have explicit political views and discuss political issues, as their lives are influenced by politics. Given the novel's robust engagement with reality (historical or contemporary), it has often been designated as a “document novel” or “debate novel”.

The central theme of the period will be, of course, communism itself, and the main character, the activist. In *Viața particulară a lui Constant Hagiu* (1967) by Corneliu Leu, the action takes place in 1950, when an activist is excluded from the Party after some verifications. This occasion prompts the protagonist to reflect on

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<sup>37</sup> The subject has recently benefited from a major in-depth study that has highlighted the importance and novelty of the literary representations of the communist period, both of socialist realism and of the Thaw, in understanding a phenomenon that marked an epochal turning point for the Romanian rural world. See Cosmin Borza, “The Faces of Rural Modernity in the Romanian Novel of the Agricultural Collectivization”, in Baghiu et al. (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain*, p. 78: “[...] the political and cultural interest for the rural setting is considerably more visible, and writers take this opportunity to paint vivid and ambitious pictures of rural existence, which transgress the ideological directives of the totalitarian regime [...]. Moreover, because agricultural collectivization was the first important step in the national modernization process undertaken by the communists, through which the party sought not only to legitimize its power, but effectively developed its functioning mechanisms, the village became – for the first time ever in Romanian culture – the privileged setting reflecting the challenges of modernity”. See also Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, Maria Sass (eds.), *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2019; Emanuel Modoc, “Literary Safe Spaces: Functions of Rural Settings in the Romanian Novel (1948-1989)”, in Baghiu et al. (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain*, pp. 83-92.

his life, beginning with the year 1939. Consequently, he comes to realize that he has a clear political conscience. The epilogue reports that he was readmitted to the party in 1953.

Many other novels will present analogous plots, wherein the contemplation of one's past serves as the foundation for a comprehensive examination of history, society, political events and political beliefs, as in *Inima omului* [*The Heart of Men*] (1970) by Șerban Nedelcu, in which the protagonist is a member of the illegal party; Paul Georgescu's *Înainte de tăcere* [*Before Silence*] (1975), which also presents an "illegalist" who, after being sentenced to death, writes his life story in a journal, this becoming a form of surviving but also a political confession; *Fidelitate* [*Loyalty*] (1977) by Ovidiu Genaru; *Patriarhii* [*The Patriarchs*] (1979) by Corneliu Leu; *Zbor în furtună* [*Flight into the Storm*] (1984) by Ionel Săndulescu. A process of reclusion and social and political rehabilitation is also the main theme of *Strada Labirint, II* [*Labyrinth Street*] (1977) by Sergiu Than, while *Drum spre început* [*Road to the Beginning*] (1979) by Ana Ioanid presents the same dynamics by making the protagonist write his "autobiography". Other kinds of plots, which alternate between political and erotic issues, present the lives of activists and the problems they must confront, as in *Cădere liberă* [*Free Fall*] (1978) by Grigore Zanc, and *Dosare deschise* [*Open Files*] (1979) by Vasile Ionță.

The first years of the communist regime are widely presented and discussed from a political point of view and from the perspective of a protagonist-witness in *Vântul și ploaia* [*The wind and the Rain*] (1969) by Zaharia Stancu, which presents the story of Darie (the protagonist of 1948 novel *Desculț* [*Barefoot*] and other novels by the same author) in the first years of "democratic elections"; *Apa* [*The Water*] (1973) by Alexandru Ivasiuc which also deals with the aftermath of the war and the opposition between communists and "reactionaries", *Drumul câinelui* [*The Road of the Dog*] (1974) by Ion Lăncrănjan, which presents the encounter, after the war, of two brothers who hate each other for political reasons; also *Pumnul și palma, I. O dimineață înșelătoare* [*Fist and Palm, I. A Deceptive Morning*] (1980) by Dumitru Popescu, which presents the early years of the regime through the retrospective reflection of two characters, professional activists "who adopt two different conceptions of the exercise of power"<sup>38</sup>.

