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DAIANA GÂRDAN
EMANUEL MODOC¹

NEW METHODOLOGIES IN THE STUDY OF THE ROMANIAN NOVEL

The transnational and the digital turns² have significantly influenced literary studies over the past thirty years, positioning the novel as an ideal subject for examining innovative methodological and analytical approaches³. As both a recipient and an initiator of socio-economic, political, and cultural tensions, the novel regains its societal role as a mirror and mediator of its source culture, particularly at local and regional levels. Consequently, new issues have arisen in recent research initiatives: the global dissemination of imported literary forms (considering the disparities in modernization between central and peripheral cultures), the transformation of these forms across various social, historical, and spatial contexts, and the emergence of subgenres with national or regional distinctions.

In the realm of evolving literary criticism, which seeks to treat national literatures as part of the global literary landscape and employs statistical and computational techniques for sociological literature analysis, scholars exploring (semi)peripheral literary cultures have begun taking significant steps toward fresh literary interpretations since 2010. In Romania, new research directions have predominantly centered on novelistic works (both local and translated). Initial distant readings of this cultural segment were facilitated by the *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel* (2004, 2011) and the *Chronological Dictionary of Translated Novels in Romania* (2005, 2017), two of the few national lexicographical resources greatly enhancing the application of new research

¹ This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 101001710).



² See Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris, Seuil, 1999; David Damrosch, *What is World Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003; Katherine Bode, *Reading by Numbers: Recalibrating the Literary Field*, London, Anthem Press, 2012; Thomas O. Beebe (ed.), *Literatures as World Literature* series, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014–2023.

³ See Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”, *New Left Review*, 2000, 1, pp. 54–68; Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61, 2000, 1, pp. 207–227; Stanford Literary Lab, *Pamphlets*, 2011–2018, <https://litlab.stanford.edu/pamphlets>. Accessed November 20, 2024; Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2015; Ted Underwood, “The Life Cycles of Genres”, *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, 2, 2016, 2, pp. 1–25; Andrew Piper, *Enumerations: Data and Literary Study*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2018.

methodologies. Quantitative analyses have reignited interest in the sociological examination of the novel, with literary lexicography serving as an essential resource. Noteworthy projects in this respect include Yves Stalloni's *Dictionnaire du roman*⁴, encyclopedias of the novel⁵, as well as traditional bibliographies focused on themes, authors, or genres within specific national literatures⁶.

To foster the growth of this research platform, the Romanian Academy's "Sextil Pușcariu" Institute of Linguistics and Literary History in Cluj-Napoca hosted in 2023 the inaugural *International Conference for the Study of the Novel*. This conference aimed at exploring the potential of utilizing traditional lexicographical tools (dictionaries focused on authors, literary works, periodicals, bibliographies, critical references, etc.) as (meta)data sources for novel studies, as well as to redefine philological lexicography in response to the quantitative and digital shifts. The event focused on two primary areas: first, presenting ongoing or completed research projects that employ systemic, transnational, quantitative, or digital methodologies regarding the novel and promoting the sharing of their preliminary or final findings. Second, it engaged in theoretical discussions about the transformation of research tools for studying the novel in light of new methodological developments in literary studies, emphasizing individual applications and workshops that explore the advantages and challenges associated with these innovative methods.

The studies gathered in this issue of *Dacoromania litteraria* represent a significant part of the findings presented at the first *International Conference for the Study of the Novel*. The issue follows the main thematic areas highlighted throughout the conference.

In the first section, titled "Engaging with Theoretical Perspectives", Valeska Bopp-Filimonov's paper explores Liviu Rebreanu's novel *Ion* through the lens of Critical Disability Studies, highlighting how physical impairments and social hierarchies intersect. It examines marginalized characters with disabilities, such as Savista and the Romani musicians, and contrasts them with the protagonist Ion, whose physical strength symbolizes the potential of the Romanian nation. Focusing on a corpus of 95 Romanian novels translated into Polish between 1931 and 2023, Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev and Tomasz Krupa's paper investigates the reception of the Romanian novel in Poland over the 20th and 21st centuries. Their study uses statistical and computational methods to analyze the sociological aspects of this literary exchange, examining the political, economic, and cultural factors influencing the translation of Romanian literature in Poland, highlighting the role of translators, the impact of historical events, and the gender disparity in translated works. Teodora Dumitru examines the reception of B. Fundoianu's 1922

⁴ Yves Stalloni, *Dictionnaire du roman*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2006.

⁵ Peter Melville Logan (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*, I–II, Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011; Paul Schellinger (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, I–II, London and New York, Routledge, 2014.

⁶ See, for instance, Donald W. Urioste, Francisco A. Lomeli María Joaquina Villaseñor, *Historical Dictionary of U.S. Latino Literature*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017; Taiping Chang, *A Dictionary of Chinese Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.

famous thesis on the colonial status of Romanian literature, exploring the reception of this theory from E. Lovinescu's critique in the 1920s to its post-war fate under Romanian Communism and post-Communism. Her study also explores the adaptation of Fundoianu's thesis to modern academic concepts like Antoine Compagnon's "antimodernity". Following a highly relevant theme in the contemporary critical discourse on literary creation, Constantina Raveca Buleu's probes the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence in literary production, examining the methodologies, achievements, and dilemmas associated with AI-generated works. It discusses the limitations of AI's "synthetic creativity" compared to human "transformational" creativity and highlights notable AI-generated texts like *I the Road* and *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*. Camelia Lăncrănjan's study performs a semantic micro-analysis of the term "fashion" in 19th-century Romanian novels using digital techniques and data gathered from *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel*, positing that the term encapsulates modernity and social emancipation. Through the quantitative analysis of 46 contextual excerpts, the study finds that fashion predominantly evokes negative connotations, with over 60% of these negative associations appearing in novels of manners.

In the second part of our issue, titled "Revisting Forms and Poetics", Andreea David uses a quantitative approach to examine the political dimension of the post-war Romanian novel, delving into the complicated nature of political influence on literature and focusing on novelistic subgenres such as the socialist realist novel, the political novel, and the novel of "the obsessive decade". Her paper reveals that, contrary to what critics suggested throughout time, while political themes were prominent, they did not dominate the literary landscape. Focusing on Mateiu I. Caragiale's *Craii de Curtea-Veche* [*Gallants of the Old Court*], Angelo Mitchievici's study examines the revival of adventure fiction in the Romanian novel, emphasizing the transformation of the notion of adventure from a heroic perspective to a more introspective and fictionalized approach. Teona Farmatu's contribution explores the evolution and impact of autofiction in post-communist Romania, highlighting its origins in French poststructuralism and its adaptation within Romanian literature. The paper critiques the dominance of male perspectives in autofiction and examines how female authors like Lavinia Braniște and Sașa Zare challenge and redefine the genre through their works, emphasizing themes of vulnerability, exploitation, and feminist critique. With a focus on migrant literature, Mihnea Bălici examines the Romanian autobiographical novels written by authors who worked as caregivers in Italy, through the lenses of Sarah Brouillette's "global literary marketplace" and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's "in-between peripherality". The paper argues that works authored by Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, Liliana Nechita, and Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan emphasize migrant exceptionality over solidarity, aiming to legitimize themselves to Italian readers. Finally, Magda Wächter investigates the significance of subtitles in Romanian novels, analysing their evolution and impact on literary interpretation. Her study examines subtitles' roles across different historical periods, illustrating their nature as reflectors of diverse socio-cultural contexts and literary genres.

EXTRAORDINARY BODIES IN LIVIU REBREANU'S *ION*. A READING THROUGH THE LENS OF DISABILITY STUDIES

In Search of a Title

In this essay, I would like to share some thoughts on the possible added value of reading Liviu Rebreanu's novel *Ion* (1920) through the lens of so-called "Disability Studies". Disability Studies is a social sciences and humanities academic field that emerged in the American academia in the 1990s. Before, it was mainly the practical sciences focusing on concrete interventions that would favor individuals with impairments who had limited access to societal opportunities and resources¹. Activists demanded attention to the topic. They admitted that the notion of "disability" functioned as a kind of container, having stemmed mainly from the need to construct a collective identity "to make change possible, to break down discrimination in jobs, transport, in people's attitudes generally" as claimed by author Peter White, who was blind himself. Otherwise, he could wonder what makes him comparable to a man in a wheelchair and ask himself "whether putting me into a disabled category really makes much sense"².

Meanwhile, researchers using the advanced academic approach of Cultural or Critical Disability Studies³ emphasize the fact that "impairment is a common

¹ I refer here to the emerging rehabilitation sciences in the historical context of the 1970s and 1980s. The study and discussion of disability, also in scientific terms as a whole, have a much longer history in many different individual disciplines, which cannot be discussed in detail here (for an overview, see Anne Waldschmidt, *Disability Studies zur Einführung*, Hamburg, Junius Hamburg, 2020, pp. 17-20). However, it should be remembered that "interventions" did take place earlier in the opposite direction – e.g., in the context of nationalistic "Völkerrkunde" and eugenics, resulting, as a catastrophic climax, in the de facto genocide of people who were physically or mentally impaired, euphemistically called "euthanasia", in the German Third Reich.

² Peter White, "Disability: A New History", *BBC Radio 4*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/-programmes/b021-mdwt/episodes/player>. Accessed June 10, 2024. See also Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, David Serlin (eds.), *Keywords for Disability Studies*, New York, New York University Press, 2015, p. 6.

³ A major critique of the first wave of disability studies is that, although disability is no longer regarded as an individual medical problem, it is (still) conceptualized as a "deviation from the norm". From the perspective of Critical Disability Studies, however, the focus should be on "changing the social and political treatment of difference". See Markus Dederich, *Körper, Kultur und Behinderung. Eine Einführung in die Disability Studies*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2007, pp. 30-31. Some authors also emphasise the activist character of research in this field – see Melinda C. Hall, "Critical Disability Theory", in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, <https://plato.sta->

experience in human life and that we all are differently able-bodied”⁴. Disability can be innate, caused by an accident or develop with age and, as such, affect every human at any time. However, in the majority of cases, the ascription “disabled” remains a variable category of difference, changing the fact to “a specific social identity of a minority”⁵. It is not surprising that this specific social and cultural discourse is of particular interest to many social sciences and humanities researchers. In this regard, they share certain assumptions with studies on race, class and gender/sexuality. They are also analytically inspired by the earlier focus on “otherness”⁶. Shared assumptions include the focus on socially constructed rather than natural or inherent identities, the examination of power dynamics involved in the construction and maintenance of these identities, the recognition of intersectionality in shaping the experiences and opportunities of marginalized groups and the critical analysis of societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. These perspectives align closely with the social model of disability, which emphasizes that disability is primarily a result of societal barriers and attitudes rather than individual impairments. Beyond the ethical concerns (critical) disability scholars engage with, their primary focus is to explore the question “How, why and to what end is ‘otherness’ historically, socially and culturally produced, objectified and practiced as disability?”⁷.

For the title of my essay, I initially chose the term “deformed bodies”. By doing so, I used a notion that preceded contemporary conceptions of disability and “demarcated and degraded physical difference”⁸ on a more basic level. In my perception, the notion of “deformity”, originating in the 18th century, better reflected the perspective still prevalent when Rebreanu wrote the novel *Ion*. The word immediately characterizes the perspective of the contemporaries as well as the narrator’s voice in *Ion* – as the deviancy of the characters presented in this article is firstly and most explicitly exposed by their visible physical impairments and bodily particularities. These aspects make the notion of deformity seem to come much closer to the point of the (re)presentation. In relation to the concrete *Zeitgeist* of the novel’s context, it is worth considering the work of Marius Turda, who traces the way eugenic ideas gained momentum in Hungary and Romania in

[nford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/disability-critical](https://www.ford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/disability-critical). Accessed July 2, 2024. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

⁴ Anne Waldschmidt, “Disability Goes Cultural. The Cultural Model of Disability as an Analytical Tool”, in Moritz Ingwersen, Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berressem (eds.), *Culture – Theory – Disability*, Bielefeld, Transcript-Verlag, 2017, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ See David T. Mitchell, Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 3.

⁷ Waldschmidt, *Disability Studies*, p. 12: “Wie, warum und wozu wird – historisch-sozial und kulturell – ‘Anderssein’ als Behinderung hergestellt, verobjektiviert und praktiziert?”.

⁸ Helen Deutsch, “Deformity”, in Adams et al. (eds.), *Keywords*, p. 52.

the early 20th century. He points to the fact that “degeneration (in its multiple forms) came to be widely discussed”⁹, the “nation’s racial body” became protected¹⁰ and hence “eugenicists glorified the mentally and physically healthy while warning against those deemed inferior”¹¹. Therefore, several factors make it highly unlikely that the described contexts in *Ion* are not at least partially shaped by this contemporary context of ideas. Rebreanu, the novel’s author, originates from the then-Hungarian Transilvania, where his novel is also set. He was fluent in both Romanian and Hungarian. So, he was able to perceive in both languages the eugenic discourses that dealt with the fear of degeneration of one’s own “race” on the one hand, and with health as a necessary processor of modernization and national development on the other¹². And, indeed, going deeper into the character analysis in *Ion*, I became aware that Ion, the able-bodied main character, is such a dominant character also due to his physical strength. His body is described as almost super-naturally healthy and powerful. At the time the novel was written, health was understood as “a normative category operating in both medical and social environments”¹³. I will show later that this physical configuration is no coincidence but fits into a eugenic reading of *Ion*.

It made a lot of sense, though, to change the essay’s title to “extraordinary bodies” to integrate the presentation of his body and show the range of literary bodies, from weak to strong. With the term “extraordinary bodies”, I am also quoting Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s important 1990s contribution to the field of disability studies¹⁴. The term very convincingly reflects the fluidity she addresses in her book of which we are also constantly reminded in the presented novel — “anyone can become disabled at any time”¹⁵. In the context of Henri-Jacques Stiker’s *History of Disability*, David T. Mitchell points to the fact “that

⁹ Marius Turda, *Eugenics and Nation in Early 20th Century Hungary*, Basingstoke–New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 30.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 44. Interestingly, disability is not (yet) a prominent topic. It is explicitly dealt with only in connection with war returnees when, in 1915, the Hungarian Prime Minister initiated a Welfare Committee for Disabled and Injured Soldiers (p. 180). Maria Bucur points to the absolute lack of attention paid to the topic of disability in Romanian politics and society as late as the 19th century, as well as the immense current research gap in the study of disability in Eastern Europe. She herself traces the topic of abled/disabled bodies using the example of the Romanian military, medical institutions and the first philanthropically motivated institutions founded in Romania between the turn of the century and the beginning of the First World War – see Maria Bucur, “Disability Discourses in Romania before 1916”, in *New Europe College Yearbook*, 2022-2023, vol. 1, pp. 41–65, <https://nec.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BUCUR.pdf>. Accessed November 3, 2024.

¹² Turda, *Eugenics and Nation*, pp. 25-33.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies. Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

human capacities vary greatly from one another and that those differences mark the dynamic essence of what it means to be human"¹⁶. By this, Stiker argues for a perspective of general human difference and against what Mitchell calls a "rhetoric of sameness" that does not recognize "the realities of disabled lives"¹⁷. It is, therefore, an inclusive concept. One could also say that particularities are gradually regarded as part of one and the same phenomenon of the general physical and mental conditionality of creaturely beings.

Disability in the Context of Literature

Investigating disability in the context of literature is relevant. Literature is full of characters who deviate from an assumed norm. Concerning Montaigne, Nietzsche, Shakespeare and Melville, Snyder and Mitchell convincingly point out that "disability is a prevalent characteristic of narrative discourses"¹⁸. It seems that disabled characters demand a meaningful narrative while they also enable an intriguing story. On the one hand, such fictional characters shape the reader's idea of what it means to live or have to live "differently" in one respect or another¹⁹. On the other hand, in most cases, they are not the main characters of a plot, meaning that attention and empathy are focused on others. The narrating voice is not constructed to convey how it feels to be perceived as deviant and stigmatized. Instead, at decisive moments, it is directed by the mediating narrator into other realms occupied by non-disabled (main) characters. Most readers are not aware of this omnipresence: the disabled characters still play a marginalized or exoticized role that conforms to unquestioned cultural assumptions by a majority of seemingly unaffected people²⁰, the disabled characters do not stand out precisely because they *conform to* stereotyped ideas²¹.

Stereotypes extend beyond perceptions of disabled bodies. In every society, various groups face prejudice based on different aspects of their identity. Consequently, researchers have concluded that an intersectional perspective is essential to understanding and addressing these complex social dynamics. The notion of "intersectionality", introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, points to double or multiple disadvantages when people combine several characteristics perceived by their societies as "different". For instance, Crenshaw was a black

¹⁶ David T. Mitchell, "Foreword", in Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*. Transl. by William Sayers, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. xiii.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. xii.

¹⁸ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 1.

¹⁹ See Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 9: "The discursive construct of the disabled figure, informed more by received attitudes than by people's actual experience of disability, circulates in culture and finds a home within the conventions and codes of literary representation".

²⁰ See also *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

female feminist. As women and black people are both disadvantaged in American society, gender and race overlap and (can) result in a double burden²². Meanwhile, especially in gender studies, intersectionality is being discussed as a new paradigm²³, and Feminist Disability Studies has emerged as a sub-branch. Also, Garland-Thomson argues in favour of this intersectional perspective that productively expands the “thinking about the complexity of embodied identity”²⁴. In terms of the supposed existence of races²⁵, there is (even) historical evidence of discourses on eugenics and the hierarchization of human groups in general, closely accompanied by a discursive connection of supposedly “lower races” with attributions of disability²⁶. This should be kept in mind, as, in the novel *Ion*, we are also confronted by the multiple disadvantages of the physically impaired, as we will see below.

The first impulse towards the topic of diversity in Romanian literature (which can also serve as a starting point when analysing intersectionality) is the quantitative study “Identitarian Diversity in the Romanian Novel (1844-1932)”²⁷. The metadata the authors extracted while digitizing more than 500 novels provides a useful overview of the quantitative presence of authors’ and protagonists’ identity characteristics in Romanian novels. Gender, Ethnicity/Nationality and Class/Work are the routes of investigation. The authors did not search for disabled characters in the Romanian novel. Nevertheless, all of their categories will still play a role in the context of disability as presented in *Ion*. The novel is classified as the first modern novel in the Romanian literary realm, and, as Linett points out,

²² Crenshaw analyses this through the framing and interpretation of court cases in which black women are the plaintiffs. In doing so, she shows that there is absolutely no sensitivity to the relevance of intersectionality; instead, those who are “burdened” in multiple ways are marginalized – see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989,1, Article 8, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>. Accessed July 31, 2024.

²³ Ilse Lenz, “Intersektionalität: zum Wechselverhältnis von Geschlecht und sozialer Ungleichheit”, in Ruth Becker, Beate Kortendiek, Barbara Budrich (eds.), *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*. Unter Mitarbeit von Barbara Budrich, Ilse Lenz, Sigrid Metz-Göckel, Ursula Müller und Sabine Schäfer. 3., erweiterte und durchgesehene Auflage, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften / GWV Fachverlage GmbH, Wiesbaden, 2010, pp. 158-165.

²⁴ Garland-Thomson, *Feminist Disability Studies*, p. 1559.

²⁵ For the concept of race underlying this article, see the “Jena Declaration. The Concept of Race is the Result of Racism, not its Prerequisite”, <https://www.uni-jena.de/22120/jenaer-erklaerung>. Accessed August 02, 2024.

²⁶ Jamelia Morgan, “On the Relationship Between Race and Disability”, *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review (CR-CL)*, 2023, 58, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4519059>. Accessed July 27, 2024.

²⁷ Vlad Pojoga et al., “Diversitate identitară în romanul românesc (1844-1932)” [“Identitarian Diversity in the Romanian Novel (1844-1932)”, *Transilvania*, 2022, 10, pp. 33-44.

“modernist authors believed fiction should be expansive, even in some cases encyclopedic” so that “they included myriad human types in their fictional worlds”²⁸. In the following sections, I will introduce the physically impaired in more detail and examine them under the following questions: Which protagonists have “deformed bodies”, and what functions do their impairments and their characters – Linett refers to the “bodymind”²⁹ – have in the novel? What does the kind of representation tell us about the positionality of the narrator’s voice concerning persons with physical and/or mental impairments? Which major topics are (implicitly) negotiated when the characters’ bodies are presented in such detail? What is their symbolic content? I will argue that *Ion* is a suitable example to show the close link between disabled and enabled bodies in their reciprocal conditionality. In this sense, the Romanian identity at the time the novel is set is also multifaceted, with each body illustrating a partial facet. I will start by presenting the relevant characters and develop the argument in each concrete case.

Savista – between Non-human Animal, Seer and Saint

The first obviously disabled person is Savista, “oloaga satului” [“the village lame”]. In this way of imagining, she is the kind of person who, like “the” teacher, “the” priest, etc., belongs to the overall panorama of the (Romanian) village. Right at the beginning, when the village dance is described in order to introduce the readers to the essential plot location and the protagonists, “Savista, the village cripple, crept through the gate, worming her way through the people’s legs”³⁰. The physical description the narrator uses to introduce her highlights her appearance, which is different from that of all the other characters. What Garland-Thomson means becomes apparent when one concludes that disabled literary characters’ “bodily configurations operate as spectacles”³¹: “Her legs were maimed from birth and her long wiry arms served as hooks to drag her crippled body along. The whitish lips of her enormous mouth covered froth-flecked gums and sparse pointed

²⁸ Maren Linett, *Bodies of Modernism. Physical Disability in Transatlantic Modernist Literature*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2016, p. 2, see in greater detail also pp. 145-149.

²⁹ See *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Liviu Rebreanu, *Ion*. Transl. by A. Hillard, London, Peter Owen Limited, 1965, p. 14. For the Romanian version see Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere [Works]*, vol. 4: *Ion*. Edited by Nicolae Gheran and Valeria Dumitrescu, București, Eminescu, 1970, p. 18: “se târăște pe poartă, printre picioarele oamenilor, Savista, oloaga satului”. The English version consistently translates “oloaga” (“lame”) with the more general word “cripple” which in Romanian would be “schilod”.

³¹ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 9. See also p. 10: “From folktales and classical myths to modern and postmodern ‘grotesques’, the disabled boy is almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice”.

stubs of yellow teeth”³². While her otherness is emphasized and she is given non-human animalistic features, especially through the description of her mouth and teeth, in the same paragraph she is also integrated biologically as part of the human village community in which kinship relations are set out. Significantly, out of all the people, she is related to Florica, “the prettiest girl of Pripas”³³, which gives her a kind of flip-side, or mirror, function and shows the range of possible appearances of the human species here, in the village of Pripas³⁴. Therefore, Savista is explicitly presented as part of the biological community but is clearly excluded from the social community. The description of the crippled woman pushing her way through the crowd seems almost grotesque to the still unfamiliarised reader. Nevertheless, no one “took any notice of her”³⁵.

Andrei Terian elaborates on a hierarchy of the Pripas villagers in Rebreanu’s *Ion* and makes social position and eventual promotion in the social structure the decisive criteria for an unchallenged – or less challenged – position. Terian distinguishes between “supra-humanity”, “superior humanity”, “simple humanity”, “inferior humanity”, and “infra-humanity”³⁶. Despite having a subordinate position to children, Savista is addressed once as follows: “No really, you’re worse than the silliest of children...”³⁷.

And by her repeatedly emphasized animal-like existence outside in the courtyards or inside the house on corridor floors –

Trifon Tătaru kept her in his house to look after the children³⁸.

Savista the cripple, more dead than alive with fright at the men’s shouts, was sitting crouched near the porch where she had shrunk back to avoid being trodden under their feet³⁹.

... she would stick to the Veranda like a toad⁴⁰.

³² Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “Are picioarele încârcite din naștere, iar brațele lungi și osoase ca niște cângi anume spre a-și târî schilozenia, și o gură enormă cu buzele alburii de sub care se întind gingiile îmbălate, cu colți de dinți galbeni, rari și lungi”.

³³ *Ibidem*. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “fata cea mai frumoasă din Pripas”.

³⁴ Garland-Thomson points to this fluidity caused by the fact that “anyone can become disabled at any time” which, hence, is also “perhaps more threatening to those who identify themselves as normates” (*Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 14).

³⁵ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “N-o bagă în seamă nimeni”.

³⁶ See Andrei Terian: “Oameni, câini și alte dobitoace: O lectură pseudo-darwinistă a romanului *Ion* de Liviu Rebreanu” [“Men, Dogs and Other Beasts: A Pseudo-Darwinian Reading of Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion*”], *Transilvania*, 2018, 11-12, p. 20.

³⁷ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 19: “Vai de mine, că ești mai rea ca copiii cei fără minte”.

³⁸ *Ibidem*. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “Trifon Tătaru o ține pe lângă casă”.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 27. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 37: “Savista [...] ședea ghemuită, speriată moartă de răcnetele oamenilor, ferindu-se să nu fie călcată în picioare”.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 360. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 504: “ea se lipea pe prispă ca o broască”.

Careful not to stumble over Savista and wake her up, he groped his way to the corner where he found the tool...⁴¹

– Savista is given a place in the category of “inferior humanity”. This category also includes Jews and Roma who, for very different reasons, have no opportunities for change or advancement. The category of “infra-humanity” includes – amongst others – some non-disabled humans like Ion’s father Alexandru Glanetașu. He is apparently lazy, a peasant who, according to the description, was born to be an artist. Yet, as an unproductive villager, he brings no benefit at all to the community. By contrast, Savista is assigned tasks by the families who provide for her. She fulfils these tasks, such as tending to children or keeping chickens from wandering into the house. Through alms, she manages to acquire a modest amount of money for herself. She is in a constant state of dependency and occasionally homeless. Even her begging has to be authorized⁴².

However, Savista is not only “the village lame” who completes the “picturesque” naturalistic village picture. She also has a role to play. Her observations and conclusions regarding the love relationships in the village have a lasting impact on events: in particular, Ion, who is following Florica, is a thorn in her side. Savista’s interventions also determine Florica’s husband, George, to become aware of this and finally slay Ion. Although Savista is often more able to make herself understood by stuttering and gesticulating when agitated, her key phrases have a seer-like character: several times, the words “George will kill you all” are put into her mouth. In this way, she resembles the mythological Cassandra, who foresees doom. This function within the novel’s plot is not only inherent in her name, “Savista”, which refers to a visionary character⁴³. Her deformed body also supports this reading. Deutsch points to the conceptual link between deformity and monstrosity: the latter “is derived from *monstra*, meaning a warning or a sign of imminent catastrophe. ‘Deformity’, like ‘monstrosity’, is at once sign and story”⁴⁴. But her name also contains the meaning “the day of worship”. Savista worships George; thus, her moral claim of uncovering the affair is mixed with the unconditional will to do George a favour and harm Ion, whom she hates. When Savista is first introduced in the novel, Maria, Trifon Tataru’s wife, impatiently

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 384. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 539: “Încet, să nu se împiedice de Savista și s-o scoale, pipăi în ungher și o găsi...”.

⁴² See in particular *Ibidem*, pp. 359-360.

⁴³ See <https://www.names.org/n/savista/about>. Accessed July 20, 2024.

⁴⁴ Deutsch, *Deformity*, p. 52. The Latin origin is *monstra*. On the different assessments and treatments of cripples under different historical conditions, see Rudolf Wilhelm Brednich et al. (eds.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1996, <https://www.degruyter.com/database/-EMO/entry/emo.8.109/html>. Accessed July 20, 2024. The attitudes could vary from extreme rejection to the highest esteem, ominous or auspicious; in the majority of cases, however, the ominous predominated. In pre-modern times, physical disability was seen in several religions as God’s punishment for sin.

and indignantly bumps into her. She tries to understand what Savista is trying to say and desperately addresses her (in the Romanian original) as “woman of God”⁴⁵. It could be this transcending existence of Savista as laid out by the author – between non-human, animal-like inscriptions (due to her physical impairments) and God, coupled with her strategically relevant function – that does not let her (stay) at the bottom of the village hierarchy.

Otherwise, the account follows quite stereotypical perspectives on a disabled woman “considered undesirable, asexual, and unsuitable as parent”⁴⁶, even though she is only twenty-five. But Tataru’s wife is ashamed when she sees Savista arriving at the celebrations, even though no one else takes notice of her. Not being seen is painful for Savista, not only physically, when people trample over her, but also emotionally. She hates it when people do not listen to her or turn away from her, as in the case of Ana, whom she wants to warn about Ion’s betrayal. She is very emotional. We learn early on that she loves music and social pleasures. The narrator is not as ignorant as most village characters, as he elaborates on her emotions and state of mind for some short moments. Yet, as soon as another main character passes by, the narrator’s voice switches over and leaves behind the often-upset woman. Besides, he labels her emotional behaviour as “wild passion peculiar to cripples”⁴⁷. Very often, she is only called “the cripple”⁴⁸. Although Ion is convicted in the end, she ends up disgruntled.

Savista must be a woman. Here, an intersectional aspect takes effect in its problematic form. Her hysterical side can be closely linked to women’s characterizations of the time. Interestingly, the close links between body and mind – their interplay – or the “bodymind” can be found in modernist literature, infiltrated by the latest psychology trends at the time⁴⁹. If one reads hysteria as anger and resistance, also against the patriarchal system and Ion’s male-connoted violence and sexual assault, the opportunity to criticize patriarchal violence lies within her character⁵⁰. However, at the end of the novel, the narrator preserves the

⁴⁵ The English version just says “What’s that got to do with you?” – Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 19: “Ce-ți pasă ție, femeia lui Dumnezeu?”.

⁴⁶ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30, 2005, 2, pp. 1557-1587. See also Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 359. Rebreanu, *Opere*, pp. 503-504: “Savista îl iubea cu o furie sălbatică, atât de caracteristică estropiaților”.

⁴⁸ Twenty times she is referred to simply as “the cripple”, without any proper name; three times “the cripple” follows her name as an attribute. A few times this term is used in Ion’s thoughts to indicate his negative attitude towards her, but most of the time she is simply called “the cripple” in the narrator’s running text.

⁴⁹ Linett, *Bodies of Modernism*, p. 5ff.

⁵⁰ Some suggestions regarding women, disability, hysteria and resistance, I owe to Rachel Gorman and Onyinyechukwu Udegbe, “Disabled Woman/Nation: Re-narrating the Erasure of (Neo)colonial Violence in Ondjaki’s *Good Morning Comrades* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*”, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 4, 2010, 3, pp. 321-323.

status quo and does not expand this possibility any further. It is also more than obvious that her social status is miserable; even begging for alms is strictly regulated to one day a week during the time she stays with Florica and George. So here we have another issue: in this case, the *social* aspect joins in. Lastly, her name can be linked to Urdu, the Indo-Aryan language spoken in Pakistan and India⁵¹, although this needs further confirmation. This would link her to the Roma population and associate her with another excluded and disadvantaged group, which I will deal with in the following section.

Holbea and the Other Folk Musicians — Dehumanized Serfs

In the novel *Ion*, there are several characters with physical impairments. The folk musician Holbea, also introduced in the very first village reunion, is described as follows: “Holbea, with one eye and a club foot, had only three strings to his fiddle, but he accompanied his partner with the same intensity as Găvan, [...] strumming the chords of his double-bass”⁵². The description of the physical impairment – one-eyed and with a limping leg, like the devil⁵³ – is mirrored in the material object, the violin, which is missing a string.

But one should also add the more detailed description of Găvan: a short relative clause that contains four extremely strong, negatively connoted attributions (compared to the Romanian version in the footnote, the English version contains only three attributes): “Holbea, with one eye and a club foot, had only three strings to his fiddle, but he accompanied his partner with the same intensity as Găvan, a dark ungainly gypsy, strumming the chords of his double-bass”⁵⁴.

And finally, one can add Briceag. The name of the third musician means “pocket-knife” and most probably refers to a criminal past. Also, Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boată assume that Holbea lost his eye after a violent confrontation

⁵¹ See <https://www.urdupoint.com/names/girls/shaista-name-urdu/95012.html>. Accessed July 20, 2024.

⁵² Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 11. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 14: “Holbea e chior și are un picior mai scurt [...], iar la vioară numai trei coarde, dar secondează cu aceeași patimă cu care Găvan, [...] apasă cu arcul pe strunele gordunii”.

⁵³ See again Brednich et al. (eds.), *Enzyklopädie*, lemma “Hinken, Hinkender” [limping, the limping one], <https://www.degruyter.com/database/EMO/entry/emo.6.204/html>. Accessed July 20, 2024. For *choir/one-eyed* see *Ibidem*, <https://www.degruyter.com/database/EMO/entry/emo.3.204/html?lang=de>. Accessed July 20, 2024.

⁵⁴ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 11. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 14: “Holbea e chior și are un picior mai scurt, iar la vioară numai trei coarde, dar secondează cu aceeași patimă cu care Găvan, un țigan urât și negru ca un harap, apasă cu arcul pe strunele gordunii”. To highlight my rejection of pejorative and racially derogatory language, I have struck through certain offensive terms. While the word *țigan* (gypsy) appears 33 times in the main text or as a form of address, the disrespectful term *cioară* (crow) is used twice to address the musicians.

and that his name might be a nickname⁵⁵. Thereby, the three *lăutari* (the Romanian word for folk musicians) are given the additional characteristic of outlaws. The description of the fiddlers is dense and detailed in the opening scene, where readers are introduced to the village population. It leaves hardly any room for an unbiased perspective beyond the tightly woven clichés about Roma people, both disabled and negatively racialized⁵⁶.

However, in the eyes of both the narrator and reader, the description of all the “inadequacies” is counterbalanced by the effect of the music itself on the bystanders. The young adults especially are dancing and focusing on each other. Throughout the novel, the quality of the musicians is presented as essential for every celebration in the village. In one case, a reunion is scheduled on condition of the availability of the *lăutari*. But while everyone fusses over them and the prestige of the festivals depends on the quality of the musicians, the supply-demand principle does not affect pricing. Despite performing their work to perfection, they are constantly exposed to the threat of somebody stealing or destroying their instruments⁵⁷, or of being paid inadequately or not at all⁵⁸. This does not prevent the narrator from negatively underlining the solicitation of tips with supposed erotic advances, by which Găvan tries to impress the female listeners. From an intersectional point of view, disability, race and class overlap with thoroughly negative consequences – for their “real” economic situation as well as their social standing in the village hierarchy.

Another short scene represents the “strangeness” of the Roma population from an assumed (Romanian) white and non-disabled perspective. This perspective is embodied by the audience of a small sketch performed on the occasion of a public ball in the nearby community of Armadia. It reinforces the stereotypical view of Roma as disabled and disconnected from the assumed “normal” part of the local population. I quote from *Ion*:

The performance had already begun... A lanky, weedy-looking schoolboy was reciting a ~~gipsy~~ anecdote, grimacing all the time, rushing up and down the stage, changing his

⁵⁵ Anca Parvulescu, Manuela Boatcă, “The *Longue Durée* of Enslavement: Extracting Labor from Romani Music in Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion*”, *Literature Compass* 17, 2020, 1-2, 2020, p. 11.

⁵⁶ For the history of white supremacist ideology and the consequent way of dehumanizing racial groups labelled non-white by attributing them disability tropes, see Morgan, *Race and Disability*, pp. 674-675.

⁵⁷ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 25, 29.

⁵⁸ Parvulescu and Boatcă have dealt extensively with the aspect of labour in Rebreanu’s *Ion*, especially with unpaid or badly paid labour as in the case of the Roma musicians. See Parvulescu, Boatcă, “The *Longue Durée*”.

voice constantly, rousing boisterous guffaws at the back of the hall and discreet smiles among the chairs in front.⁵⁹

Parvulescu and Boatcă describe this scene in their own words as follows: “The student is mimicking stereotypes about exaggerated facial expression and inability to control one’s body or one’s voice”⁶⁰. This is a very eloquent way of describing the social construction of disability, ending in social exclusion. They continue, “The community gathers and collectively mocks a racialized minority”⁶¹. Such a performative act is a way of repeating and codifying existing social prejudices – like telling a joke. By including what was most likely a typical performance at the time in his work – which has become canonical – Rebreanu further contributes to reinforcing this prejudice, according to which the Roma were as good as “handicapped”.

In the case of the local Roma and the local Romanian population, the novel constructs a relationship that can hardly be thought of separately, as we have seen in the biological closeness of Savista and Florica. The above performance “reinforces a sense of community [...], a sense of national community that constitutively excludes Roma”. This exclusion proves “necessary to the production, through a very particular rhetorical gambit” of the audience’s “Romanianness and [...] their implicit whiteness”⁶², as Parvulescu and Boatcă put it. Following this logic, they point out one band that plays “a song that would become the Romanian national anthem, ‘Romanians, awaken’”⁶³ close to the end of the novel. This shows the indispensable part the Roma play: firstly in the community life in general, by decisively shaping the character of the festivities, and secondly as a contrasting template to the white (Romanian) majority, which is reinforced against the backdrop of the non-white (Roma) minority. In this combination, the Roma crucially contribute to the increasing sense of the Romanians as a (healthy) national community. In their work “Diversitate identitară în romanul românesc”, the authors note a significant presence of Romani characters in Romanian fiction. However, they observe that these portrayals are often heavily stereotyped, primarily conveyed through the perspectives of non-Romani characters⁶⁴. This phenomenon has similarities with the widespread portrayal of disabled people “penned” by non-disabled people in world literature and also reflects both regionally specific and socio-economic tensions.

⁵⁹ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 117. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 167: “Spectacolul începuse... Acuma un elev lung și slab declamă o anecdotă țigănească, strâmbându-se într-una, repezindu-se încoace și încolo pe scenă, schimbând mereu glasul și stărnind râsete zgomotoasă în fund și zâmbete discrete pe scaune”.

⁶⁰ Parvulescu; Boatcă, “The *Longue Durée*”, p. 16.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Pogoja et al., “Diversitate identitară”, p. 37.

In contrast to the peasants, the *lăutari* move geographically all the time but are excluded from upward mobility in the village's social hierarchy⁶⁵. Much worse, they are treated as if the festivity organizers own them – as if enslavement has not ended yet. When tired and longing for a pause, the audience harshly demands “with threatening scowls or entreating glances: Go on, ~~gypsy!~~ Come on, ~~blackbird!~~”⁶⁶. The modernist narrator who enters regularly into the thoughts and psyche of the novel's protagonists does not do so in the case of these musicians; their stress can be inferred from descriptions of them being tired or sweaty, but their inner life is kept hidden from the reader. In one case, the folk musicians switch to the Romani language, another alienating effect, which seems to give even the narrator the excuse of being unable to find out about their personal exchange even if he had wanted to.

Ion – the Super-body

Regarding the description of his body, the novel's main character, Ion, is no “neutral, disembodied, universalized norm”, as Garland-Thomson puts it when describing the kind of bodies the inferior or deviant ones usually differ from⁶⁷. To illustrate this, I refer again to Terian's compelling article on the bestiary in *Ion*⁶⁸. He points to the animal comparisons to describe Rebreanu's protagonists and finds relatively consistent descriptions: while passive characters like Ana (who becomes Ion's wife and commits suicide after giving birth to their son) are constantly compared to dogs, Ion's opponent, George (later Florica's husband), is compared to a bull (Romanian: *taur*). However, his description is still inferior to the characterization of Ion as a dragon (Romanian: *balaur*)⁶⁹, or as one mighty enough to slay dragons. For instance, “He felt in him the pride and might of the giant in fairy-tales, who after a grim, deadly battle has slain a host of fearful dragons.”⁷⁰ So, his appearance, which is also how he perceives himself, is gigantic and

⁶⁵ See also Daiana Gărdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern* [Between Worlds. The Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System], Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023.

⁶⁶ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 11. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 15: “urlând deserați, cu priviri amenințătoare sau rugătoare: — Zi, ~~țigane!~~ Mai zi, ~~eioară!~~...”.

⁶⁷ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 135.

⁶⁸ Terian, “Oameni, câini și alte dobitoace”.

⁶⁹ Here it is not easy to work with the English translation, as Ion is “breathing heavily” which in the Romanian original reads as “aprinș ca un balaur” (fiery as a dragon). Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 32. See the whole sentence in Romanian – Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 45: “Să știu că zece ani nu scap din temniță și tot nu mă las până nu-i văd sângele! Murmură Ion, aprinș ca un balaur, încleștând pumnii și cutremurându-se...”.

⁷⁰ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 306. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 430: “Se vedea acum mare și puternic ca un uriaș mare din basme care a biruit, în luptele grele, o ceață de balauri îngrozitori”.

colossal, and he has many “features” that enable him to survive all kinds of opponents.

However, the most eloquent scene in this sense is the description of his corpse. After his death, the coroner over-idealizes him and refers to his body's physical strength and abilities:

As he cut and scissored away, the loquacious doctor pointed out the wounds and explained the situation to the judge, who kept smoking one cigarette after another, to drive away his nausea:

“This one, Mr Justice, was the toughest blow of all... He bashed in the crown of the head, but the skull-bone was so strong that it only cracked... Quite a miracle! Very rare case indeed! Or perhaps the blow was not such a heavy one after all. Anyhow it is extraordinary to have one's head struck with a hoe and the skull not break. That can only happen to peasants... On the other hand, here are four ribs completely broken. A fatal blow too, naturally... Here you can see how he split his chest open, why there's a wound big enough to get your fingers in... And long too... Ten... thirteen centimetres... The hoe, of course!... Yes, the arm is shattered too, not too serious... This would have been a light thing... it would have healed soon... at the worst the arm would have remained somewhat stiff... It must have been the last blow, when the murderer had cooled off a little.”

Then, when he had done and washed his hands, he declared emphatically:

“The man was as strong as steel!... He could have lived a hundred years!”⁷¹

“That can only happen to peasants” is a fascinating reflection on the predominant intellectual discourse on the Romanian peasantry of the time, the peasant standing at the core of Romanianness. Through the eyes of the teacher's son Titu – who finds employment with a municipal clerk and is given the task of collecting taxes from farmers still in arrears – the reader also meets the impoverished and little educated peasants that were much too weak to get involved in political action. But with Ion, Rebreanu has invented a strong *and very potent* peasant body which, he indicates, will survive under any circumstances.