The character-witness is frequently a journalist, as in *Omul de duminică* [*The Sunday Man*] (1974) by Al. I. Ștefănescu, or *Scrisori venețiene* [*Venetian Letters*] (1987) by Platon Pardău, which depicts the world of the activists in the 1950s.

Some novels, more psychological in structure, directly address power and the mechanisms behind it, as in *Iluminări* (1975) by Alexandru Ivasiuc, where the protagonist has a crisis of conscience that leads to self-analysis concerning the

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<sup>38</sup> Valentin Tașcu, "Dumitru Popescu, *Pumnul și palma, I. O dimineață înșelătoare* [*Fist and Palm, I. A Deceptive Morning*]", in Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, II, p. 79.

conditions of his social ascent: “from fragments of memories and present contacts, the character retraces a path of Power, as well as the ideology that directed him”<sup>39</sup>. Another “debate on power”, *Bunavestire* [Annunciation] (1977) by Nicolae Breban, is a novel at the intersection of two genres, which combines realistic and symbolic elements, becoming a parable of power (see *infra* “Parabolic novel”). Corneliu Leu’s 1985 novel *Rănile soldaților învingători* [The Wounds of Victorious Soldiers] (1985) also discusses “the problem of power [...] and the mechanism of the system of relations that lead to socialism”<sup>40</sup>. He developed this further in *Faptele de arme ale unor civili în secolul războaielor mondiale, sau Ce înseamnă puterea, I-II* [Acts of Civilian Struggle in the Century of World Wars, or What Power Means], I-II (1987–1989).

In addition to the communist reality, numerous novels address the years of the legionary movement, the Antonescu dictatorship, or World War II. For example, in *Unde ești Eli?* (Where Are You Eli? 1969), Horia Panaitescu critiques the persecution of Jews by the legionaries; the first novel of Sergiu Than’s cycle, *Strada Labirint* (1972), chronicles the events of Romanian history from 1934 to 1943 and so does the first volume of Marin Preda’s documentary novel *Delirul* (Delirium) (1975). Gheorghe Schwartz’s *A treia zi* [Third Day] (1980) presents the reality of the 1940s in the town of Lugoj at the time of the legionary government; Georgeta Horodincă’s *Somnambulii Soarelui* [Sleepwalkers of the Sun] (1981) analyzes the conversion to fascism of a large group of young intellectuals during the interwar period; *Lege și anexă* [Law and Annex] (1983) by Nicolae Țic is the inaugural novel of a documentary cycle intended to portray the period between the establishment of the Romanian Communist Party and the onset of World War II. The second novel of the cycle, *Sărindar* [Prayer] (1983), is set in 1926–1927 and presents the characters of various political personalities of the time from the perspective of a journalist. In contrast, Valeriu Gorunescu’s *Drumul spre zori* [The Road to Dawn] (1988) focuses on a single pivotal moment in the struggle against the legionaries, namely 1940. Francisc Păcurariu’s *Ultima călătorie a lui Ulise* [Ulysses’ Last Journey] (1976) depicts the lingering effects of fascism even after its demise.

#### *The Novels of the “Obsessive Decade”*

The novels of the “obsessive decade” are distinguished by a persistent alternation of temporal planes between the present and the past in the context of the 1950s, and a multiplicity and variation of narrative perspectives. The reevaluation of the

<sup>39</sup> Valentin Tașcu, “Alexandru Ivasiuc, *Iluminări* [Enlightenment]”, Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, I, p. 738.

<sup>40</sup> Mircea Popa, “Corneliu Leu, *Rănile soldaților învingători* [The Wounds of Victorious Soldiers]”, in Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, II, p. 194.



Stalinist past, frequently positioned in opposition to the present, characterized instead by a communism “with a human face”, is typically undertaken by a former party activist who, through a process antithetical to that of the “enlightenment” of socialist realism, becomes a reflective and complex character.