Interwoven at the novel's very end, relatively concealed by the fact that it “might” be just a rumor, is another telling example. Florica turns out to be pregnant shortly after the events, most likely with Ion's child:

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 389-390. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 546: “Tăind și forfecând, doctorul guraliv arăta rănilile și explica judecătorului care fuma țigară după țigară, spre a-și alunga greața: ‘– Uite asta, domnule judecător, asta a fost cea mai grea... L-a pocnit în creștetul capului, dar osul a fost destul de rezistent că doar a plesnit... Mare minune! Rar caz! Sau poate lovitura n-a fost prea de tot puternică. Orișicum e o minune să dai cuiva în cap cu sapa și țeasta să nu se spargă. Așa ceva numai printre țărani se găsește... În schimb patru coaste rupte complet... Lovitură mortală și asta, firește... Poftim cum i-a deschis coșul, mai-mai să-ți încapă degetele în rană... Și ce lungă... Zece... treisprezece centimetri... Ehe! sapa!... Da, e zdrobit și brațul, dar nu prea rău... Asta n-ar fi avut importanță... se vindeca... cel mult brațul rămânea cu beteșug... Desigur însă că a fost ultima lovitură, când ucigașul a mai pierdut din furie...’ Apoi, isprăvind și spălându-se pe mâini, declară hotărât: ‘– A fost un om ca oțelul!... Putea să trăiască o sută de ani!’”.

“By the time George comes back, I think his wife will be waiting for him with a baby in her arms. She says she’s with child... Maybe, that’s woman’s mission”, added Toma a little later, a brighter look in his eyes.

A rumor was circulating in the village that Florica had been left with child by Ion. No one could tell where this report had come from, but there were quite a number of people who believed it. Some old wives, greedy for gossip, kept questioning Savista. The latter had moved back to Trifon Tătaru’s and resumed begging in Broad Lane, as the mere sight of her was an eyesore to Florica. The cripple, however, would not answer any questions, but was all the time so sour-tempered and gloomy that the people started saying that she must have entered her death year.⁷²

At the very end of the novel, the narrator’s camera zooms out from the scenery without noticing any serious change: “The village is left behind, the same as ever, as though nothing had ever changed. Some people have passed away, others have taken their place”⁷³. The underlying message is that the driving force remains with Ion, who, despite appearing as the victim of violence and dying at the end of the novel, still represents a continuing energy. This energy foreshadows future events where peasants like him will rebel, as in the violent Romanian Peasants’ Revolt of 1907. In this context, the figure of the disabled Romanian woman Savista can be seen as a symbol of the “disabled” inter-imperial province of Transylvania⁷⁴. Even though not yet old, she is described as becoming weaker and weaker and possibly even dying soon. Ion, as an idealized prototype of the Romanian peasant, has an attachment to the soil – see the omnipresent claim of the Romanian peasants: “Vrem pământ” (“We want land”). This means that the Romanian peasant would never follow the example of the teacher’s son, Titu, and move to Romania, i.e., the Old Kingdom, consisting of Moldova and Walachia. Instead, Romania has come to him – and thus, implicitly, Transylvania must become a part of Romania. In this respect, it is surely no coincidence that one of the last musical pieces mentioned in the novel is the future national anthem *Awaken thee, Romanian!*.

⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 406-407. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 570: “– Mi se pare că până să vie acasă George, nevastă-sa o să-l aștepte cu copilașul în brațe. Zice că-i grea... O fi, că asta-i menirea femeii”, rosti mai târziu Toma, înșeninat puțin. Prin sat însă umbla zvonul că Florica ar fi rămas însărcinată cu Ion. Nimeni nu știa de unde a ieșit vorba aceasta, dar mulți o credeau. Unele babe mai lacome de bârfeli ispiteau pe Savista, care acum se mutase înapoi la Trifon Tătaru și cerșea iar în Ulița Mare, deoarece Florica o vedea ca sarea în ochi. Oloaga însă nu răspundea nimănui, era veșnic acră și mânioasă, încât lumea spunea că trebuie să fi intrat în anul morții”.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 409. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 574: “Satul a rămas înapoi același, parcă nimic nu s-ar fi schimbat. Câțiva oameni s-au stins, alții le-au luat locul”.

⁷⁴ Gorman and Udegbe have written a fascinating analysis of two African novels where the disabled women protagonists’ bodies can be seen as tropes in postcolonial African literature and symbols of the disabled postcolonial nation. Gorman and Udegbe, *Disabled Woman/Nation*, pp. 309-326, see in particular p. 311, 318.

Conclusion

This approach, centered on disability, can be expanded. Not only are Savista and the Romani musicians barred from social advancement, but as a farmer, Ion also has very limited opportunities for advancement and finds himself in various dependencies when it comes to his interests, such as a promising marriage, the advice of the teacher, and the (non-existent) favour of the judge. Although he is the strongest character in the novel, literally and figuratively, and symbolically represents the potential of the still incomplete (but desired) modern nation, he is only indirectly at the centre. In literature, he is one of the earliest peasant characters to act as a main protagonist⁷⁵. However, he is seen through the eyes of a narrator aligned more closely with the perspective of the teacher's son Titu⁷⁶. It is also worth noting that Titu's family enjoy a higher proportion of direct speech and interventions than the peasant class⁷⁷.

Nevertheless, my contribution focuses primarily on the physical and bodily conditions and particularities of characters not previously analysed from this perspective. In the novel *Ion*, disability and bodily conditions are gradually conceived as links between extremes – from the most physically impaired to the most potent body, Ion's. Savista, born disabled, is related to Florica, whose beauty and attractiveness are highlighted several times throughout the book. Ion's ideal body stands in contrast to the impaired bodies of the Roma musicians. Savista and Ion hate each other, as do Ion and the *lăutari*, although they simultaneously depend upon each other. Following the symbolic thread of Romanian nationhood, which can be seen as symbolically negotiated, no condition is perfect – so far – although the plot contains a vision: Despite Ion dying as a consequence of pursuing his sexual and corporeal desire for his rival's wife, Florica – an action that might initially be perceived as a weakness – this decision ironically ensures his biological legacy through the posthumous birth of an illegitimate child. Therefore, he not only survives biologically, but the child also results from the union of the novel's healthiest, most attractive and able-bodied characters. So, in this case, disability is not primarily necessary “to expose imperfection and inhumanity”⁷⁸,

⁷⁵ Pogoja's (et al.) result of the quantitative meta study is that “Protagonists of the peasant class are nearly non-existent either in first- or third-person narratives, until the beginning of the 1930s” – see Pogoja et al., “Diversitatea în romanul românesc”, p. 39.

⁷⁶ The fact that Titu is the narrator's alter ego is repeatedly emphasized in the secondary literature, see e.g., Alexandru Piru, *Liviu Rebreanu: Leben und Werk*. Transl. to German by Eva Marschang, Bukarest, Jugendverlag, 1968.

⁷⁷ Vlad Pogoja, Laurentiu-Marian Neagu, Mihai Dascalu, “The Character Network in Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion*: A Quantitative Analysis of Dialogue”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 6, 2020, 2, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Laura L. Behling, “The Necessity of Disability in Flannery O'Connor's *Good Country People* and *The Lame Shall Enter First*”, *Flannery O'Connor Review*, 2006, 4, p. 88.

but to strengthen the ideal image of able-bodiedness, and in this case for the sake of the healthy Romanian nation (yet) to come.

When looking in detail at Ion's feelings – as described by the narrator – towards his opponents and all the impaired bodies and psychologically weak characters around him (one could add Ana to the previously presented figures), his perception contains a lot of inhumanity. Ion is brutal, not only in his behaviour but also in his thoughts, when “he had for some time been feeling Savista's enmity and he often felt like strangling her to clear his way to Florica. But George was the only one he hated, more and more bitterly, for it was on account of him that the woman was not free”⁷⁹.

He also behaves inhumanly towards the *lăutari*. He is coarse, rhetorically violent and prone to physical violence. But still the narrator does not speak out, remaining a simple observer and creating no empathy for Savista or the *lăutari*. For the most part, Ana's tragic story also remains purely descriptive. So, in this respect, it is possible to see *Ion* as an example of “literature's complicity in the historical devaluation of people with disabilities”⁸⁰.

Furthermore, given the focus on the characters' bodies, *Ion* can also be read as a narrative about a particular society and its aspirations at a certain point in time. I hope to have shown convincingly that disability studies “explore the embeddedness of bodies within cultures”⁸¹ and that (fictional) individual bodies invite interpretation as reflections of the social imperfections of the time they inhabit and “embody”. Linett argues even further about disability in our minds by concentrating on the embeddedness of canonical literature and its narratives. She considers that they have an influence, explicitly or implicitly, on many contemporary bioethical discussions, especially about the value of disabled and nonhuman lives⁸². Here, she touches upon an aspect that has motivated me to study the aspect of disability in this canonical literary text. To uphold the relevance and efficacy of literature in shaping our culture, we must consciously and critically examine stereotypical representations to develop an informed perspective and prevent their perpetuation.

⁷⁹ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 371. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 520: “Ion însuși simțise de mult vrăjmășia Savistei și deseori îi venea s-o sugrume, ca să-și deschidă drumul la Florica. Ura însă numai pe George, din ce în ce mai rău, fiindcă numai din pricina lui nu e slobodă femeia”.

⁸⁰ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 17.

⁸¹ Linett, *Bodies of Modernism*, p. 1.

⁸² Maren Tova, *Literary Bioethics. Animality, Disability, and the Human*, New York, New York University Press, 2020.

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EXTRAORDINARY BODIES IN LIVIU REBREANU'S *ION*. A READING THROUGH THE LENS OF DISABILITY STUDIES (Abstract)

This article aims to develop a Disability Studies inspired reading of the Romanian canonical novel *Ion* by Liviu Rebreanu. Consequently, the paper focuses on the marginal figures endowed with physical impairments. On the one hand, the novel impressively depicts the ethnic and gender hierarchy in the village society of the time. The hierarchy is closely linked with degrees of disability: the physically impaired and mentally weak have at least one further characteristic of "disadvantage". This could be a "race" or gender considered inferior and directly associated with a social disadvantage. On the other hand, the analysis reveals how the protagonist's particularly potent body functions as a foil for contrast and comparison. Even though *Ion* is the protagonist, he dies in the end. Does the able-bodied then also have no future? A visionary answer lies in the symbolic link between the characters' bodily condition and the Romanian state of nationhood. At the time when the novel is set, the very beginning of the 20th century, the modern Romanian nation, including all Romanians, had not yet been fulfilled. But *Ion* leaves behind an illegitimate child to be birthed by the apparently most able-bodied woman of the village Pripas. Therefore, he leaves a legacy – and with it, the chance of a prosperous future. This shows how the eugenic debates of the time were also internalized by Rebreanu, as biological strength and the will to survive are positively united and linked to the idea of the (Romanian) nation, while all others are given no chance.

Keywords: Liviu Rebreanu, *Ion*, disability, intersectionality, nation.

CORPURI EXTRAORDINARE ÎN *ION* DE LIVIU REBREANU. O LECTURĂ
DIN PERSPECTIVA STUDIILOR DIZABILITĂȚII
(Rezumat)

Articolul propune o reinterpretare a romanului canonic *Ion* de Liviu Rebreanu din perspectiva studiilor umaniste ale dizabilității. În consecință, cercetarea se focalizează pe figurile marginale ale romanului, a căror funcționalitate este afectată din cauza unor deficiențe fizice. Pe de o parte, ierarhia socială, etnică și, de asemenea, de gen a societății rurale din acea vreme este descrisă impresionant – și strâns legată de gradele de handicap: persoanele cu deficiențe fizice și mintale au cel puțin o altă caracteristică „debilitantă”, fie că este vorba de o „rasă” sau de un gen care este considerat inferior. Pe de altă parte, articolul dezvăluie cât de important este corpul deosebit de puternic al protagonistului Ion ca element de contrast și de comparație. Chiar dacă este eroul romanului, el moare în cele din urmă. Așadar, nu are viitor nici cel „capabil”? Un răspuns este oferit de legătura simbolică a condiției corporale a personajelor cu starea națiunii române. În momentul în care se petrece acțiunea romanului, chiar la începutul secolului al XX-lea, națiunea română modernă, care îi include pe toți românii, nu era încă împlinită. Dar, lăsând în urmă un copil nelegitim care să fie născut de femeia aparent cea mai atrăgătoare din satul Pripas, Ion lasă o moștenire – și, odată cu ea, șansa unui viitor prosper. Această situație arată cum dezbaterile eugenice ale vremii au fost interiorizate și de Rebreanu, forța biologică și voința de supraviețuire fiind unificate și corelate cu ideea de națiune (română), în timp ce tuturor celorlalți nu li se dă nicio șansă.

Cuvinte-cheie: Liviu Rebreanu, *Ion*, dizabilitate, intersecționalitate, națiune.

OLGA BARTOSIEWICZ-NIKOLAEV
TOMASZ KRUPA

A PROJECT OF INTER-PERIPHERAL HISTORY OF THE ROMANIAN NOVEL: THE POLISH CASE

The Romanian Novel as a Mode of Inter-peripheral Literary Exchange

Our study announces a series of research studies on the Romanian novel in Polish translation. Thus, our project covers nearly a century of literary import from one peripheral culture to another and aims to create a set of useful tools for the transnational history of the foreign novel in Poland or for analysing Romanian and Polish literary polysystems¹. Moreover, our research aspires to contribute to the debate over the place and importance of the Romanian cultural system from a World Literature perspective seen as a “mode of reading” of all the texts that circulate beyond their culture of origin².

In our research, we will discuss how we can use statistical and computational methods to conduct a sociological study of literature, providing a new perspective on the reception of Romanian literature in Poland and the complex dynamics of cultural exchange between these two (semi)peripheral cultures. Thus, we will examine issues such as: how the reception and translation of the Romanian novel into Polish have developed over a century and what factors have influenced this evolution? How can we track changes in the translation of the Romanian novel into Poland? What is the place and importance of translations into Polish in the global context of the reception of the Romanian novel? Additionally, we will attempt to characterize the agencies of this intercultural phenomenon (i.e., writers and translators).

Although the reception of the Romanian novel in Poland has lasted for almost a century (the first complete translation into Polish of a Romanian novel dating back to 1931), this is a specific scientific issue that has not been extensively studied so far. Our study will focus on 95 complete modern direct³ translations,

¹ Itamar Even-Zohar, “Polysystem Studies”, *Poetics Today*, 11, 1990, 1, pp. 1-268.

² David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003.

³ In accordance with the criteria proposed in a previous research, our study concerns the whole Romanian novelistic production (including novels from the Republic of Moldova), but excludes authors translated through another language: Panait Istrati (translated from French) and Ion Druță (translated through Russian) – see Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Tomasz Krupa, “Bibliografia

providing an extremely rare opportunity to propose a holistic and comprehensive perspective on a complex issue such as an inter-peripheral literary exchange.

Therefore, our study aims to highlight the partial premises of our research project, the complete database digitized needed to create the corpus of the Romanian novel translated into Polish, and the research methods and philological tools used in the ongoing project.

Despite the fact that the Polish reception of the Romanian novel has been going on for almost a hundred years, this is a relatively unexplored area of research: although Polish- and Romanian-language writers, researchers, and translators have contributed in the last fifty years to different special issues dedicated to Romanian culture⁴, and even though there are a few Polish monographs⁵, a dictionary⁶, and chapters on the history of Romanian literature (besides prefaces to Polish translations, or anthologies)⁷, the problem of Polish translations has been rarely discussed⁸. Moreover, there has been no up-to-date bibliography of Polish translations of Romanian literature until recently⁹.

romanului în limba română tradus în limba polonă până în 2023” [“Bibliography of the Romanian-language Novel Translated into Polish until 2023”], *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2023, 10, pp. 279-292.

⁴ Constantin Geambașu, Sabra Daici (eds.), “Literatura rumuńska” [“Romanian Literature”], *Dekada Literacka*, CLXIX, 2000, 11; Jacek Purchala (ed.), “Rumunia – Romania – România”, *Herito*, 2013, 12; Jakub Kornhauser, Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Joanna Kornaś-Warwas (eds.), “Rumunia. Mały realizm / apologia codzienności” [“Romania. Micro-realism/Apologia for Everyday Life”], *Nowa Dekada Krakowska*, XLIII/XLIV, 2019, 5-6.

⁵ Zdzisław Hryhorowicz, *Demetru Demetrescu-Urmuz. Między dadaizmem a surrealizmem* [Demetru Demetrescu-Urmuz. Between Dadaism and Surrealism], Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1995; Kazimierz Jurczak, *Dylematy zmiany. Pisarze rumuńscy XIX wieku wobec ideologii zachowawczej: studium przypadku* [Dilemmas of a Change: Romanian 19th-century Writers Facing the Conservative Ideology: A Case Study], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011; Olga Bartosiewicz, *Tożsamość niejednoznaczna: historyczne, filozoficzne i literackie konteksty twórczości B. Fundoianu – Benjamine’a Fondane’a (1898–1944)* [Reconstructing Identity: Historical, Literary and Philosophical Contexts of B. Fundoianu – Benjamin Fondane’s Works (1898–1944)], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2018.

⁶ Halina Mińska-Lasota, *Mały słownik pisarzy rumuńskich* [A Small Dictionary of Romanian Writers], Warsaw, Wiedza Powszechna, 1975.

⁷ Danuta Bieńkowska, “Literatura rumuńska” [“Romanian Literature”], in Władysław Floryan (ed.), *Dzieje literatur europejskich* [History of European Literatures], I, Warsaw, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1977, pp. 1089-1139; Justyna Teodorowicz, “Literatura rumuńska” [“Romanian Literature”], in Tadeusz Skoczek (ed.), *Historia literatury światowej* [History of World Literature], III, Warsaw, SMS, 2004, pp. 141-156; Justyna Teodorowicz, “Literatura rumuńska” [“Romanian Literature”], in Tadeusz Skoczek (ed.), *Historia literatury światowej* [History of World Literature], IV, Warsaw, SMS, 2004, pp. 107-116.

⁸ Anna Kaźmierczak, “Literatura rumuńska w Polsce” [“Romanian Literature in Poland”], *Dekada Literacka*, CLXIX, 2000, 11, pp. 20-21; Jakub Kornhauser, „Piszą Rumuni” [Romanians Are Writing], *Dwutygodnik*, 2023, 351, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/10509-pisza-rumuni.html>. Accessed April 26, 2024.

⁹ See Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Krupa, „Bibliografia romanului”.

Our project fills an important gap in the existing scholarship and also in the translation history of European fiction in Poland. Besides, no quantitative research of the Romanian novel in translation has ever been proposed.

Meanwhile, the transnational and digital turns in literary research have given rise in the past thirty years to a new kind of literary criticism that views national literatures as world literatures and employs statistical and computational methods in the sociology of literature. This approach is particularly relevant to the novel, which is considered the “first truly planetary literary form”¹⁰. Not only does this genre reflect and catalyse local and regional socio-economic, political, and cultural changes in Europe since the 19th century, thus regaining its social significance, but it has also become the primary mode of literary exchange, shaping the core-periphery relationship in both European and global modern contexts.

In the midst of worldwide importation and exportation of literary forms where central (“core”) cultures have an advantage over (semi)peripheral ones, scholars who study “small”¹¹ or “minor”¹² literatures, such as Romanian-language literature, focus their efforts on the production of novels, both originally written in Romanian (i.e. DCRR-1, DCRR-2, Astra Data Mining & MDRR)¹³ or translated into Romanian (i.e. DCRT-1, DCRT-2, TRANOV)¹⁴. Due to the profound need for external legitimation and the lack of original literary pieces until the interwar period, cultures such as the Romanian one have projected their national literature as a competitive homologue of several external models, which confirms the Western (mainly French and German) monopoly from the very beginnings of the modern local cultural institutions¹⁵.

However, while external influences have been always considered important for the formation of Romanian literature¹⁶, national literary histories such as George

¹⁰ Franco Moretti, “On the Novel”, in *The Novel*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. IX.

¹¹ See Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des Lettres*, Paris, Seuil, 1999.

¹² See Sean Cotter, *Literary Translation and the Idea of a Minor Romania*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2014.

¹³ See Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain. Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2021; Alex Goldiș, Ștefan Baghiu (eds.), *Translations and Semi-Peripheral Cultures. Worlding the Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2022; Daiana Gărdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern [Between Worlds. The Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System]*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023.

¹⁴ See Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2018.

¹⁵ Andrei Terian, “Translating the World, Building the Nation: Microtheories of Translation in Romanian Cultural Criticism (1829–1948)”, in Sass et al. (eds.), *The Culture of Translation*, pp. 19–30.

¹⁶ Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2018; Sass et al. (eds.), *The Culture of Translation*.

Călinescu's¹⁷ or Nicolae Manolescu's¹⁸ have often hidden foreign influences to highlight the originality of the local production. In fact, from a quantitative point of view, the Romanian autochthonous novel struggled to gain momentum until 1932, when the number of Romanian novels being published exceeded, for the first time, that of translations¹⁹. Labelled as a „golden age” of the Romanian original novel, the interwar period is simultaneously marked by a desire to synchronise with the European modernist production of fiction.

What is intriguing is that the same period is also the time of the first full translations of the Romanian novel into European languages, whether global (English, French), regional (German, Italian), or local (Czech, Hungarian, Polish)²⁰. These attempts at cultural export from a peripheral literature, especially to the last group, seem to be accelerated by a geopolitical reconfiguration in Central and Eastern Europe (the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the foundation of modern Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greater Romania, etc.). Although we are dealing with the nation-building discourse and the (re)birth of national identities in this region at that time, transnational literary interactions in the first half of the 20th century witnessed a recalibration of centre-periphery and West-East relationships. For example, Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion* (1920), considered the first Romanian truly modern novel, has been translated first into Czech (1929) and Polish (1932 – it is the second Romanian novel ever translated into Polish), much earlier than in German (1941) or French (1946).

Paradoxically, the hegemonic position of the Soviet social realist culture has led, since the end of the 1940s, to the creation of a highly ideologized and monophonic, yet multi-ethnic and pluralistic literary network that promoted peripheral literatures through the Eastern Bloc. Despite the isolationist and autarkic politics of Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania, the Romanian contemporary novel remained accessible to Eastern European readers through translation. However, the post-communist socio-economic, political, and cultural transformations in the region virtually banished Romanian novels from the Polish

¹⁷ G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present], București, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă „Regele Carol II”, 1941.

¹⁸ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române. Cinci secole de literatură* [The Critical History of Romanian Literature. Five Centuries of Literature], Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008.

¹⁹ Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Review*, XXVIII, 2019, suppl. 1, pp. 55-74; Ștefan Baghiu, “Translations of Novels in the Romanian Culture During the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 2, pp. 87-106.

²⁰ Apart from the novels that were first published in a foreign language (French or German) and then in Romanian, only three Romanian novels had been ever translated by the First World War: *Elena Taceanu* by Iuliu Bettelheim (1884; 1890 in German), Ion Pop-Florantin's *Avram Iancu, regele Carpaților, continuatorul operei lui Horia* (1891; in American English) and Duiliu Zamfirescu's *În război* ([1897]1902; 1900 in French) – see DCRR-1.

book market for 14 years, with no Romanian novel being translated into Polish between 1988 and 2002. The European integration and international recognition of other arts in Romania, such as the cinema, have since re-established this cultural exchange. As a result, a third of all Polish translations of Romanian novels date from the last 15 years. By complementing the records of the DCRR-1 and DCRR-2 with our own findings²¹, we identified 95 Polish translations of 92 Romanian novels, translations published in Poland between 1931 and 2023. Is this a lot or a little?

The Modern Romanian Novel (Un)translated

Taking into account the whole Romanian production in the Romanian language until 2000, catalogued by the authors of the DCRR-1 and DCRR-2, approximately 6,500 titles, the number of 65 novels available in Polish translation is not impressive at all, constituting just one percent. This number appears even more disappointing when we realize that we are talking about only nineteen percent of the 359 Romanian titles dating from the 19th and 20th centuries that have been fully translated. Indeed, we do not have such data for other national literatures, not even for Polish literature, which would allow us to estimate the dimensions of Romanian literary exports in relation to other publishing markets in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead, thanks to the DCRR-1 and DCRR-2, we are able to place the Polish imports of Romanian novels of the 20th century on the world map, in relation to the 51 other languages into which the 19th and 20th century Romanian novel has ever been fully translated.

The data collected, based on the DCRR-1 and DCRR-2, turned out to be incomplete at least for the Polish language: out of 65 Romanian novels of the 20th century, only 28 novels were listed. Therefore, in order to more accurately position the Polish translation in the context of the global mapping of Romanian novels, it was necessary to verify and supplement the data for other cultures as well. The gathered results are far from complete: we realized this ourselves, as a few months after the bibliography was published (in 2023), we identified 10 additional translations. Nevertheless, at this early stage, we are able to make certain acknowledgements in the hope of expanding the results in the future.

²¹ Our bibliography was created based on the *Polska Bibliografia Literacka* [Polish Literary Bibliography], <https://pbl.ibl.poznan.pl/dostep/> (Accessed April 26, 2024) and the library queries in Poland (at the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków and the National Library in Warsaw).

Language	Complete	Unique	Autonomy
Russian*	65	17	26%
German*	65	9	14%
Polish	65	12	18%
Hungarian*	58	9	16%
French*	50	6	12%
Bulgarian	50	6	12%
Italian	35	2	6%
Czech	35	1	3%
Slovak	27	0	0%
Spanish	26	0	0%
Ukrainian	25	5	20%
English*	19	1	5%

*Romanian internal editions excluded

Fig. 1. The Romanian novel in world translation (1863–2000): the top 12

Before commenting on the collected data, we owe an explanation: in order to investigate the phenomenon of the import of literary novels into a foreign culture and, therefore, the characteristics of a publishing market open to Romanian literature, we calculated only the complete publications from abroad (222 novels), thus rejecting approximately 140 Hungarian editions, 70 German editions, and 40 French editions, as well as cca. 20 each in Russian, English, and Serbian, which were printed only by various Romanian publishers (especially Kriterion before 1989), and whose circulation outside Romania and impact on the reception of Romanian novels in target cultures are difficult to determine.

However, even if we were to consider these internal editions, the position of Polish translations, which have a completely external character compared to Romania's editorial production, would remain the same, as we are still talking about the six largest importing cultures (with the exception of the Serbian language). Each of them (see **Fig. 1**) – in this group, we can also include Bulgarian translations, with at least 50 novels – achieves the most surprising score, considering the smaller population compared to other countries, having its own internal translation for at most one percent of all Romanian novels from the 19th and 20th centuries.

This suggests the heterogeneity or „autonomy”²² of each foreign selection of Romanian texts: on one hand, we can identify a small group of texts considered canonical at a certain period and available through translation (see below **Fig. 2**).

²² See Terian, “Big Numbers”, p. 59.

We will deal with globally significant interwar or postwar novels such as Mihai Sadoveanu's *Baltagul* [*The Hatchet*] or *Mitrea Cocor*, translated both into major European languages and into languages of the Global South, mostly Asian languages spoken in Soviet-influenced areas but not limited to them, such as Turkmen, Tajik, Kazakh, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Urdu, Hindi, and others. Among these languages into which internationally significant novels have been translated, almost none of the six quantitatively major languages are missing.

Author	Title	First Romanian edition	Complete foreign translations
SADOVEANU, Mihail	<i>Mitrea Cocor</i>	1949	36
SADOVEANU, Mihail	<i>Baltagul</i>	1930	25
STANCU, Zaharia	<i>Descuț</i>	1948	24
ELIADE, Mircea	<i>Maitreyi</i>	1933	22
REBREANU, Liviu	<i>Ion</i>	1920	20
REBREANU, Liviu	<i>Răscoala</i>	1932	18
REBREANU, Liviu	<i>Pădurea spânzuraților</i>	1922	18
PETRESCU, Cezar	<i>Fram, ursul polar</i>	1932	13
STANCU, Zaharia	<i>Jocul cu moartea</i>	1962	13
ADAMEȘTEANU, Gabriela	<i>Dimineață pierdută</i>	1983	13
SADOVEANU, Mihail	<i>Nada Florilor. Amintirile unui pescar cu undița</i>	1950	12

Fig. 2. The most translated 20th-century Romanian novels before 1989

The fact that only 14 out of 222 novels have been translated into at least 10 languages confirms a high degree of autonomy in the editorial markets that did not import the same titles, even though we know of the existence of lists of novels accepted by Romanian censorship and suggested to foreign ministries for translation. This also applies to Eastern Bloc countries such as the Soviet Union, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, or Czechoslovakia. Indeed, 77 out of the 222 novels have only one translation, while more than half (117) have at most two translations.

For all major target cultures (Soviet/Russian, German, Polish, Hungarian, French, and Bulgarian), the number of unique translations (“autonomy”) equals to at least 10% of all translated Romanian novels into a specific language, whereas among the five consecutive receiving cultures (Italian, Czech, Slovak, Spanish, Ukrainian, and English), only one (Ukrainian) achieves a score higher than 10% and this underlines the prestige of the Soviet publishing market (Fig. 1).

Additionally, for each target language, we can talk about the “great untranslated” – we do not mean the 95% of all Romanian novels that remain inaccessible to any non-Romanian reader, but rather what has not been translated into a language despite being available in other languages.

Towards a Polish Kind of Specificity

Author	Title	First Romanian Edition	First Polish Edition
GHEORGHIU, Mihnea	<i>Două ambasade (A venit un om din răsărit)</i>	1955	1976
GHILIA, Alecu Ivan	<i>Îngeri biciuiți</i>	1967	1969
CHIRIȚĂ, Constantin	<i>Aripi de zăpadă</i>	1968	1977
POPESCU, Petru	<i>Prins</i>	1969	1973
STANCU, Horia	<i>Întoarcerea în deșert</i>	1969	1974
CRISTESCU, Maria-Luiza	<i>Nu ucideți femeile</i>	1970	1974
BENIUC, Mihai	<i>Explozie înăbușită</i>	1971	1974
MICU, Mircea	<i>Patima</i>	1972	1975
IVASIUC, Alexandru	<i>Apa</i>	1973	1978
CUBLEȘAN, Constantin	<i>Iarba cerului</i>	1974	1981
IACOBAN, Mircea Radu	<i>Departee</i>	1975	1980
TOTT, Rodica	<i>Cumințenia pământului</i>	1975	1985
DUMITRIU, Dana	<i>Duminica mironosițelor</i>	1977	1988

Fig. 3. 20th Century Romanian novels translated only into Polish

In the case of Polish translations, only one globally significant novel promoted before 1989 does not appear on this list (Zaharia Stancu’s *Jocul cu moartea* [A Gamble with Death]), which means that Polish readers actually had access to almost all the texts considered representative for Romanian culture at that time. In parallel, until 1989, we have 13 novels translated only into Polish, and another 24 translations are the first ones in the whole world, rivalling or even overtaking other publishing markets (Fig. 3). In other words, more than half (37) of the 65 novels until 2000 translated into Polish were an original choice made by Polish translators who, based on their own tastes and knowledge and independently of foreign trends, shaped the image of the Romanian novel in their country.

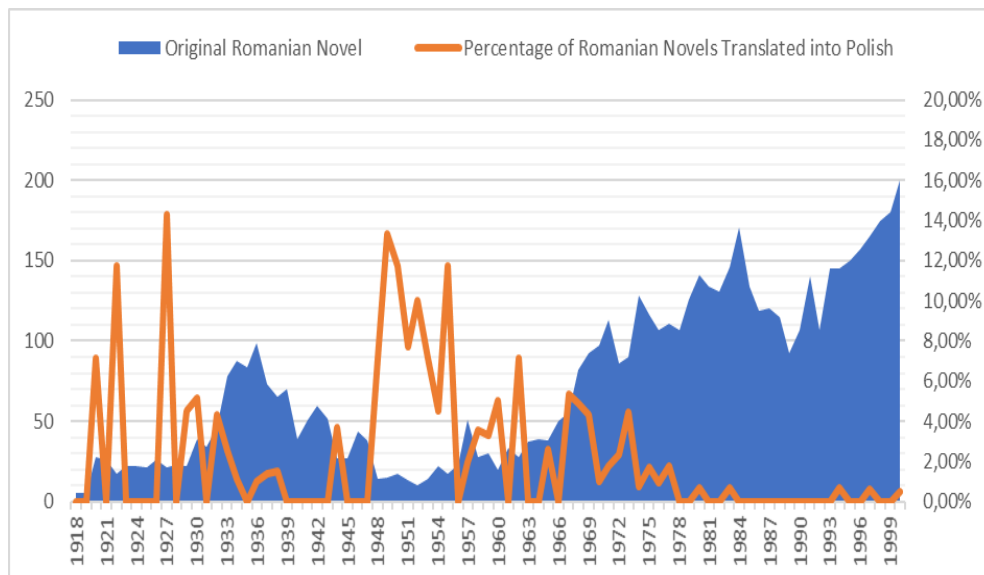


Fig. 4. The 20th-Century Romanian novel and its Polish translation

Fig. 4 shows to what extent the Polish representation of the Romanian novel is a discontinuous phenomenon, determined by several socio-economic and geo-cultural conditions. Considering the entire novelistic production in Romania, we can see how much has been translated into Polish in different years.

Over the period between 1918 and 2000, again, approximately one percent of Romanian novels have a Polish translation. What we immediately notice in the interwar period is that the first decade is better known to the Polish reader than the 1930s, and this is not only due to the rapid increase in the number of novels after 1932, but also to fewer translations, even though in the 21st century, all of Max Blecher's novels have been translated, the author becoming one of the most well-represented Romanian-language writers in Poland in just a few years.

In parallel, the so-called 'Obsessive Decade' seems overrepresented, because, for example, 13% of all novels published in 1949 have a Polish translation. Of course, we are talking about the period when only about 15 novels are published annually, mostly socialist-realist, which explains this sudden increase. Nevertheless, these literary exports from Romania settle in the 1960s and 1970s at a level of 3-5%, and thus this proportion of Polish imports comes close to the ratio between all translations in the world and all novelistic production in Romania.

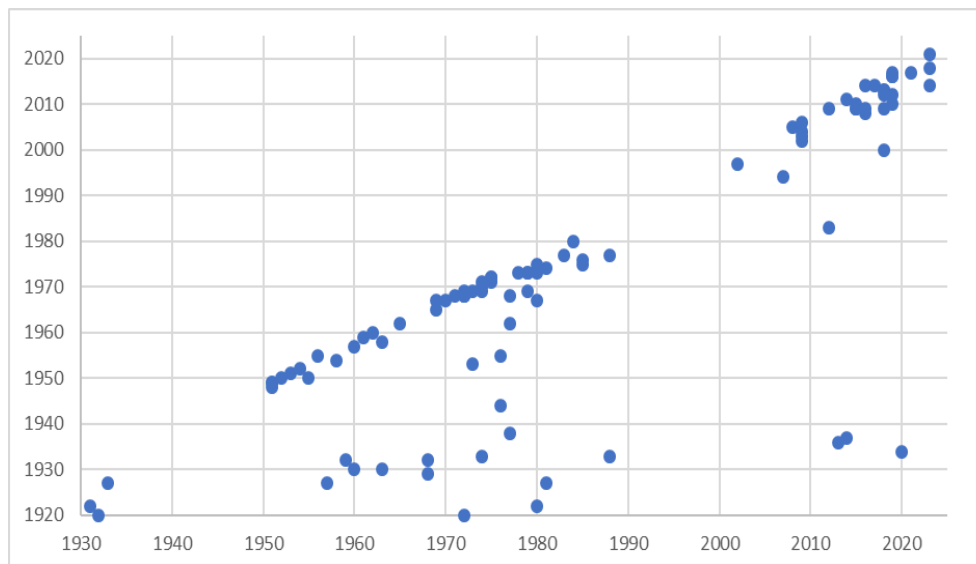


Fig. 5. The “chronological constellation”²³ of the Romanian novel (1920–2021) in Polish translation (1931–2023)

Concerning the publication of Polish translations of Romanian novels during the 20th and 21st centuries, two significant crises can be observed, the first during the Second World War, lasting until the 1950s (which does not require further explanation), and the second one in the late 1980s, lasting until the mid-2000s (**Fig. 5**). After 1989, both Poland and Romania faced their own economic and political crises, which, of course, also affected the publishing market: we are dealing with, among other things, the abolition of censorship, the decentralization of the publishing policy, the privatization of publishing houses, the abundance of translations from western countries, the hyperpresence of English in the linguistic hierarchy of translations, the consequences of the massification of culture, which led to the creation of a cultural industry submitted to the rules of competition on the internal market. In addition, Polish literature was preoccupied in the 1990s with its own complexes, the introduction of a new literary order, and the desire to find its position in “world literature”²⁴; therefore, neither Romanian literature nor Romanian culture was an important point of reference at that time. It was also during this period that Romania began to be negatively stereotyped in Poland (a situation influenced on the one hand by the scene of the execution of the

²³ Ștefan Baghiu, “Quantitative Translationscapes and Chronological Constellations: French, Soviet, and American Novels in Communist Romania”, *World Literature Studies*, 13, 2021, 3, pp. 117-129. See also Baghiu, “Translations of Novels”.

²⁴ See Przemysław Czapliński, *Powrót centrali. Literatura w nowej rzeczywistości* [*The Return of the Central: Literature in the New Reality*], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007.

Ceaușescu couple, the recording of which went around the world, and on the other by the emergence of the beggar network phenomenon associated with the Roma in Romania). All this did not help create and maintain cultural relations between the two countries.

Moreover, in 1992 Danuta Bienkowska – the first “pillar” of the bridge between Romanian and Polish literature during communism – passed away; it was then clear that in a symbolic way a certain era had ended, and that Poland needed a new generation of translators who could end the stagnation after the fall of communism.

However, it should be mentioned that in the 1990s the great Romanian names of the interwar period, notably Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran and Constantin Noica, were translated on the Polish market, in correspondence to the publishing proposals in Romania after 1990 and following the tendency to acknowledge the work of authors recognized in the West. Thus, between 1993 and 1999, 8 works by Cioran appeared in Polish, 7 of which were translated from French²⁵; between 1990 and 1999, 24 texts by Eliade appeared, none of which was translated directly from Romanian, and in 1997 Ireneusz Kania translated from Romanian *Șase maladii ale spiritului contemporan* [*Six Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit*] by Noica. The above-mentioned translator has also made a significant contribution to the reception of Eliade and Cioran’s works in Poland – Kania has published a total of 31 volumes by these authors (including reprints).

Fig. 5 clearly shows that the situation begins to change in the mid-2000s, which corresponds to the accession, first of Poland (in 2004), and then of Romania (in 2007), to the European Union. This landmark event was preceded by many smaller but equally important steps: in 1999 the tradition of scientific conferences in Suceava was initiated as part of the “Days of Polish Culture” organized by the Union of Poles in Romania, which helped to establish relations between Polish and Romanian researchers, and in 2001 the Polish-Romanian Society in Kraków was founded.

Things were also starting to move at the national institutional level: in the pre-accession period, the Polish Institute in Bucharest was established in 2001, and in 2006 the Romanian Cultural Institute opened in Warsaw. In the same year, the first edition of the Translation and Publication Support Program was launched, and in 2007 the National Book Centre initiated the Publishing Romania program, a funding program for publishing projects aimed at promoting Romanian culture abroad.

²⁵ All data in this paragraph come from the resource-based corpus of the National Library of Poland, collected by the *Ukryta kolekcja* [*Hidden Collection*] project led by Magda Heydel and Agnieszka Podpora at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków and to which we are collaborators (See <https://przekladoslawstwo.polonistyka.uj.edu.pl/ukryta-kolekcja>. Accessed April 29, 2024).

Indeed, around 2007/2008, there is a significant increase in the number of translations, reaching a peak (i.e. 6 novels translated) in 2018. At that time, there were already 5 publishing houses on the Polish market known for publishing Romanian novels, and most of the books were published with the financial support of the Romanian Cultural Institute.

What is significant is that the first Romanian novel translated into Polish after Romania became an EU member, the one that started this “rising tide” of translations from Romanian literature, is Cărtărescu’s *Travesti*. However, even though one of the most internationally recognized Romanian writers, he will paradoxically remain “a great untranslated” on the Polish literary market, his most important novels being not available in Polish (only an excerpt from *Orbitor. Aripa Stângă* [*Blinding. The Left Wing*] was published in the Romanian edition of *Literatura na Świecie* in translation by Joanna Kornaś-Warwas²⁶).

	Author	Title	Number of translations	First Romanian Edition	Polish Edition	Notes
1	BLECHER, Max	<i>Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată</i>	8	1936	2013	
2	BLECHER, Max	<i>Inimi cicatrizate</i>	5	1937	2014	
3	SEBASTIAN, Mihail	<i>De două mii de ani</i>	6	1934	2020	
4	ADAMEȘTEANU, Gabriela	<i>Dimineață pierdută</i>	13	1983	2012	
5	CĂRTĂRESCU, Mircea	<i>Travesti</i>	10	1994	2007	
6	POPESCU, Simona	<i>Exuvii</i>	3	1997	2002	First Polish
7	IUGA, Nora	<i>Sexagenara și tânărul</i>	7	2000	2018	
8	ȘTEFĂNESCU, Cecilia	<i>Legături bolnăvicioase</i>	3	2003	2009	
9	MANEA, Norman	<i>Întoarcerea huliganului</i>	17	2004	2009	
10	LUNGU, Dan	<i>Sînt o babă comunistă!</i>	14	2005	2009	

²⁶ Mircea Cărtărescu, “Olśniewający. Lewe skrzydło” [“Blinding. The Left Wing”], transl. Joanna Kornaś-Warwas, *Literatura na Świecie*, 2008, 5-6, pp. 37-57.