The protagonists of *Interval* (1968) and *Păsărilor* [*Birds*] (1970), as depicted by Alexandru Ivăsiuc, evoke past abuses of power and injustices, reflecting a deep political conscience. The recollection of the past, marked by the social conjunctures of the 1950s, is also the focus of *Luni, după viscol* [*Monday, after the Blizzard*] (1971) by Aurel Deboveanu and *Viața postmortem* [*Postmortem Life*] (1972) by Romulus Guga. In *Fără vâsle, I* [*Without Oars, I*] (1972) by Bujor Nedelcovici, the protagonist is depicted as a figure defeated by events, but who does not give up, continuing his quest to understand his “guilt” in *Noaptea* [*The Night*] (1974). Similar protagonists are presented – each grappling with the complexities of self-identity and the quest for understanding – in Marin Preda’s *Marele singuratic* [*The Great Loner*] (1972), *Galeria cu viță sălbatică* [*The Gallery of Wild Vines*] (1976) by Costantin Țoiu, *Babilonul de nisip. Cartea zilei întâi* [*Sand Babylon. Book of Day One*] (1979) by Nicolae Stăiculescu. *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* [*The Most Beloved of Earthlings*] (1980) by Marin Preda could be considered a comprehensive representation of the genre, encompassing a broad social, moral, and political examination from the perspective of an intellectual (the use of the first person singular here excludes the perspective of the Party from the narration).

A narrative of failure and defeat, which originated in the 1950s, is also that of the protagonist of *Tatuajele nu se lasă la garderobă* [*Tattoos Don’t Belong in the Wardrobe*] (1982) by Francisc Păcurariu, while Radu Țuculescu’s *Vânzătorul de aripi* [*The Wing Seller*] (1982) is “an indictment of the ‘obsessive decade’ set against the backdrop of the psychological pressure on an innocent teenager involved in a monstrous investigation”<sup>41</sup>. By the end of the 1980s, the theme of the destiny marked by the errors of the 1950s had been completely exhausted, as evidenced by the works *Scara de incendiu, I–II* [*Fire Ladder, I–II*] (1982–1984) by Chiril Tricolici (also a prolific author of socialist realist novels) and *Și mâine, și poimâine...* [*And Tomorrow, and the Day after Tomorrow...*] (1988) by Corneliu Ștefanache.

Other novels address the same theme but employ slightly different plots. *Vânătoarea regală* [*The Royal Hunt*] (1973), a work in the *F* cycle by Dumitru Radu Popescu, is structured around the investigation carried out by a prosecutor to elucidate the circumstances of the disappearance of his father. As with the other novels in the series, the narrative combines realistic and symbolic elements. The

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<sup>41</sup> Valentin Tașcu, “Radu Țuculescu, *Vânzătorul de aripi* [*The Wing Seller*]”, in Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, II, p. 134.

protagonist of *Mierea* [*Honey*] (1978) by Eugen Uricaru is a writer who returns to the small town of his youth after 20 years of absence, “with the aim of writing a novel about the turbulent events of the early days of communism”<sup>42</sup>, while Dana Dumitriu, in *Întoarcerea lui Pascal* [*Pascal’s Return*] (1979), presents the difficulties of those years through the troubled existence of a family. Alexandra Ioachim’s *Zgomotul cuvintelor* [*The Noise of Words*] (1982) brings to light the abuses of the “obsessive decade” through the direct confrontation between two characters, the first party secretary of a Transylvanian town, and a man seeking justice.