11	FLORIAN, Filip	<i>Degete mici</i>	12	2006	2008	The same year: Hungarian, and German
12	FLORIAN, Filip, FLORIAN, Matei	<i>Băiușeii</i>	4	2008	2009	First Polish
13	FLORIAN, Filip	<i>Zilele regelui</i>	6	2009	2016	
14	MANEA, Norman	<i>Vizuina</i>	5	2009	2012	The same year: Spanish, Arabic, German, Chinese, and Czech
15	PÂRVULESCU, Ioana	<i>Viața începe vineri</i>	10	2009	2016	
16	TEODORESCU, Cristian	<i>Medgidia, orașul de apoi</i>	2	2009	2015	
17	TEODOROVICI, Lucian Dan	<i>Celelalte povești de dragoste</i>	6	2009	2018	
18	VOSGANIAN, Varujan	<i>Cartea șoaptelor</i>	18	2010	2015	
19	MĂLAICU- HONDRARI, Marin	<i>Apropierea</i>	2	2010	2015	The same year: Polish and Spanish
20	VIȘNIEC, Matei	<i>Domnul K. eliberat</i>	3	2011	2019	
21	TEODOROVICI, Lucian Dan	<i>Matei Brunul</i>	6	2012	2014	
22	COMAN, Dan	<i>Parohia</i>	1	2012	2019	The only translation
23	FLORIAN, Filip	<i>Toate bufnițele</i>	2	2013	2018	
24	SCHIOP, Adrian	<i>Soldății. Poveste din Ferentari</i>	3	2013	2018	
25	VIȘNIEC, Matei	<i>Negustorul de începuturi de roman</i>	3	2014	2018	
26	MIHULEAC, Cătălin	<i>America de peste pogrom</i>	3	2014	2023	
27	LUNGU, Dan	<i>Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu</i>	3	2014	2017	
28	LUNGU, Doina	<i>Simfonia unui criminal</i>	1	2016	2016	The only translation

29	BRANIȘTE, Lavinia	<i>Interior zero</i>	3	2016	2019	
30	PÂRVULESCU, Ioana	<i>Inocenții</i>	3	2016	2019	
31	ȚÎBULEAC, Tatiana	<i>Vara în care mama a avut ochii verzi</i>	6	2017	2021	
32	TEODORESCU, Cristian	<i>Cartea pisicii</i>	1	2017	2019	The only translation
33	ȚÎBULEAC, Tatiana	<i>Grădina de sticlă</i>	5	2018	2023	
34	SEREBRIAN, Oleg	<i>Pe contrasens</i>	1	2021	2023	The only translation

Fig. 6. The Romanian novel in Polish translation in the 21st century

As we can see above (**Fig. 6**), out of all 34 novels translated after 2000, 4 remain novels translated only into Polish, while the other 5 are the first translations in the world, either appearing for the first time or in the same year as translations from other countries. Thus, after 2000 we are still dealing with a high degree of autonomy of Polish translations and translators – a trend that is noticeable in each of the periods we have analysed.

The Polish Quantitative Translationscape

Most of the novels translated after 1989 (the first chronological cluster from the right in the Polish „chronological constellation” – see Fig. 5) are contemporary novels, the distance between the first edition in Romania and the first translation into Polish being no more than 10 years (in most cases – 23 novels translated). We can then note a tendency towards synchronization with what is happening on the literary market in Romania, and with what is translated in Western Europe. We can assume that the crisis during the transition period, which interrupted the continuity of intercultural exchanges for almost 15 years, has determined the need to fill this gap and present the current Romanian literary scene. The best proof of such a tendency is the most prolific editorial series so far, titled *Rumunia dzisiaj* [*Romania Today*], in which 10 titles were published between 2018 and 2019.

The second cluster highlighted in the same graph represents the translations during communism. The shortest distance (2 years on average) can be noticed in the 1950s, when socialist-realist novels (that were in line with the ideology promoted in both countries) were translated, 9 novels in total (e.g. *Mitrea Cocor* by Sadoveanu, *Negura* [*The Mist*] by Eusebiu Camilar, *Dulăii* [*The Dogs*] by Zaharia Stancu).

43 novels published between 1948 and 1980 were translated in line with the trends on the Romanian market during the communist period (in only two cases are we dealing with a distance of 20 and 21 years, respectively: *Bietul Ioanide* [*Poor Ioanide*] by George Călinescu, 1953–1973, and *Două ambasade* [*A venit un om din răsărit*] [*Two Embassies (A Man from the East has Come)*] by Gheorghe Mihnea, 1955–1976). Among the translations of that period, a wide variety of literary genres is noticeable, as well as the presence of names that have belonged to the Romanian canon to this day (e.g. Eugen Barbu, Marin Preda, Alexandru Ivasiuc), and of names less known nowadays, but which enjoyed wide popularity during the communist period (e.g. Ion Grecea, Dana Dumitriu, Vintilă Corbul). On the list of translated novels we also find a significant number of books belonging to the so-called youth literature – this was most probably due to Danuta Bieńkowska herself, who was also a well-known author of Polish-language youth novels – in 1978 she even received the Prize of the President of the Council of Ministers of the Polish People’s Republic for this part of her literary work.

In the case of communist literature, our future research requires an in-depth study of the archives of both countries so that we can answer at least two fundamental questions: 1) to what extent the choices of translators depended on the cultural policy of the Romanian Socialist Republic; 2) did they enjoy a “margin of freedom” within the policy established by the regime? From Bieńkowska’s memories we learn that she was on very good terms with the Romanian Writers’ Union (she even received a special prize for translations and dissemination of Romanian culture²⁷), she used to meet Romanian writers and critics in Bucharest from whom she received various book recommendations, and if something interested her, she proposed it to Polish publishers²⁸. Therefore, her opinion was crucial to Polish-Romanian literary exchanges during the communist period.

The third cluster that we can highlight is that containing the first translations of Romanian novels into Polish (all by Stanisław Łukasik). Here we have the 1931 *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*Forest of the Hanged*] by Liviu Rebreanu, the 1932 translation of the novel *Ion* and the 1933 publication of *Întunecare* [*Gathering Clouds*] by Cezar Petrescu. During the interwar period, contemporary Romanian literature was also present in Polish magazines, arousing more and more interest among literary critics and the public, with support by the cultural policy of the two neighbouring countries under authoritarian regimes. What should be mentioned

²⁷ Danuta Bieńkowska, *Zwyciężyłam* [*I Won*], Warsaw, Dabor, 2000, p. 85.

²⁸ It is also worth mentioning that six of Bieńkowska’s novels have been translated into Romanian (5 before 1989, one in 1991), which confirms her strong position in the Romanian literary world, her connections with translators and her awareness of publishing realities during communism. See: Constantin Geambașu (ed.), *Bibliografia traducerilor din literaturile slave (1945–2011)* [*Bibliography of Translations from Slavic Literatures (1945–2011)*], București, Editura Universității din București, 2011, p. 46.

here is the fact that the first Romanian novels translated into Polish will also be the only novels retranslated in 1957 (the novel *Întunecare*, translated by Rajmund Florans), 1972 (*Ion*, translated by Bieńkowska)²⁹ and 1980 (*Pădurea spânzuraților*, translated by Stanisław Bik). This practice of retranslation, present and well received in the case of literature written in languages such as English, French, German or Russian, is practically non-existent in the case of literature written in Romanian, firstly because of the small number of translators, and secondly because there is no such need among readers or researchers, the reception of Romanian literature in Poland being rather hermetic and restricted.

We also notice another trend in the evolution of Polish translations of Romanian literature. The starting point for both tendencies is the modern interwar novel, whose representation in Polish will increase over the years, thus redeeming its limited presence so far, compared to its canonicity in the Romanian environment. This literature reappears on the Polish market in 1957 after a series of socialist-realist novels, and with the Khrushchev thaw, the retranslation of Cezar Petrescu's novel *Întunecare* contributes to its presence on the Polish market, a presence that will steadily increase until 1988, the year of the thirteenth translation of interwar literature, namely that of Mircea Eliade's *Maitreyi*.

After 2010, we find three translations as the most isolated from the others on the graph. The two texts by Max Blecher – *Întâmplări din irealitatea imediată* [*Adventures in Immediate Irreality*] and *Inimi cicatrizate* [*Scarred Hearts*]³⁰, as well as *De două mii de ani* [*For Two Thousand Years*] by Mihail Sebastian, have been published in Poland in the last eleven years. On one hand, this fits into an international trend, as these authors, along with Eliade, are the most frequently translated after 1989 in terms of the interwar period. On the other hand, this corresponds to trends in the Polish culture where, especially after 2000, there is a growing interest in the Jewish heritage of Central and Eastern European cultures and the contribution of Jewish authors to the development of modernist literature.

However, unlike the communist period, this recovery attributes an elitist character to translated Romanian literature, aimed at a narrow audience, whereas translations from the 1960s and 1970s were much more diverse in terms of period (each decade of post-WW1 Romanian novel until then being represented by at

²⁹ Our 2023–2024 undergraduate seminar produced a paper juxtaposing these two translations. See: Aleksander Podgórný, "Când timpul nu există: strategii de traducere folosite în transpunerea timpului *mai mult ca perfect* românesc în limba polonă pe exemplul romanului *Ion* de Liviu Rebreanu" ["When Time Does Not Exist: Translation Strategies Used in Transferring the Romanian Tense *mai mult ca perfectul* Into Polish in the Example of Liviu Rebreanu's Novel *Ion*"], *Transilvania*, 2024, 6–7, pp. 60–75.

³⁰ It is worth recalling that the third text by Max Blecher, *Vizuina luminată* [*The Lighted Burrow*], was also translated into Polish in the 2010s.

least one translation) or genre, and democratic, as they included adventure novels, historical novels, social, psychological, and detective novels.

A Sociology of the Romanian novel translated into Polish

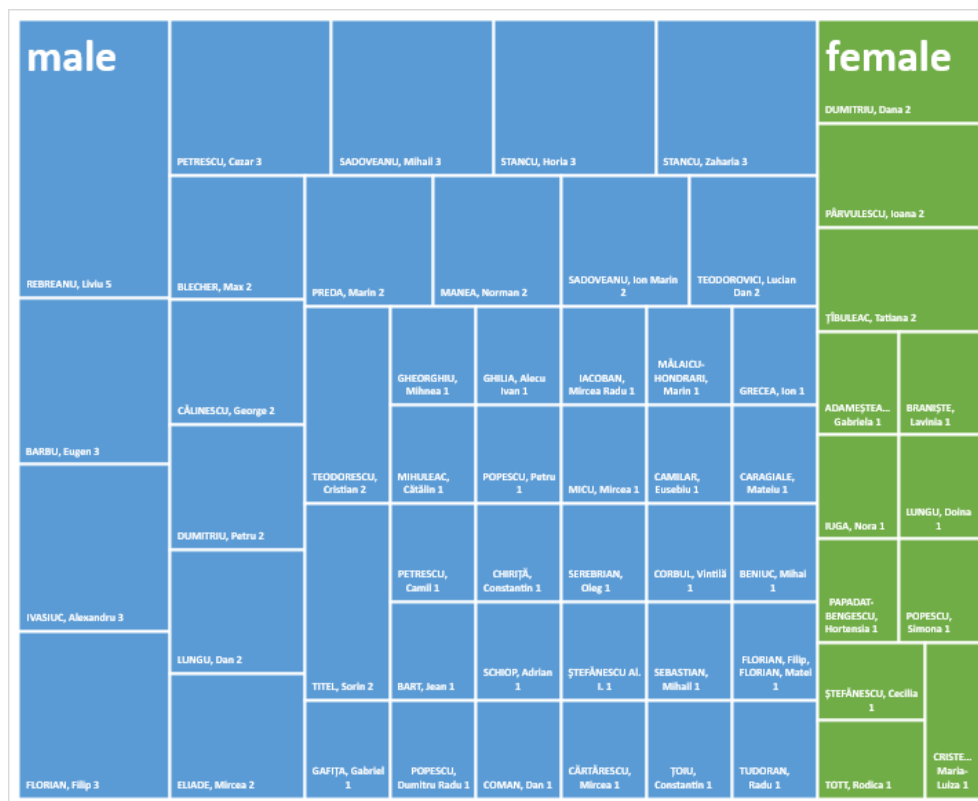


Fig. 7. Male and female authors of Romanian novels and their Polish translations (1931–2023)

Among the metadata we have collected so far, in addition to the publication dates in Romania and Poland and the number of translations into all languages, it is worth analysing the number of Polish translations for each writer and the gender identity of both the author and the translator.

In **Fig. 7**, we propose a complete overview of Romanian authors translated into Polish and the ratio between women and men, with female authors constituting 20% of the total number of authors. However, their share is smaller when we look at the number of novels: the proportion of texts written by women is lower, at 16%, which is less than the overall Romanian production in Romania, as the percentage of novels written by women over the period in question approximates

20%³¹. This is surprising because of the predominance of women in the import of Romanian novels in Poland.

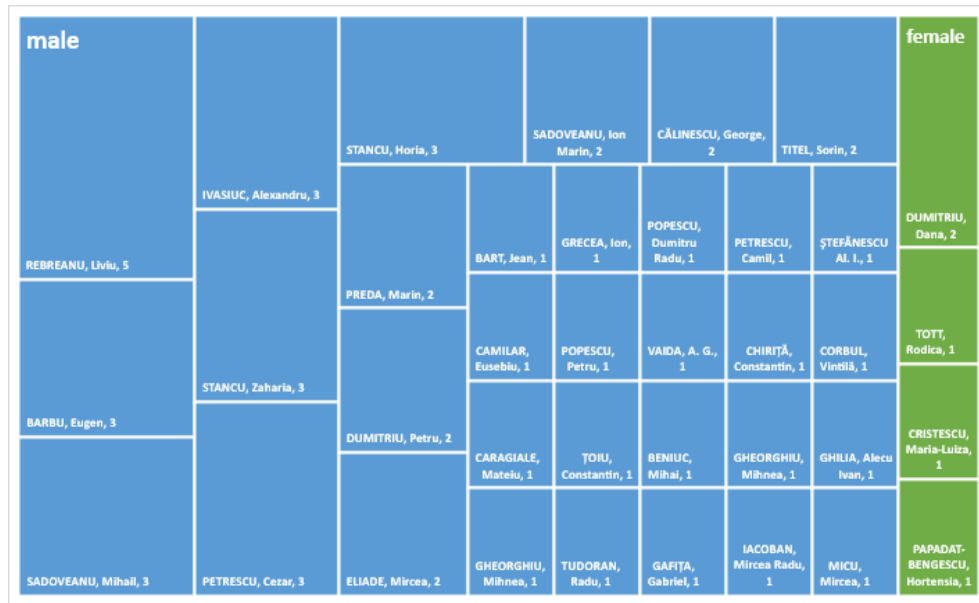


Fig. 8. Male and female authors of Romanian novels before 1989 and their Polish translations

However, this underrepresentation of female writers is even more alarming when we look at the novels translated before 1989 (Fig. 8). Only 5 out of the 60 novels, then only 8%, are written by women. Romanian literature written by women in the period before 1989 is reduced to four names: Dana Dumitriu, with two translations, and Rodica Tott, Maria-Luiza Cristescu, and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu with only one each, which is intriguing in the last case (2 Slovak translations, 3 German, 3 Hungarian). The title of the most important Romanian female writer, Dana Dumitriu, is quite shocking and exceptional. Two of her novels – *Masa zarafului* [*Usurer's Feast*] from 1972, translated into Bulgarian, and *Duminica mironosițelor* [*The Myrrhbearers' Sunday*] from 1977, translated only into Polish – were translated by two different translators, and a third rendition was planned. We know that she was friends with Irena Harasimowicz, her translator: did the translators have so much freedom in choosing the novels? They certainly were in a much better financial situation in a publishing market that was centralized, providing translators with economic and professional security, and

³¹ Vlad Pojoga et al., “Diversitate identitară în romanul românesc (1844–1932)” [“Identitarian Diversity in the Romanian Novel (1844–1932)”], *Transilvania*, 2022, 10, p. 34.

where their cultural capital played an extremely important role in the literary import from Romania.

If we look at male authors, we realize the gap between the idea of a canon then and now, revealed by the almost immediate character of Polish translations. Firstly, we cannot be surprised by the presence of authors of socialist-realist novels as Eusebiu Camilar, A. Vaida, Alexandru Ștefănescu, Dumitru Radu Popescu. Secondly, we are struck by the disappointing score of classics such as Sadoveanu (only 3 out of the 15 novels ever translated), or Marin Preda (2 novels out of 5).

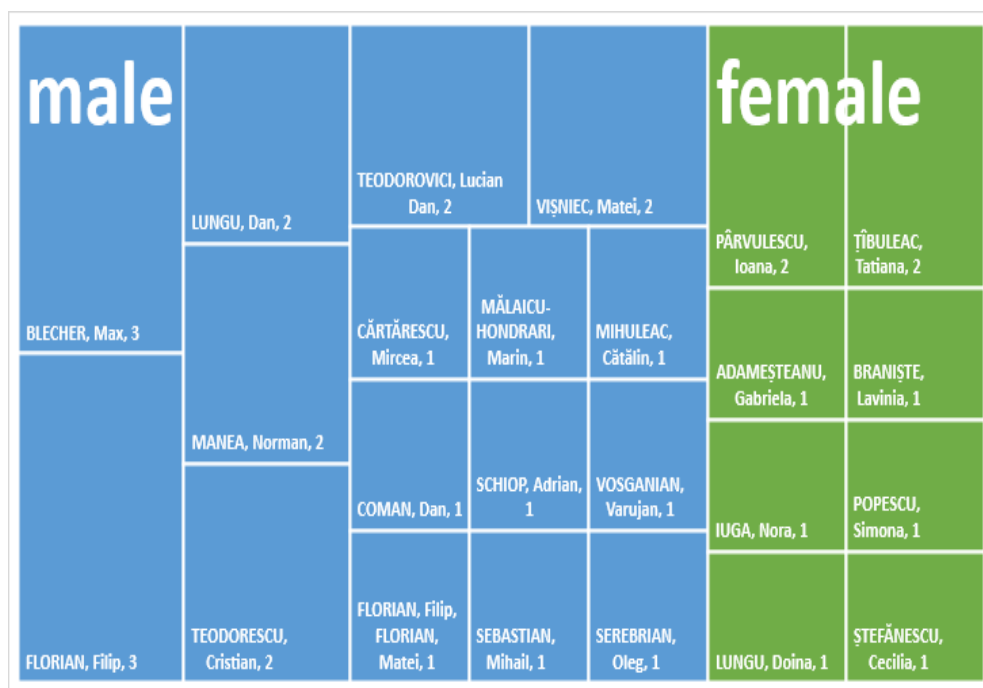


Fig. 9. Male and female authors of Romanian novels after 1989 and their Polish translations

The above graphic (**Fig. 9**), which presents the male and female writers translated into Polish between 2002–2023, shows us that the gender gap is starting to decrease; however, the disproportion is still visible – we have 16 male writers and only 8 female writers. This disparity indicates a still significant problem in the contemporary literary world (both Polish and Romanian): the underrepresentation of female writers conditioned by numerous social factors, so that their careers often develop in a less spectacular way in both the domestic and the foreign literary market.

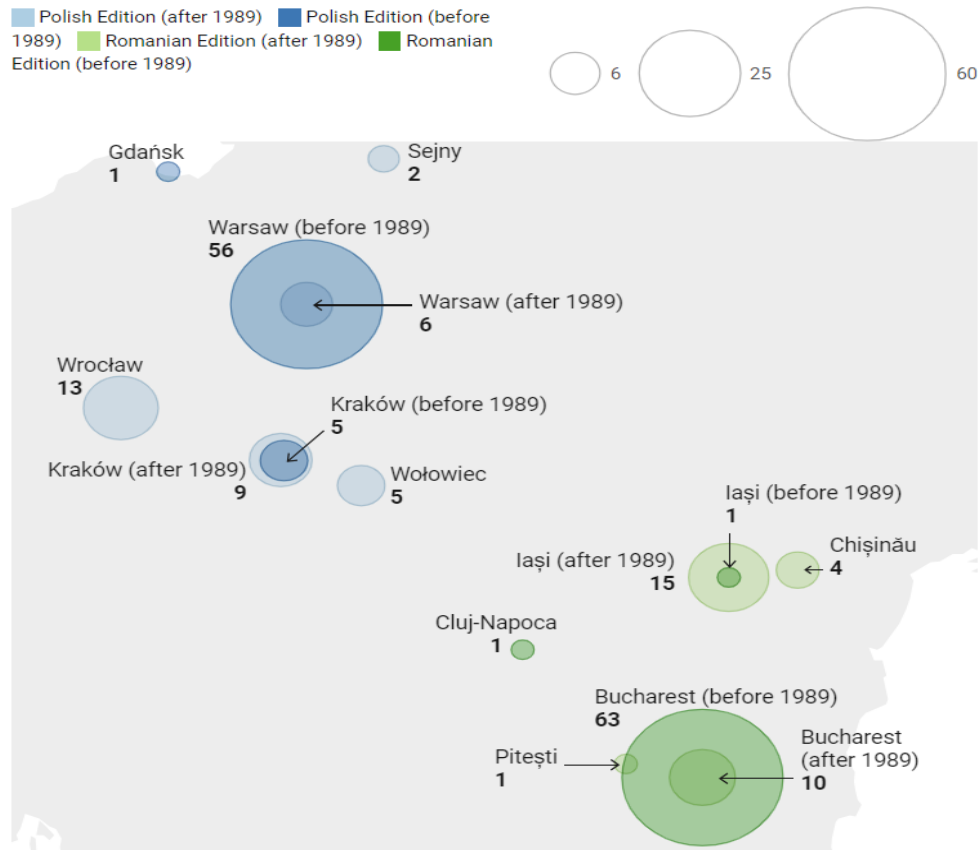
Poles of Production

Fig. 10. The geography of the Romanian novel in Polish (1931–2023)

The above image (Fig. 10) represents the editorial geography of the Romanian novel translated into Polish. Before 1989, the centralization mechanisms on the publishing market are very clear: most translations come from Bucharest publishing houses and are published in Warsaw, by the largest and most important Polish state publishing houses (e.g. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Czytelnik, Nasza Księgarnia).