One of the most frequently discussed aspects of these novels is the collectivization that occurred during the early years of the communist regime. However, this is only one aspect of a much broader reflection that also revolves around “the motherland”, “reality”, “personal Ego”, “truth” or “death”, as shown by Denisa Bud<sup>43</sup>, thus addressing some of the major issues of their contemporaneity. The first book that may be included in this category is *Moromeții, II* [*The Moromete Family, II*] (1967) by Marin Preda, followed by Augustin Buzura’s *Fetele tăcerii* [*The Faces of Silence*] (1974) the most-known example on this theme. The category also includes *Niște țărani* [*Some Peasants*] (1974) by Dinu Săraru, *Acei bărbați pătimiși* [*Those Fiery Men*] (1981) by Alexandru Vergu, *Tăcerea pământului* [*The Silence of the Earth*] (1982) by B. Pandelea. The period of collectivization, intertwined with other themes, is also recalled in *Ora de dimineață* [*The Morning Hour*] (1972) by Platon Pardău, *Fiul secetei* [*The Son of the Drought*] (1979) by Ion Lăncrănjan, *Izgonirea neguțătorilor* [*The Banishment of the Merchants*] (1983) by Mihai Duțescu, *Bărbații* [*The Men*] (1984) by Valer Chioreanu.

### *The Social Novel*

As a different macro-category, the social novel has a variety of thematic declinations and narrative outcomes; its generic characteristic is that it deals with the *external life* of the characters, as opposed to the *internal life* explored by the psychological novel. The focus of these novels will be on the description of a social environment, the individuals within it and their social relations, thus the activities of these environments, the changes that occur within them, and the impact of these changes on the lives of individuals<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Valentin Tașcu, “Eugen Uricaru, *Mierea* [*Honey*]”, in Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, II, p. 41.

<sup>43</sup> See Bud, “The Romanian Novels”, pp. 204-ss.

<sup>44</sup> In her study of the social novel of the period 1965–1989, Denisa Bud proposes a systematization according to its thematic subcategories. This articulation is as follows: rural environment, provincial urban environment, radiography of certain social environments with political implications, social analysis, and other categories.

It is therefore not surprising that this category is the one with which political elements can most easily be associated, to the extent that the distinction between the two is often difficult to discern. The themes most frequently addressed in these novels are not markedly distinct from those previously analyzed, yet the political dimension is not invariably a primary focus.

Students and youth, on which historical, social and political events have a profound impact, influencing their formation and consciousness, as well as their life path, serve as the primary subjects in *Viața-i frumoasă... [Life is Beautiful...]* (1968) by Dumitru Almaș and in Petre Popescu's *Sfârșitul bahic [Bacchic End]* (1973). In Radu Ciobanu's *Ultima vacanță [The Last Holiday]* (1977), the love between two young people, opposed by their families, is the input for the recollection of the political circumstances of the 1950s that led to this enmity; while in *Calul negru [Black Horse]* (1983) by Traian Gruia, the youth is depicted through the eyes of an intellectual compelled to teach in a village during a period of political and social transformation (1946). Daniel Drăgan's *Ursa Mică [Ursa Minor]* (1985) presents the theme of the construction of socialism from the perspective of a student who participates in the civil resistance against the Germans during WWII. About other social categories, Tania Lovinescu's *Aproapele meu [My Close Friend]* (1979) addresses the situation of women in society, with reference to the political problems of the 1950s, while *Tare ca piatra [Hard as a Rock]* (1986) by Daniel Drăgan depicts an activist, a former maid who becomes a security officer in the 1950s.

At the crossroads with the political novel, *Caloianul, I-II [The Caloian, I-II]* (1975) by Ion Lăncrănjan presents the journal of a writer who analyzes the causes of his own artistic failure against the backdrop of a debate on the influence of power on artistic creation; Platon Pardau's *Cercul [The Circle]* (1975) shows the life of a character between the 1930s and the 1960s, who starts as an apprentice and becomes a party leader in the setting of a provincial town; *Grădina Icoanei [Icoanei Garden]* (1977) by Bujor Nedelcovici continues the series started by *Fără vâsle* (1972), the setting being this time that of the courtroom and the novel addressing the problem of absolute truth. In *Zigguratul [The Ziggurat]* (1982), Paul Eugen Banciu uses a group of journalists from a provincial town to analyze the pyramidal power relations that structure social life in the era of "victorious socialism".