The situation changes after 1989: here we can notice a real decentralization of the publishing market in Poland, while in Romania, Bucharest and Iași remain the two main publishing centres. In Poland, private publishing houses are beginning to be set up, specializing in the publication of books in certain cultural, linguistic, and thematic areas. This is why on the map we can see two places that could be considered provincial, but in fact they are important centres for the promotion of the culture of South-East European countries: Sejny and Wołowiec.

In May 1990, Krzysztof Czyżewski, Małgorzata Sporek-Czyżewska, Bożena and Wojciech Szroeder, founded Sejny Fundacja Pogranicze [The Borderland Foundation], whose program of activities is entirely devoted to the promotion of the ethos of the border areas and the presentation of the regions and cultures of Central and Eastern Europe in particular. It was there that the first translations of Norman Manea's novels were published (in 2000 and 2003), as well as Mihai Sebastian's *Journal. 1935–1944* (in 2006). Thus, this new and small publishing house became the first to overcome the crisis of the lack of Romanian literature in the Polish literary world after 1989. The second one is Czarne Publishing House, founded in 1996 in Wołowiec, a small village in southern Poland, by the writer Andrzej Stasiuk and his wife (also a writer) Monika Sznajderman. It specializes in publishing contemporary essays and prose, both from Poland and from all over the world (but especially from Central and Eastern Europe). Czarne is best known for its series of literary reportage and has a remarkable symbolic capital owing to Stasiuk's position in the Polish literary field. It published the first four Romanian novels after 2007 in an editorial series entitled *Inna Europa, Inna Literatura* [*Another Europe, Another Literature*]. This is a significant title, which shows the context in which Romanian literature appears in the 2000s and how it is promoted: as something exotic, far away and in need of discovery, as if the long tradition of Romanian-Polish intercultural relations had never existed.

In 2013, in Wrocław, the publishing house Książkowe Klimaty was established, as the founders themselves confess, "out of a passion for exploring the unknown"³². They publish contemporary European prose mainly focused on the South. Each series is dedicated to a different country or region. There are books from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. Thus, we are dealing here with a similar pattern, meaning that literature written in less widely spoken languages is considered "unknown" and "exotic", even though we are talking here about other Slavic languages, countries neighbouring Poland, or countries that Poles visited in large numbers during the communist period (like Bulgaria or Romania).

The important position of Wrocław as a centre of production of Romanian literature in Polish translation was consolidated in 2014, when Amaltea Publishing House was founded, at the initiative of the translator Radosława Janowska-Lascar. The first translated novel published there, *Matei Brunul* by Lucian Dan Teodorovici, received the Readers' Prize at the ANGELUS Central European Literary Award, already a great success for a newly established publishing house, which strengthened its position on the book market.

Kraków is second in terms of the number of translations thanks to a publishing series established in 2018 at the Universitas Publishing House, one of the largest

³² See <https://ksiazkoveklimaty.pl/>. Accessed April 30, 2024.

publishing houses in Poland. The series *Romania Today* was intended to be dedicated to contemporary Romanian literature (fiction and non-fiction), and it aimed to publish 4-5 books a year and draw the attention of the publishing market. The editor-in-chief of the series was Jakub Kornhauser, himself a translator of poetry from Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, French and a poet in his own right. The series had only two editions (in 2018 and 2019), in which 10 books were published. The above-mentioned editorial initiative explains why 2018 became the most successful year since 1989 in terms of the number of translations.

Polish Translators

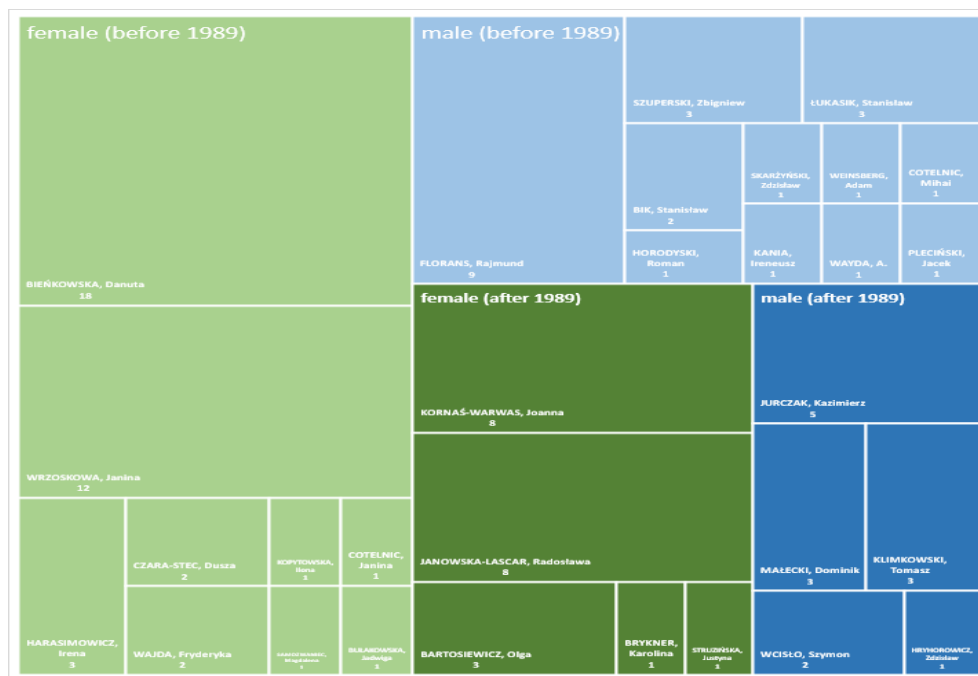


Fig. 11. Polish Male and Female Translators of the Romanian Novel Before and After 1989

In the context of importing and adapting a literary text into another cultural background, translators deserve our attention, as by rewriting the original text, they become its co-authors. Out of the 30 translators, there are 14 women and 16 men (**Fig. 11**). However, the proportion of women in the production of translations, although they themselves are fewer in number, is much higher: 61 translations are signed by women and only 39 by men. This disparity – compared to the male dominance in the author category – reveals gender conditions that hinder women's access to the publishing market as authors, especially to a foreign publishing market, but grant them the role of intermediaries. This also suggests a

higher level of professionalism among women, each of them translating an average of 4 novels, while men only translate about two.

The pioneer of Polish translations is Stanisław Łukasik (1897–1962), a Romanian language professor and linguist at Jagiellonian University. Regarding translators from the communist era, in most cases we are talking about the generation of those who, after Poland was invaded in September 1939 by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, sought refuge in Romania, where they learned the language. Perhaps this also explains why interwar literature became popular among them starting in the late 1950s, in the period corresponding to the typical global trend of the thaw era. The contribution of translators such as Danuta Bieńkowska, appointed by the ministry to monitor trends in Romanian literature, Janina Wrzowska, and Rajmund Florans, remains the most visible to date.

Regarding the educational identity of translators in the Polish literary landscape after 1989, all of them graduated in Romanian philology either from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków or from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, so we can speak here of a “new wave” of translators due to the development of Romanian studies in Poland. Thus, we can outline the existence of two “translation circles”. The first one includes Kazimierz Jurczak from the Department of Romanian Language and Literature in Kraków and his students who became either researchers or translators – Radosława Janowska-Lascar, Szymon Wcisło, Joanna Kornaś-Warwas, Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, and the second one was formed around Zdzisław Hryhorowicz from Poznań and his students Justyna Teodorowicz (b. Strużińska), Tomasz Klimkowski, Dominik Małecki, Karolina Brykner.

Concerning Romanian literature, it is very often the translator who selects the author/book that deserves to be translated and presents it to the publisher; the translators are also in many cases asked for an expert opinion on the quality of a particular book proposed for publication. Hence, he or she also plays the role of a literary agent. As our research suggests, based on the memoirs of translators³³, discussions with translators currently active in the literary market and observation of their professional activity (e.g. the case of the Amaltea publishing house, established on the initiative of, among others, translator Radosława Janowska-Lascar, who thus gained editorial control over the process of publishing and promoting Romanian literature in Poland), as well as reference to the professional experience of one of the authors of the article, an active translator, the translator’s role remains constant regardless of the political regime. The translator needs to know the literary market of the target culture very well and to be aware of what might appeal to the Polish reader. This is why Dan Lungu (2 novels), Filip Florian (4), Lucian Dan Teodorovici (2) and Cristian Teodorescu (2) are among the most

³³ See Bieńkowska, *Zwyciężyłam*.

translated authors: in their prose, the communist past, memory and history are important as major themes that Poles like and with which they can identify. It should not be forgotten that they are writers who are often translated abroad, which contributes to their symbolic capital in Poland (for example, the novel *Sînt o babă comunistă* [*I Am an Old Communist Hag*] is translated into at least 14 languages). Smaller publishers often rely for their existence precisely on personal contacts, sympathies, the translators' knowledge and their literary taste; the decision to publish is also influenced by international awards and the fact that the proposed text has been translated into the language of a country that has a more established position in the world literature system (e.g. Tatiana Țîbuleac's international success in recent years has led to the translation of her two novels in Poland).

The translator therefore claims a certain position of power not only in the literary field of the target culture but also in that of the source culture (e.g. translators' participation in international literary festivals in Romania, their personal contacts with writers or publishers).

Conclusions

A thorough analysis of the quantitative data we have been able to collect so far has led us to the following conclusions:

1. Compared to other countries in the region, Poland appears as a culture with a rich reception of Romanian literature, but at the same time is characterized by a high level of autonomy when it comes to selecting novels for translation. The latter is mainly due to translators whose role in this process, despite the many political and economic difficulties in the Polish publishing market in the last century, remains fundamental and indicates their strong position in the intercultural transfer between (semi)peripheral countries, despite the fact that this position has not been noticed or appreciated either by literary critics or by readers for a long time.

2. The presence and quantity of translations of Romanian literature in Poland depend mainly on the political and economic situation of both countries. This is evident during the World War II crisis and the post-1989 transition, and it is visible in the rising number of translations from the communist period and the significant increase in translations after Romania's accession to the European Union. The last few years, which have been characterized by a decline in translation production, have been marked by the pandemic crisis, the Romanian state's failure to provide sufficient funding for translation initiatives, and the deteriorating situation of small, niche publishers on the Polish publishing market (which are nowadays the main suppliers of so-called "minor" literature).

3. Translations of novels from the communist period are characterized by much richer genre and thematic diversity than post-1989 translations, which, as might be expected, are much more sensitive to the needs of the market and the

reader and are also dependent on external funding sources and the international symbolic capital of individual authors.

4. The gender disparity we noticed (more Romanian male writers, but more Polish female translators) reveals the still existing inequality between the position of men and women in the literary field. It is mainly literature written by men that gets translated, although it is mainly introduced into the canon by qualified women. However, by practising a profession whose status has been unclear for a long time, the translators are considered invisible and ignored in reviews or publishing promotional strategies, and their financial situation is much less favourable (although here both the above-mentioned professions may qualify as precarious work). In Poland, only recently have the translators begun to function as co-authors of a book. It is officially agreed that they should have their name printed on the cover, and their cooperation with publishers has been officially professionalized³⁴.

5. Among the 92 translated novels, the Polish reader can find both titles considered canonical by Romanian literary history and titles that have appeared on the Polish publishing market only due to the literary taste of the translators. However, we can treat the whole as a representative and diverse enough corpus for the average Polish reader to form a general opinion about Romanian novelistic production in the 20th and 21st centuries.

6. Given the limited data set to which we applied the computational method, we admit that within the scope of the three main topics we address – namely, the political history, geography, and gender identity of Romanian translations on the Polish literary market – the strength of our methodological approach lies not so much in generating entirely new knowledge, but rather in confirming our presuppositions and research intuitions derived from traditional work with the corpus of literary texts and critical studies. Since our research is pioneering in this area, we believe that validating hypotheses on the functioning of Romanian translations within the Polish literary field in this way is useful, significant, and valuable from a scientific perspective. This research represents a preliminary step towards constructing a social and cultural history of the Romanian novel in Polish translation. In the subsequent phase of our project, which will involve direct analysis of the entire corpus of 95 translations of 92 novels, we anticipate uncovering new and previously inaccessible insights. This analysis will shed light on the portrayal of Romania in Polish literature and public consciousness, the divergences between the original texts and their translations, and the prevailing themes in the Romanian literature available in Polish.

³⁴ See *Konwencja Krakowska 2022* [*The Kraków Convention 2022*], <https://konwencjakrakowska.pl/>. Accessed April 30, 2024.

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A PROJECT OF INTER-PERIPHERAL HISTORY OF THE ROMANIAN
NOVEL: THE POLISH CASE*(Abstract)*

The main purpose of the article is to identify the most important tendencies in the reception of the Romanian novel in Poland in the 20th and 21st century, thus proposing an original and innovative analysis of the process of the cultural transfer between these two (semi)peripheral cultures. The study focuses on a complete corpus of 95 novels written in Romanian (also by authors from the Republic of Moldova) and translated into Polish between 1931 and 2023, providing a new and comprehensive perspective on a complex issue such as an interperipheral literary exchange. The paper uses statistical and computational methods to conduct a sociological study of literature, thus exploring the social, political, and cultural circumstances that influenced the evolution of the reception of the Romanian novel in Poland, also characterizing the agencies of this phenomenon (writers and translators). Moreover, it attempts to situate the regional Polish case into a broader, global context of the reception of the Romanian novel during the last century.

Keywords: Romanian literature, Polish literary translation, novel, cultural exchange, reception.

UN PROIECT AL ISTORIEI INTERPERIFERICE A ROMANULUI
ROMÂNESC: CAZUL POLONEZ*(Rezumat)*

Scopul principal al articolului este de a identifica cele mai importante tendințe ale receptării romanului românesc în Polonia secolele al XX-lea și al XXI-lea, propunând astfel o analiză originală și inovatoare a procesului de transfer cultural între aceste două culturi (semi)periferice. Studiul abordează un corpus de 95 de romane scrise în limba română (inclusiv cele aparținând autorilor din Republica Moldova) și traduse în poloneză între 1931 și 2023, oferind o perspectivă nouă și cuprinzătoare asupra unei probleme complexe, anume schimbul literar interperiferic. Lucrarea utilizează metode statistice și computaționale pentru a realiza un studiu sociologic al literaturii atât prin explorarea circumstanțelor sociale, politice și culturale care au influențat evoluția receptării romanului românesc în Polonia, cât și prin caracterizarea agenților acestui fenomen (scriitori și traducători). În plus, studiul contribuie la situarea cazului regional polonez într-un context mai larg, global, al receptării romanului românesc în secolul al XX-lea.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură română, traducerea literară poloneză, roman, schimb cultural, receptare.

STAGES IN THE SAGA OF THE INTERPRETATION OF B. FUNDOIANU'S COLONIAL THEORY: FROM E. LOVINESCU UNTIL TODAY

In the present essay I wish to investigate the reception of the thesis according to which Romanian literature is/should be a “colony” of French culture, presented by B. Fundoianu in the “Preface” of his 1922 volume *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [*Images and Books of France*]².

B. Fundoianu (1898–1944), born Benjamin Wexler/Wechsler, Jewish-Romanian poet, essayist, filmmaker and literary critic who emigrated to France in the 1920s, became internationally known especially as an essayist, under the French name Benjamin Fondane (his naturalization as a Frenchman occurs in 1938³), and died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in the first days of October 1944, unwilling to abandon his sister who had been arrested by the French Police and deported by the Nazis, even though he himself could have been saved.

The 1920s

I start the analysis of the reception of Fundoianu's colonial thesis from the interpretation proposed by the “synchronistic” and “modernistic” literary critic and liberal ideologue and historian E. Lovinescu (1881–1943) in some of his works from the 1920s. Then I follow its post-war destiny under Romanian communism (in Mircea Martin's interpretation) and under post-communism (in contributions by Mircea Martin, Roxana Sorescu and others). The selection of references allows me to observe the particularities and variations of this reception, of the way in which Fundoianu's colonial thesis and/or the overall philosophy of the writer, which include this thesis, is either completely or partially rejected or justified and/or nuanced, either subjected to readings from previously unaccepted or

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² B. Fundoianu, “Prefață” [“Preface”] to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [*Images and Books of France*] (1922), in *Imagini și cărți* [*Images and Books*]. Edited by Vasile Teodorescu, introductory study by Mircea Martin, translated by Sorin Mărculescu, București, Minerva, 1980, pp. 23-28.

³ See Jean-Yves Conrad, “Le dossier de naturalisation de Benjamin Fondane”, *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 2005, 8, https://benjaminfondane.com/un_article_cahier-Le_dossier_de_naturalisation-de_Benjamin_Fondane-225-1-1-0-1.html. Accessed September 27, 2024.

unimagined angles or just adjusted to converge with some apparently innovative concepts on the academic market at the time, such as that of “antimodern(ity)” launched by Antoine Compagnon at the beginning of the 2000s.

In the early 1920s, E. Lovinescu – the leader of the *Sburătorul* cenacle and of a homonymous periodical dedicated to the “new” literature – was engaged in a polemic with two contemporary adversaries, post-romantic literary critics and poets themselves. One is N. Davidescu (1888–1954), proficient in the French Symbolist *doxa*, the other is Fundoianu. Davidescu antagonized Lovinescu with the idea, expressed in an article from 1922⁴, according to which Romanian literature begins – as a community, not as a sum of disparate individualities – with Romanian Symbolism. As for Fundoianu, he dismayed Lovinescu by the very thesis that Romanian literature is/must be imagined as a “colony” of French literature, exposed in the above mentioned “Preface”. For Lovinescu, these two points of view are related and say roughly the same thing, which is why he seeks to reject them together, as parts of the same fundamental error. His response to both, concentrated in his 1922 polemical paper “Există o literatură română?” [“Is there a Romanian literature?”], will be inserted, with some minor changes, in the first pages of his 1923 study “Poezia nouă” [“The New Poetry”], and afterwards in his massive *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*] (I–VI, 1926–1929).

Here is how Lovinescu handles the “violent” Fundoianu, whose passion for distancing himself from others/from the “crowd” he had noticed on other occasions:

With a violence of thought that could have lacked the violence of expression, Mr. Fundoianu has contested, in a recent study, the individuality of Romanian literature. Launched from the bow, the arrow of the [Eleat] Zeno froze in place; after a century of evolution, our literature would also have remained at its starting point. Zeno denied motion; more categorically, Mr. Fundoianu denies our very existence⁵.

This ironic approach continues in a free indirect style that translates Fundoianu’s thesis – reduced, apparently, to the aporia of Zeno’s movement – through elements or concepts of the future Lovinescian theory of “synchronism”, launched in the *Istoria civilizației române moderne* [*History of Modern Romanian Civilization*] (I–III, 1924–1925):

⁴ N. Davidescu, “Critica veche despre poezia nouă (Dl G. Ibrăileanu și poezia simbolistă)” [“Old Criticism about ‘New Poetry’ (Mr. G. Ibrăileanu vs. Symbolist Poetry)”] (1922), in *Pagini de critică și publicistică literară* [*Pages of Literary Criticism and Literary Journalism*], vol. I. Edited and prefaced by Margareta Feraru. București, Editura Academiei, 2018, pp. 301-306.

⁵ E. Lovinescu, “Poezia nouă” [“The New Poetry”] (1923), in *Opere* [*Works*]. Edition by Maria Simionescu and Alexandru George, notes by Alexandru George, vol. IX, București, Minerva, 1992, p. 293. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

Reduced to the role of a colony of French culture, we can only conceive of an undifferentiated literature. Lacking original expression, we have a virtual soul; the movement is only apparent; the arrow is still in the bow. Not integrating universal literature through any specific note, we therefore stand at the threshold of Europe with empty hands⁶.