The Act of 23 August 1944 and the installation of communist power are depicted in *În furtună [In the Storm]* (1979) by Cornel Ionescu, in *Tornada [Tornado]* (1980) by Ion Marin Almăjan, which analyzes the dynamics between different nationalities in Transylvania from 1918 to the aftermath of 1944, and in *Un august nu prea îndepărtat [An August Not Too Far Away]* (1989) by Haralambie Bârzan, while *Vânătoare de vrăjitori [Witch Hunt]* (1986) by Mircea Vaida depicts the period from October 1944 to March 1945 in a Transylvanian town.

*The Parabolic Novel*

The parable's form allows for the staging of the mechanisms of power without necessarily making any references to the present; as a result, it has a higher degree of literaturization than other political forms. The political parable may focus on the rise and thirst for power of an individual or a group. Alternatively, it may represent the effects that a certain type of political power has on the individual or society: these effects may include violence, compromise, a sense of confinement or fear, or a general feeling of guilt.

Eugen Barbu's *Princepele* (1969) is a well-known example of the first category. It is set in the days of the Phanariotes and shows the rise and fall of a prince and his advisor, paving the way for a new duo. This circularity is also staged in Ioan Nicolescu's *Dupa mine o zi...* [*After Me One Day...*] (1983), once again set in the Phanariot era but also involving the figure of a duplicitous chronicler who evokes the writers' status under the regime.

Alexandru Ivasiuc's *Racul* [*The Crayfish*] (1976) also explores the themes of power, violence and terror by depicting the staging of a coup d'état in a fictional South American country. "The focus, however, is not on the masses, but on the psycho-affective reaction of the character Miguel, who has a deep knowledge of the conflicting sides"<sup>45</sup>. Other narratives of the rise to power of an individual are staged in *Bunavestire* (1977) by Nicolae Breban, while representations of a totalitarian dictatorship can be found in *Eclipsa* [*The Eclipse*] (1979) by Alice Botez, which insists on the theme of collective guilt; in *Castelul romanului. Etymologicum parvum* [*The Castle of the Novel. Etymologicum Parvum*] (1981) by Andrei Brezianu, in which the political theme is intertwined with a reflection on the novel and writing; in *Spitalul* [*The Hospital*] (1981) by Gheorghe Schwartz, in which a hospital for political refugees becomes a prison and a violent apparatus of repression that depersonalizes people and turns them into puppets; in *Coroana Izabelei, I* [*Izabel's Crown, I*] (1982) by Marius Tupan; in *Vladia* (1982) by Eugen Uricaru, which paints a Kafkaesque universe divided between those who maintain the established order of fear and lies, and the marginalized, the unfit, who seek an escape route, even an illusory one. In *Bunul cetățean Archimede* [*Good Citizen Archimedes*] (1975) by Dan Mutașcu, the reference to the historical event of the siege of Syracuse serves as an opportunity to reflect on the nature of dictatorship, freedom, and human identity. *Paradisul pentru o mie de ani* [*Paradise for One Thousand Years*] (1974) by Romulus Guga employs the image of an asylum for the poor during WWII as a parable for the irrationality of war and totalitarianism. Theodor Constantin's *Muntele morții* [*The Mountain of Death*] (1972) is a novel

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<sup>45</sup> Valentin Tașcu, "Alexandru Ivasiuc, *Racul* [*The Crayfish*]", in Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, I, p. 757.

that turns to the dreadful experience of concentration camps to critique “ideologies that deny human personality”<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, Mircea Ciobanu’s novels *Cartea fiilor* [*Book of Sons*] (1970) and *Tăietorul de lemne* [*The Woodcutter*] (1974) reflect upon the concept of culpability, while Octavian Paler’s *Viața pe un peron* [*Life on a Platform*] (1981) can be considered an essay on terror, oppression and indifference. In *Lumina din adâncuri* [*The Light from the Depths*] (1988), Alecu Ivan Ghilia presents the relationship between power and freedom, duty and arbitrariness.