Fundoianu's thesis – in fact, a criticism of his thesis turned into caricature – is, therefore, reinterpreted by Lovinescu through his own concepts, which will become his trademark. One of them is “differentiation”, which means the adaptation to the frames of national culture of imported models (through “integral imitation”). In the passage quoted above, this concept can be detected in his negative form: “undifferentiated”. It can also be deduced from the context that the “colony [of France] role” – which Fundoianu estimated that Romanian culture can fulfil – reflects what Lovinescu understands by the stage of “integral imitation” which, followed by the potential phase of “differentiation”, would illustrate what from 1924 onwards he would promote as his theory of “synchronism”, that is the two-steps dynamic or dialectical process by which Romanian/young/small cultures can “synchronize” or catch up with the Western/organic/great/ancient cultures.

I stated that Lovinescu prefers to unify, in order to reject them altogether, the theses of Fundoianu and Davidescu, otherwise distinct statements and having different stakes in the context. This refusal to reject them separately must be seen as a strategy: on the one hand, the *Sburătorul* critic spares himself the effort of producing two distinct sets of counterarguments. On the other hand, by contracting the above-mentioned two points of view into a single target, it polemically trivializes their positions by reducing them to a basic anti-national discourse. But, by doing so – by choosing to ignore particularities of the real messages sent by his opponents, their intention, finality and complexity –, Lovinescu also diminishes the quality of his own responses, his own point of view.

Thus, in what regards Fundoianu's ideas, claiming that he “denies *our* very existence” (emphasis mine, Teodora Dumitru) – not the existence of Romanian *literature*, but *ours* as a people, as an entity, etc., literature functioning here as a metonymic term for the nation –, Lovinescu employs sophistry, rigging the opponent's hypotheses. For, as long as he imagined it in terms of a “colony of French culture”, Fundoianu did not, in fact, deny the very “existence” of Romanian culture/literature, but only, let us say, its lack of personality (“the inability” of “making something orderly and ours out of foreign nourishment”) and its persistence in a romantic stage of naïve mimicry. These deficiencies could be improved, according to the young essayist, not (only) by importing models from

⁶ *Ibidem*.

French⁷ culture (that is to say not only by “parasitism”), but especially by direct participation in the literature of contemporary France – a goal only possible by achieving the status of a cultural “colony” of France, a stage whose specific differences in relation to “parasitism” remain to be specified:

Our culture counts a genius [Mihai Eminescu⁸], but he did not push the boat of our literary history at all, but left it on the shores of French civilization, towards the Rhine banks. If our literature has been endless parasitism [in relation to France], the fault cannot lie with the culture of France, but with our inability to assimilate it. Moreover, the lack of remarkable talents capable of making something orderly and ours out of foreign nourishment. [...] The appearance – not of geniuses, but of a few outstanding talents, when, between Eminescu and Arghezi⁹, the pattern of our literary speech was established, provides us with a respite and a possibility. [...]. We are out of the category of poor and voluntary imitation and we are entering, with all industriousness, another category. Our culture has evolved, it has drawn a figure and a state, it has become a colony – a colony of French culture¹⁰.

The concept of “colony” and “colonization” was not unfamiliar to Romanians in the 19th century: they prided themselves on their own status as descendants of the Roman colonists (of Emperor Trajan) and had various opinions about the “colonists” of modern Romania, from Jews to Germans. However, the idea of becoming a colony of another state was perceived with an irritation that was the opposite of the pride of being descendants of the Roman colonists¹¹.

The thesis of the necessity (opportunity) of the evolution from the stage of culture-“parasite” to that of “colony of French culture” is an argument and an ethos obviously opposed to the organicist-conservative theories expressed up to that time in the Romanian space, from the theory of “forms without content” submitted by conservative politician and literary critic Titu Maiorescu (1840–1917) in a study from 1868¹², to the more acute conservative/reactionary opinions,

⁷ Resolutely French, not of other origin, for sociological, anthropological reasons; the German influence would not have been effective, in Fundoianu's opinion, because it would not have had the force to displace or compete with the Romanians' affinity for France as a Latin culture.

⁸ Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889), late Romantic author, praised as the national poet.

⁹ Tudor Arghezi (1880–1967), post-Romantic poet, novelist, publicist considered among most relevant Romanian “modernists”.

¹⁰ Fundoianu, “Prefață”, p. 25.

¹¹ On the current Romanian colonial anxieties from the 19th century, see Andrei-Dan Sorescu, *The Infrastructures of Anxiety: Reflections on Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Xenophobia in Nineteenth Century Romania*, lecture at New Europe College, București, May 13 2024 (paper to be published), and “Historicising the ‘Colonial’ in Nineteenth Century Romania”, lecture at New Europe College, București, October 11, 2024 (paper to be published).

¹² Titu Maiorescu, “Against the Contemporary Direction in Romanian Culture”. Translated by Mária Kovács, in Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and Vangelis Kechriotis (eds.), *Modernism: Representations of National Culture. Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries*, volume III/2, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2010, pp. 87–93.

at the beginning of the 20th century, of populist ideologue and professor Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), who blamed the import (including, in the proper sense, the import of books) of foreign cultural models, especially French¹³. Under these conditions, even if we do not take into account Fundoianu's thesis itself, at least if we take into account its anti-conservative potential, the "synchronistic" Lovinescu should still have found in it some confirmation or at least support for his own ideas of reforming the intellectual spectrum of the local culture.

The premises and conclusions of Fundoianu's "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* are, in reality, neither nihilist-demolishing, nor are they – that is also clear – enthusiastic. They rather illustrate a pragmatic balance between the two states of mind, an equilibrium which, however, it is obvious that neither Lovinescu nor other contemporaries perceived as such. Reducible, largely, but also utterly simplified, to a proto-"dependency theory", Fundoianu's "Preface" describes, as we have seen, a state presumed as a state of fact – the "parasitism" of Romanian culture in relation to the symbolic "host" represented by France –, but it also proposes a solution to overcome this state of affairs: the accession of Romanian culture to the estimated superior status of "colony of the French culture".

The *de facto* state of "parasitism" in relation to French culture, diagnosed by Fundoianu in the wake, apparently, of Iorga et al., says that Romanian literature consumes without producing specific difference, plus-knowledge, etc., without creatively surpassing its models. This state of "parasitism", Fundoianu noted, was not even eradicated by the appearance in Romanian literature of the "genius" of Eminescu (to whom he refers, however, in terms surprisingly in line with the tradition of Romanian criticism: as to a "chemical accident" or as to a "miracle", a scientifically and logically impossible phenomenon. This would lead him to the conclusion that – as a phenomenon without a discernible cause –, Eminescu cannot be responsible for any effective lineage or legacy to feed the literature that followed him). In the estimated higher "colony" stage of French culture, Romanian culture would not only take over the models of the metropolis/empire, but should also be recognized as such by the metropolis/empire. However, it is certain that, for Fundoianu, at the time of the publication of his "Preface", Romanian culture does not yet represent a true "colony" of French culture: the image of a Romanian culture-"colony" of the French culture illustrates, for him, a desirable stage (on which one must reflect "with joy"), rather than a manifest one; that is, it illustrates a status towards which Romanian culture should strive by making efforts (maybe political ones?) in this direction. This is, after all, the real meaning of Fundoianu's message, even if his thesis is formulated, as seen in the above-mentioned passage,

¹³ See N. Iorga, *O luptă literară* [A Literary Battle]. Edited by Valeriu Râpeanu and Sanda Râpeanu, introductory study, notes, and comments by Valeriu Râpeanu, București, Minerva, 1979.

in the present perfect tense: “[our] culture [...] *has become* a colony of the French culture” (e.m., T.D.).

Already achieved or still in the stage of a goal to be pursued, the “colony” status of Romanian culture appears, in any case, to Fundoianu as an evolutionary argument, as a sign of progress: “Our culture *has evolved* [...], it has become a colony of the French culture” (e.m., T.D.). The fact that the “colony” status was, in Fundoianu’s view, more ideal than real (and that the colonial thesis was, moreover, also an import solution, which Fundoianu himself takes from an “obscure” foreign author) also emerges from the comparison of Romania at the beginning of the 20th century with French-speaking Switzerland, which allegedly benefitted from a higher status than Romanian culture in its relationship with France, ensured by the common language. French-speaking Switzerland would represent, indeed, a *true* “colony” of the French culture, a status which Romania/Romanian culture, one infers from this context, would not really possess as long as the authors “sent” by Romanians to France (Alexandru Macedonski¹⁴, “the Poet Cantacuzène”¹⁵, Elena Văcărescu¹⁶ et al.) would be a worthless “vassal gift”¹⁷, and as long as – on the national level, in Romanian literature –, “we imitate [the French, among others] in our ‘narrow circle’” and “do not contribute or benefit to the general culture”:

I was reading last year, in a review, an admirable article on the French-speaking Switzerland. Its author, an obscure name, Delieutraz¹⁸, recognized in French-speaking Switzerland the situation of a cultural colony of France. It is true that he demanded a certain independence, based on mutual exchange between the two cultures. Switzerland sent Rousseau to France, who prepared a Revolution for it. France sent Calvin to Switzerland, who gave it Reformation. And it is not nothing. We are in the situation of French-speaking Switzerland, without even being able to have its rights vis-à-vis of France. It’s true, since the Phanariote period, in parallel to neo-Greek education so far, we have used the culture of France – and we sent in return vassal gifts [peșcheș] such as Macedonski’s *Bronzes*, the poet Cantacuzène and the *chanteuse*¹⁹ [Elena] Văcărescu. The Swiss poets, however, have the horizon of the

¹⁴ A francophone and francophile Romanian writer and literary critic, Alexandru Macedonski (1854–1920) is known for his special interest in promoting Symbolism. He wrote with equal ease in Romanian and in French. Among the various works he produced in French, some manage to be published in Paris (see, for example, *Le calvaire du feu*, Sansot, 1906).

¹⁵ Charles-Adolphe Cantacuzène (1874–1949), the *nom de plume* of Scarlat A. Cantacuzino, a prolific peri-symbolist poet and diplomat.

¹⁶ Also known under the *francisé* name Hélène Vacaresco, Elena Văcărescu (1864–1947) was a Franco-Romanian writer established in France. *Chants d'Aurore* (1886), her first book of poetry, written in French, was published in Paris and received the French Academy prize.

¹⁷ In Romanian language, “peșcheș”, a word of Turkish origin, refers to a “gift” in money or in kind that the rulers of the Romanian provinces offered to the Ottomans as a consequence of their status of vassalage to the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁸ Possibly Lucien-Albert Delieutraz (1877–1944), translator of D. H. Lawrence among others.

¹⁹ Probably Fundoianu alludes to her debut volume, *Chants d'Aurore*.

world opened up [for them], because they write in French. We do not have it. The cause that binds us to France is subject to a more than inferior condition. We cling to French literature because of our bilingualism – at least that of the upper class. We cannot write in French, which would be the only logical course of action, and in Romanian, where we imitate in “our narrow circle”, we do not contribute or benefit the general culture. *As a literature of our own, we cannot interest anyone. We will have to convince France that, intellectually, we are a province of its geography, and our literature is a contribution, in whatever it has superior, to its literature.* If a phenomenon – not cultural, but biological – does not soon change the course of our souls, we must gladly accept the role – if we are allowed – to be the citizens, less original, but industrious, of the French culture. (e.m., T.D.)²⁰

It is worth noting that, for Fundoianu, the Romanian authors who arrived (in fact, “were sent” – a sign of a state policy) within reach of the French culture, neither of them of Rousseau’s stature, represent only a “vassal gift”. That is, the sign of a unilateral relationship, of vassalage, of unequivocal inferiority, not of an exchange of values/commodities between two “evolved” cultures/entities towards a mutually profitable relationship. Thus, the (estimated *feudal*) relationship of vassalage that would characterize Romanian culture at the time²¹ does not express, according to

²⁰ Fundoianu, “Prefață”, pp. 25-26.

²¹ It is a stage that Fundoianu seems to equate with “parasitism” (because we only “used the culture of France”, sending them sham “gifts” in return), although the concepts of “vassal” (provider of “vassal gifts”) and “parasite” are not equivalent, as long as the vassal is obliged by the contract with the senior to offer him support of any kind in exchange for the protection offered, a quality that the parasite – a non-reciprocal beneficiary of his host – does not possess. However, admitting that the sham “gifts” sent by Romania to France can be seen as parasitism, the signs of overcoming this stage, also discussed in Fundoianu’s “Preface”, would exist, too. They would be confirmed, in just a few years, not only by the example of Fundoianu’s own books from the 1930s–1940s, written directly in French and for the French market, but also by the works of other Romanian authors who arrived in France throughout the 20th century. If, from the Phanariote era to Alexandru Macedonski or the “poet Cantacuzene”, the Romanian “vassal gift” had been worthless, as Fundoianu claims, with writers like Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu/ Eugène Ionesco, Emil Cioran and others, or with artists like Constantin Brâncuși, Romania can be said to have fully redeemed the previously precarious quality of its active participation in French culture. For details about the recipe by which the above mentioned writers managed to become part of French culture, to “export” themselves effectively (by applying, it can be added, convincingly the recipe indicated by Fundoianu in his “Preface”), see Mihai Iovănel, “Temporal Webs of World Literature: Rebranding Games and Global Relevance after World II: Mircea Eliade, E.M. Cioran, Eugène Ionesco,” in Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, London–New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 217-334. Iovănel proposes a solution that is convergent, at least epistemologically, if not sociologically or from other points of view, with Fundoianu’s proposal of colonization – a solution that only changes the poles/centers of reference of the national culture: from the francophone one to the anglophone one – see the last chapter, “The Transnational Specific” in Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990–2020*], Iași, Polirom, 2021. The hypothesis of a pragmatic renunciation – “the only logical conduct”, in Fundoianu’s terms – of Romanian authors to publish in Romanian language and the

Fundoianu, the (supposedly more modern) relationship between a “colony” and a metropolis/empire (even if the bilateral relations between France and Switzerland are tracked by Fundoianu back to the time of Jean Calvin). So, if Switzerland were, culturally, a real “colony” of France, Romania, being in a “more than inferior” condition (compared to France or even Switzerland), even in a desperate condition – because “as personal literature [written in Romanian], we cannot interest anyone...”²² –, will have to “persuade” that it can become one. The present

possibility of producing Romanian literature, that is on Romanian themes, but in the contemporary international languages is also problematized here.

²² The prognosis was invalidated, at least partially, in the post-war period, by the success of some Romanian-language authors translated into foreign languages (Mircea Cărtărescu, among the post-war Romanians, and Mihail Sebastian, among the interwar ones, are eloquent examples) proof of the fact that “we can interest/be interesting [to foreign readers]” in translation, too. However, Fundoianu was working with the existing data in the first decades of the Romanian 20th century, and it is true that these did not offer him great hopes of conquering the literary West or at least literary France other than by writing and publishing in foreign languages (primarily in French) or by planning his works as if they should be published in France, intended for the public there. At the beginning of the 1920s, Fundoianu was right to be dissatisfied with the lack of echo of Romanian literature abroad. Moreover, there was a shortage of original novels at home, too, as most of the novels published in Romanian were translations. Only around the 1930s, the scales begin to reach a state of balance, and may even tilt in favour of the original titles (see Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Review*, XXVIII, 2019, suppl. 1, pp. 55-74; Ștefan Baghiu, “Translations of Novels in the Romanian Culture During the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 2, pp. 87-106. As a study included in the present issue of *Dacoromania litteraria* shows, the interwar period, i.e. the beginning of the 1930s, “is also the time of the first full translations of the Romanian novel into European languages, whether global (English, French), regional (German, Italian), or local (Czech, Hungarian, Polish)”. In some cases, the above-mentioned study claims, Romanian works were translated first into regional/local languages and only later into the main languages (French, German, English): “For example, Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion* (1920), considered the first Romanian truly modern novel, was translated first into Czech (1929) and Polish (1932 – the second Romanian novel ever translated into Polish), much earlier than in German (1941) or French (1946)” – see Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Tomasz Krupa, “A Project of Inter-peripheral History of the Romanian Novel: The Polish Case”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2024, 11, pp. 28-55. This state of affairs denotes a different strategy of coverage/conquest of the international world than the one Fundoianu estimated in the early 1920s. In any case, we do not know how close the general phenomenon of translation – inter-war and post-war alike, each with its stages and particularities – came to Fundoianu’s wishes and parameters in 1922, but it must be admitted that translation was indeed a vector of “colonization” or access to the international market, even if not necessarily and not entirely to the metropolitan/central market, i.e. in the direction Fundoianu wanted, but first, in some cases, in regional or local markets. We also learn from the above-mentioned study that the dynamics of the translation (into Polish) of authors of Romanian origin developed a particular twist after 1989, in the sense that some translations are no longer from Romanian, but from a language of the metropolis (in some cases, these works were written directly in the languages of the metropolis: in French, for example, as Cioran’s, so they do not have a Romanian original). Another interesting aspect highlighted by this study – which Fundoianu could not have foreseen in the 1920s – is “a growing interest in the Jewish heritage of Central and Eastern European cultures and the contribution of Jewish authors to the development of modernist literature” – an interest that has grown particularly

perfect tense used by Fundoianu in the previous passage – “Our culture [...] *has become* a colony – a colony of French culture” (e.m., T.D.) – turns out to be, in fact, a simple hypothesis, a thought to be transposed into the conditional/optative regime: our culture *could* become a “colony” of the French culture, but for this we need the power of “persuasion”, i.e. a consistently pursued strategy (on an individual level or as a state policy, by carefully watching, for example, what kind of literary emissaries “we send” to Paris).

Going back to the hostile-polemical interpretation that Lovinescu offers to Fundoianu’s colonial thesis, it should be noted that, by rejecting the thesis of Romanian culture *qua* “colony” of French culture, the advocate of “integral imitation” that Lovinescu would soon become in *Istoria civilizației...* also rejects a status superior to that assumed by the “integral imitation” moment, that is, by the stage of uncritical import of Western models. Under these circumstances, the question arises: by rejecting Fundoianu’s colonial perspective, wasn’t Lovinescu prematurely invalidating his own theory of “synchronism”, since the latter was based, among other things, on the very theory of “imitation” proposed by Gabriel Tarde?²³ For “imitation” culture and “colony” culture may seem, from one point on, similar concepts.

However, on rigorously scrutinizing the two concepts/theses, it can be stated that the anticipated invalidation is premature, because, although they seem similar, the mere taking over of models (respectively the phenomenon of “imitation”), on the one hand, and the status of “colony”, on the other hand, are not the same thing in the usage that Lovinescu and Fundoianu give to these terms. In Fundoianu’s view, they cover two distinct stages (“categories”) viewed from an evolutionary perspective: first, pure imitation (“parasitism”), then colonization; as for Lovinescu, he seems to confuse them when he criticizes Fundoianu’s thesis by reducing it to Zeno’s aporia of movement. To speak in Fundoianu’s terms, “poor imitation” does not characterize a “colony”/colonial status, as Lovinescu seems to think in 1922. However, even only in terms of the usefulness of transiting the stage of “imitation”, Lovinescu might have found support in Fundoianu, who in the same “Preface” states that Iorga – none other than Lovinescu’s constant, long-term opponent – “did a senseless thing when he fought against the influence of French

after 2000 (this is why authors such as Max Blecher and, again, Mihail Sebastian become of more interest to Polish publishers than others). Finally, from another study in this issue, one can learn how, in the context of the proliferation of migrant literature after 2000 and especially after 2010, interest in “Eurocentric” voices – that is, the kind of neutral-metropolitan voice that we can estimate Fundoianu/Fondane wanted to cultivate – is waning (see Mihnea Bălici, “‘Lent Voices’: The Politics of Romanian Migrant Life Writing”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2024, 11, pp. 193-206.).

²³ See Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l’imitation*, Paris, Alcan, 1890. For details on Lovinescu’s adoption and adaptation of Tarde’s theory in his own theory of “synchronism” see Teodora Dumitru, *Modernitatea politică și literară în gândirea lui E. Lovinescu [Political and Literary Modernity at E. Lovinescu]*, București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016.

culture in us”²⁴. If he does not prematurely invalidate his thesis of the necessity/utility of “imitation” in the process complicated by “synchronization”, Lovinescu still clearly commits, in his 1920s polemic with Fundoianu, a larger *faux pas*: he refuses a concept/status estimated by its proponent as more complex and advanced than the “integral imitation” that he himself, Lovinescu, will soon accept and promote, but beyond which the *Sburătorul* critic will only see as possible the act of “differentiation” as localization or adaptation of the imported model to the national core. For Fundoianu, on the other hand, the stage of imitation/“parasitism” is logically (naturally) followed by the colonial phase of going beyond the national (in this Fondanian frame, the Lovinescian stage of “differentiation” is suspended as unnecessary or unlikely to achieve results).

But why should the status of colony be more advanced than that of “differentiation”, which Lovinescu has no problem accepting and even promoting? Because, as Fundoianu sees it, from a primarily pragmatic point of view only the status of “colony” would allow Romanian literature to contribute “with whatever it has superior, to the [French] literature” – a contribution that, if we translate Fundoianu’s theory into Lovinescu’s terms in *Istoria civilizației...*, would be denied to a culture characterized only by “integral imitation” and not yet at the point of “differentiation”, and even less to a culture that has reached “differentiation”.