### *Final Remarks*

Although a political attribute has frequently been ascribed to much of the prose of the communist period, we cannot speak, in quantitative terms, of the predominance of a political dimension in the Romanian novel after 1965. However, the brief survey of themes that has been carried out shows both the presence of political reflection related to recurring themes, but with different intensities, in different subgenres of the Romanian novel, and the variety of thematic possibilities in which a political dimension is present. At the same time, it will be useful to consider the relationship between the massive translation of texts elaborating different modes of political reflection, and the emergence in Romanian literature of a political dimension diluted in subgenres other than those with an explicit political theme.

Further research in this sense on the subcategories we have not considered here, and an in-depth study of the themes, narrative elements and formal structures (the use of memory, the form of confession, the use of the first person, the technique of voices) with which the political interacts in the categories already considered, will be able to shed more light on the way in which the political factor has been filtered into literature.

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<sup>46</sup> Valentin Tașcu, “Theodor Constantin, *Muntele morții* [*The Mountain of Death*]”, in Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic*, I, p. 675.

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THE POLITICAL DIMENSION IN ROMANIAN NOVELS OF THE  
COMMUNIST PERIOD (1965–1989): A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH  
(Abstract)

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the political dimension in the Romanian novel during the communist period. Indeed, the increasing presence of the political in the everyday life of the individual led to a greater sensitivity to this aspect of public life, making the category of the “political novel” widely used by writers and critics of the time. Based on the data provided by the only lexicographic tool on the Romanian novel, the *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from its Origins to 2000*, the analysis aims to identify not only the novels typically associated with this dimension, such as the socialist realist novel and the political novel (with the subcategory of the novel “of the obsessive decade”), but also the cases in which it is intertwined with other subgenres, such as the social, parabolic or historical. The quantitative analysis shows that the novels of this category, much emphasized by critics, especially because of the renown of some representative works, do not in fact outnumber those of other categories; at the same time, the presence of a political dimension in several subgenres highlights the inclination of this category to intertwine with other forms of the novel during this period, with different intensities and results. After this initial assessment, in the second part of the article we will review the main novels in the most relevant subgenres associated with political elements, for the period 1965–1989, identifying their main themes.

*Keywords:* Romanian novel, subgenres, political novel, communism, quantitative analysis.

DIMENSIUNEA POLITICĂ ÎN ROMANUL ROMÂNESC DIN PERIOADA  
COMUNISTĂ (1965–1989): O ABORDARE CANTITATIVĂ  
(Rezumat)

Articolul își propune să ofere o imagine de ansamblu asupra dimensiunii politice în romanul românesc din perioada comunistă. Pe baza datelor oferite de singurul instrument lexicografic privind romanul românesc, *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până în 2000*, analiza își propune să identifice nu doar romanele asociate în mod tipic cu această dimensiune, cum ar fi romanul realist-socialist și romanul politic (cu subcategoria romanului „obsedantului deceniu”), ci și cazurile în care aceasta se împletește cu alte subgenuri, cum ar fi cel social, parabolic sau istoric. Analiza cantitativă arată că numărul romanelor din această categorie, mult discutată de critică mai ales prin notorietatea unor opere reprezentative, nu îl depășește, de fapt, pe cel al celorlalte categorii; în același timp, prezența unei dimensiuni politice în mai multe subgenuri evidențiază disponibilitatea categoriei de a se împleti, în această perioadă, cu intensități și rezultate diferite, cu alte forme ale romanului. După această primă evaluare, în a doua parte a articolului vom trece în revistă principalele romane din cele mai relevante subgenuri din intervalul 1965–1989 asociate cu elemente politice, identificând totodată principalele teme ale acestora.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* romanul românesc, subgenurile romanului, romanul politic, comunism, analiză cantitativă.