However, the hypothesis of a Romanian literature (originating in the Romanian space and culture, but not necessarily written or performed in Romanian language) actively participating in the literature of France, thus conquering the metropolis/empire from within, is not imagined – not even close – by Lovinescu. It does not enter his sociological and critical-theoretical perspectives, either in the 1920s or later. The *Sburătorul* critic believes, in 1922 but also in later writings, that local literati have already succeeded and will succeed even better in “making something orderly and ours out of foreign nourishment” (I synthesized the Lovinescian theory of “synchronism” in Fundoianu’s terms), that is to move from the “integral imitation” stage to the “differentiation” stage, i.e. to the status estimated as superior to that of an organic national literature, a status where the “foreign” is metabolized into the “national”. As for Fundoianu, he has abandoned such illusions. For him, it no longer makes sense to wait for the nationalization of models of foreign origin, the opposite approach being more useful: the de-nationalization of the national, the orientation of the national – with all its cultural heritage – towards the metropolis (here, France, Paris), and camping within its perimeter, so that, by pumping new literary and cultural blood into its heart, the Romanian-born literati can somehow gain a voice beyond the borders of the nation state.

²⁴ Fundoianu, “Prefață”, p. 25.

Once these elements established, it becomes obvious that in the polemical paper “Există o literatură română?” and then in “Poezia nouă”, Lovinescu not only simplifies, but also places the reproaches addressed to Fundoianu on grounds unconfirmed by the starting and ending points of his colonial thesis, seeming not to grasp the thrust and the stakes of its argument: namely, the finding of the *de facto* “parasitic” state and the solution, overcoming it by accessing the “superior” condition of “colony of the French culture”. By acting as he did, Lovinescu must have thought of deflating once and for all the aplomb of an inopportune and transitory opponent. However, three years later, in the third and last volume of *Istoria civilizației...*, he will be forced to return, even indirectly, to this supposedly closed case and to revise the architecture of ideas and theories from which Fundoianu’s “Preface” resulted. More precisely, Lovinescu will be forced to approach more judiciously the relationship between modern (young) Romanian civilization and the civilizations considered more advanced. For that, he will have to face criticism and comments that include the terms previously circulated by Fundoianu – namely “parasitism” and “colony” – and that overlap somewhat with the concepts of “dependency” vs. “interdependence” he circulated in *Istoria civilizației...*

From 1925 onwards, after publishing the first two volumes of *Istoria civilizației...*, the critic from *Sburătorul* will be requested to refine his argumentation and to take a clearer stance in a context in which his ideological opponents decide to challenge – à la Fundoianu, but without his solution – the theses in the first two volumes of *Istoria civilizației...* where Lovinescu stated that contemporary Romania (that is 1920s Romania) was in a relationship of “interdependence” with other European countries, including the most advanced or organically evolved ones. In this context, adversaries like the literary critic and left-wing ideologue G. Ibrăileanu (1871–1936) or the philosopher and psychologist C. Rădulescu-Motru (1868–1957) will reproach Lovinescu that Romania has not overcome, as the author of the *Istoria civilizației...* claimed, the phase of “dependence” on the West (Ibrăileanu’s reproach) or that it rather illustrates the phase of “parasitism” or involuntary dependence (plastically expressed by Rădulescu-Motru as “the interdependence between the fly and the spider’s web”). As we see, none of these critiques admit that Romania really *is* in a relationship of colonialism (arguably equated by Rădulescu-Motru with a “wilful dependence”), or of quasi-equality or real competitiveness (“interdependence” is the word used by Lovinescu) in relation to the more advanced or powerful cultures of the West:

[...] how did the revolutionary ideology enter the social life of the Romanian people [...] What are the means that maintained the spirit of the revolutionary ideology? To these questions, Mr. Lovinescu has two answers available to the reader: one expressed openly and which is obvious; another slipped between the lines and which is immediately understood by the skilled reader. The parade one sounds like this: modern Romanian civilization is the creation of the French revolutionary ideology, which

imposed itself on the Romanian people through the moral and material interdependence among the European peoples. However, this answer is not supported by anything. An experienced and talented writer, like Mr. Lovinescu, if he had taken this answer seriously, would have accompanied it with the necessary proof. He would have explained to us, first, why he calls it interdependence, when in fact the Romanian people do not give anything, but only receive: why interdependence and not simple dependence? Even as a simple dependency the connection is still not clear. Is it a simple relationship of parasitism? It would not be impossible, given the premises from which he started, that the Romanian soul itself is forever passive and imitative. But Mr. Lovinescu does not state such a thing. Is it a conscious, wilful dependence, that is, a kind of colonial dependence on France, like the dependence of Algeria? For this, Mr. Lovinescu should have paralleled the history of Romanian civilization with the history of French civilization, which again he does not do. Therefore, not dependence, but still interdependence, not with Romanian participation, but over the Romanian head, or, as they say, like the interdependence between the fly and the spider's web. Be that as it may. But where is the proof? How does Mr. Lovinescu prove to us that civilizations were born in Europe through simple interdependence? By nothing²⁵.

Summoned to take a stand, Lovinescu does so in the third volume (1925) of *Istoria civilizației...* The way in which he deals with the problem of "modern" Romania's relations with the more developed West here must be considered not only a specific, explicit response to the critique directed at the first two volumes of the mentioned historiographical work, but also an implicit, hidden response – more nuanced than in "Poezia nouă" and at the same time more firm – to Fundoianu's colonial thesis (with the amendment that, if Fundoianu had in mind primarily the cultural phenomenon and, in particular, the literary phenomenon, *Istoria civilizației...* primarily refers to the indigenous ideological, economic and sociopolitical evolution, and only peripherally and secondarily to the evolution of culture or literature, the latter appearing in his frame as a rather "reactionary" product). And Lovinescu's answer to all this is: "The interdependence between our country and the heart of European life is no longer the 'interdependence between the fly and the spider's web', but a *real* interdependence [...]. In the political field, *our collaboration is already effective. Romania has become* an appreciable factor of European balance" (e.m., T.D.)²⁶ In any case, even limited to aspects of "Romanian civilization", Lovinescu chooses to promote an eminently optimistic perspective (however, presented as realistic, as describing the *reality* of interwar Romania), opposed not only to the way in which Rădulescu-Motru posed the problem in 1925, but also to Fundoianu's previous perspective stating Romania's

²⁵ C. Rădulescu-Motru, "Ideologia revoluționară în cultura română" ["The Revolutionary Ideology in Romanian Culture"], *Mișcarea literară*, 1925, 29, p. 1, 30, p. 2.

²⁶ E. Lovinescu, *Istoria civilizației române moderne*, vol. III: *Legile formării civilizației române* [*History of Modern Romanian Civilization*, vol. III: *Laws of the Formation of Romanian Civilization*], București, Ancora, 1925, p. 61.

“inferior” position (in comparison, once again, not only with France, but also with French-speaking Switzerland, the former’s cultural “colony”). Lovinescu’s last word in a polemic that began in the early 1920s and became chronic until the middle of the decade claims, therefore, without a shadow of a doubt, that “Romanian civilization” has already gone beyond the stage of “imitating” the models of the European West and is experiencing “interdependence”, a competitive relationship with other European countries, not one of subordination/“dependence” or inferiority. Is this optimism, realism or just naivety? On the other hand, Lovinescu accepts that, in terms of a “high spiritual life” – the so-called “high” culture – Romania does not currently have a real contribution to European world, but only a “virtual” one (not yet materialized, but possible at any moment):

In terms of a high spiritual life, our collaboration still remained virtual: the otherwise natural emergence of a great artist would immediately unleash a concentric wave of imitation over the entire continent, and the discovery of a scientist, possible at any moment, would have repercussions in the world’s science²⁷.

However, if with regard to “Romanian civilization” and even to Romania’s “spiritual” contribution to European culture, Lovinescu utters such theoretical certainties, regarding the effective strategies by which Romanian culture or literature – the so-called symbolic productions – could access the stage of “interdependence” which, in his opinion, the autochthonous civilization had already accessed, he does not provide details. The critic expresses hopes, if not certainties, only with regard to “differentiation”, i.e. the stage of acclimatization of imported models. Concerning the way they could be relaunched internationally – eventually returned to the metropolitan market – he does not offer any suggestion. However, “differentiation” as Lovinescu theorizes and exemplifies it, not always clearly, does not mean some sort of literary “interdependence”. “Differentiation” does not imply, once adaptation to locality has been carried out, a continuation of the dialogue with the metropolis and access to its markets, but is an approximate correspondent of what Fundoianu understands by “assimilation”. Did Lovinescu imagine that Romanian literature could have reached or at least hoped to reach a stage of “interdependence” at a European/world level – if it had not already done so through the “new poetry” investigated with great hopes by the *Sburătorul* critic since 1920–1922? We don’t know. What we do know is that Lovinescu avoids the topic of reaching “interdependence” or illustrating the “interdependence” between Romania and Europe (the West) through the example of Romanian literature/culture; what concerns him effectively and constantly is what is happening strictly on the national level: ensuring the dynamics of “imitation”–“differentiation”, researching the way imported models are

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

adapted/assimilated to the local frame, i.e. aspects of internal metabolism, free from the pressure of “sending” (as Fundoianu wanted) valuable goods to the center/metropolis/empire. The process or the problem (of the possibility) of going beyond the stage of “differentiation”, of sending goods to the metropolis, does not concern him. There are questions that Lovinescu’s work does not raise, dilemmas that it does not consider. But these are topics that others can investigate, starting from the very way in which his work hides or postpones them.

As as strong as it may have been, the “violence” of Fundoianu’s “Preface” not only did not reach the usual demolishing aggressiveness of the avant-gardes, but can even be placed in a tradition of signalling and interrogating the so-called “complexes” of Romanian literature (potentially of Romanian culture as well)²⁸. The young essayist’s diagnosis was not harsher than the identification of a perpetuated and, as such, aggravated lack of individuality, but which needs to be overcome by one strategy or another. If in the first half of the 19th century, the era of the Romantic nationalist-liberal Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891) and of *Dacia literară*²⁹, the observation that Romanian literature is only made up of translations had a moralizing, but still empathetic and mobilizing vibe, after almost a century, a similar finding about Romanian literature – which the existence of “miracles” like the “genius” Eminescu or the replacing of translations with works (supposedly) imitating Western models had not substantially ameliorated – sounded alarming and desperate. This explains why at the beginning of the 20th century some authors looked for solutions sometimes difficult to digest in the first instance, towards other horizons and formulas than their predecessors. It is also true that, in the immediate post-war context, after the achievement of the Great Union in 1918, when Romania’s territory and population almost doubled compared to the situation before the First World War, Fundoianu’s colonial theory did not at all flatter the triumphant nationalist imaginary (although, on the other hand, its implementation required, paradoxically, precisely a national effort – not only individual, but maybe also a state or a cultural community effort – to concentrate resources for the conquest of cultural France). But it is equally true that Lovinescu’s minimization of this theory in the 1920s is a questionable solution, moreover, one that is undermined by its strictly conjunctural quality, which manipulates the opponent’s assumptions or avoids its true stakes.

²⁸ A concept stemming from Mircea Martin’s seminal work *G. Călinescu și complexe literaturii române* [*G. Călinescu and the Complexes of Romanian Literature*], București, Albatros, 1981. By accident or not, this is the same critic who authored the introductory study to the volume of Fundoianu’s writings published in 1980. The torch of pointing out the vices/“complexes” of Romanian culture or literature seems to have passed smoothly, naturally, from Fundoianu to Martin, despite the decided disapproval pronounced by the post-war literary historian towards the colonial theory of the interwar critic. (It is possible, in other words, that the young Fundoianu was among the authors who inspired Martin’s reading of Călinescu).

²⁹ The first Romanian literary magazine, published in 1840 and edited by Mihail Kogălniceanu.

The 1980s

B. Fundoianu's work slipped into obscurity in Romania after 1945, and its recovery (i.e. its re-reading and editing) could not be done without a series of caveats. In 1980, in the context of the turn of the current political regime towards national-communism, his colonial theory was rejected by Mircea Martin (as a "wrong and isolated thesis"), but at the same time neutralized (as a moment overtaken by history and by the author's own contradictions) in the following terms:

Today, when our literature has certainly overcome the phase of unilateral enslavement that B. Fundoianu absolutized in 1922, I think we can consider the famous preface as a historical document among so many others, and in spite of that position we should acknowledge the author's equally historical merits. Moreover, the point of view regarding the "colonial" status of Romanian literature compared to French literature was in contradiction not only with the factual realities, but also with so many other statements by B. Fundoianu. And in any case it is unfair, if not actually harmful, that a wrong and isolated thesis should drag into depreciation and oblivion an activity which, as a whole, was so positively effective³⁰.

This caveat was pronounced in the first lines of the introductory study Martin authored for *Imagini și cărți* (1980), a massive collection of Fundoianu's works which included his first book *Imagini și cărți din Franța*, and will have been imposed on the editor and the author of the introductory study in order to be able to republish Fundoianu's work in the Romania of the last decade of communism, marked by a rise of nationalism and by Ceaușescu's autonomist/isolationist policy.

Thus, the argument concerning the real or potential tendency of the Romanian culture towards the status of "colony" of French literature is perceived by Martin as "unilateral enslavement", "infamous assessment of Romanian literature", or "[still prolific] error", stunning in its "aberrant, denigrating radicalism". Martin's view comes directly from Lovinescu's interpretation of 1922–1923 of the same thesis by Fundoianu and seems oriented, in the same vein, only towards the prevention of the unfavourable consequences of depending on a metropolis ("the phase of unilateral enslavement", in Martin's words), not to the potential benefits associated with the "colony" status, which Fundoianu clearly had taken into account when formulating his thesis. However, after the sophistry and "violence" signaled by Lovinescu in the 1920s, the "infamy" noted by Martin in the 1980s appears as a sentence in an already closed file. The global and homogeneous discredit of the local critical tradition, from the 1920s to the 1980s, functioned in

³⁰ Mircea Martin, "Valoarea pozitivă a negației sau despre publicistica lui B. Fundoianu" ["The Positive Value of Negation, or about B. Fundoianu's Journalism"], in Fundoianu, *Imagini și cărți*, p. VII. The editor Vasile Teodorescu takes good care to point out – in a footnote attached to Fundoianu's "Preface" – that it circulates "erroneous" ideas which are detected and properly addressed by Martin's introductory study (p. 24).

this case as a protective membrane trivializing and sterilizing the subject, mitigating its quantum of risk. (Of particular interest in the case of this prudent-neutralizing recovery operated by Martin is the fact that the critical revisiting of Fundoianu's work is also done by means of arguments derived from the baggage of his interwar critics, not least from that of Lovinescu – himself a constantly disavowed author, at higher or lower levels, and recovered with caveats and forewords signalling his ideological “errors” under the communist regime.)

However, although the colonial thesis as such is unequivocally refuted by Martin from the beginning of his introductory study, some of his interpretations regarding Fundoianu's writings are made in the spirit (and even in the logic!) of the former's colonial theory. The writer of Romanian origin who emigrated to France in the 1920s (without ever returning to Romania) is, for example, presented as an active contributor to the movement of ideas in the French culture of the time, which would ensure him not only a place in the French culture, but even “worldwide”. Thus, Fundoianu's writings published in Paris would be “important in themselves and revealing for the way in which his work, started in Romania, continues and is fulfilled in the French space, by means of which it is included in world literature”³¹. Other details clarify this verdict: among the books published by Fundoianu/Fondane in French, *Rimbaud le voyou* (1933) and *Faux traité d'esthétique* (1938) allegedly “attracted from the start the attention of prestigious authors such as Benedetto Croce, Jean Cassou and Raymond Aron, later joining the essential bibliography on the topics and placing Fundoianu among the European innovators of the critical perspective on poetry, alongside Marcel Raymond, Albert Béguin or Rolland de Renneville”³². The same impression is made by his philosophical essays (see *La Conscience malheureuse*, 1937), which “equally contributed to the European reputation of Benjamin Fondane, still cited today among the leading thinkers of the age”³³. I have no clear indications that, in doing so, Martin was in fact seeking to subtextually – possibly subversively – invalidate the refutation of the colonial thesis, an operation he himself had undertaken in his introductory study to *Imagini și cărți*. The hypothesis can be considered. As it is also possible that such an intention did not exist, but the theory took revenge in a perverse way, producing its confirmation at the very hands of those who reject it. Because what Martin claims, more or less intentionally, by the above observations is the same as admitting that, only by becoming a *colonizer* of the French model, or even by writing in French (and, presumably *only under these conditions!*), Fundoianu manages to achieve a kind of “universality” (or at least “Europeanness”, one may add) that it is not sure he would have otherwise achieved

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. VIII.

by writing only in Romanian. One can say that Fundoianu confirmed his theory by the example of his own work and even his own life, both assimilated to French culture. A work and life, one can add, that unfortunately also became part of the tragedy of the Holocaust. If the French state offered Fondane the chance to be read by giant intellectuals of the moment such as Benedetto Croce and to be placed in line with Marcel Raymond et al., it did not, however, save him from deportation and death in the gas chambers, from which he might have been spared (like Mihail Sebastian and other Romanian Jews, for example) if he had stayed in Romania. Hence, the irony of his destiny and of his French langue choice, which started as a promise to emancipation and inclusiveness and ended as an instrument of exclusion and segregation³⁴.

Fundoianu clearly had a program in this sense, a project of conquering the metropolis. He states as early as the “Preface” that he designed his articles in *Imagini și cărți din Franța* to be received by a French-speaking audience. Graciously accepting his “colonized” status, he had already begun the assault in the 1920s, writing in Romanian but planning his works (like Mihail Sebastian, one might add), from the start in French and/or for an extra-national public, familiar with the authors analysed by him, who, for a Romanian public, should have been handled by providing more information and contextualization. The contextualization – redundant in the cultures from which these authors come and in which they circulate intensively – is thus regarded by Fundoianu as superfluous:

We³⁵ said that our [Romanian] literature is a contribution to the French one. Doesn’t a book of criticism fall under the same laws, unchanged still? Our book does not offer biographies, does not talk about the writer’s life and does not even insist on the necessary things in a work – when they have been written too many times. *We had the impression, while writing the book, of publishing the articles in France, in a French review*, and that our purpose was to contribute something modest, but ours. This attitude towards the French book was unconscious; now we barely realize what imperious logic we obeyed. [e.m., T.D.]³⁶.

His subsequent journey to the French (cultural) territory was – as it can be seen in retrospect – only a confirmation of this route, of this solution that he apparently “unconsciously” or intuitively found.

³⁴ See Julia Elsky, *Writing Occupation: Jewish Emigré Voices in Wartime France*, Stanford–California, Stanford University Press, 2020, 30: „[...] the French language was for Fondane both a medium of cultural liberation and an escape from antisemitism in Romania. But over the course of the 1930s, Fondane would again effect a shift in his writing, referring to the French language as the site of his growing unease as a Jewish foreigner. French became not a language of belonging to a community but just the opposite, the language of a loss of community and of a Jewish poetics of exile during the Occupation”.

³⁵ *Pluralis modestiae*.

³⁶ Fundoianu, „Prefață”, p. 27.

The 2000s

In the 21st century, a judicious revisiting of Fundoianu's "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* has been endeavoured by Constantin Pricop³⁷. Roxana Sorescu also contributes to a new and welcome hermeneutic of this disputed Fondanian text. She rightly considers inadequate the interpretations according to which Fundoianu would have asserted that Romanian literature is a "colony" of French literature and recommends, instead, decoding Fundoianu's thesis in a desiderative mode: it would be good for Romanian culture to become a "colony" of French culture:

An idea widespread in Romanian criticism, from the first reviewers of the *Privelisti* volume (1930) to the present day, is that Fundoianu would have said, in the "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [...], that Romanian literature is a colony of French literature. That is incorrect. Fundoianu said that Romanian literature should strive towards the ideal of becoming a colony of French literature. The colony, said the 23-year-old, is in an active exchange with the metropolis: it receives a lot from it, but it also sends a messenger to the center, something the Romanian literature of the time had not yet deigned to do. (Fundoianu explicitly denies any value to writers who had published in French: Macedonski, Hélène Vacaresco, Charles-Adolphe Cantacuzène). Very soon he would decide to become that messenger himself³⁸.

The interpretation is clearly confirmed by Fundoianu's text, which uses "colony" and "province" with equivalent meanings and in terms of the desired, not of the actual realization of these relations: "We will have to convince France that intellectually we are a province of its geography, and our literature, in what it has of quality, a contribution to its literature"³⁹.

Neither after the Second World War, nor during the communist regime or after the fall of communism did Fundoianu escape the negative echo of the statements he made in the "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța*. Words like "parasitism" and "colony" continued to sound scandalous, unacceptable, regrettable, "infamous" to more or less informed commentators of his thesis. However, while under communism the delimitation from the colonialist hypothesis (especially in the last decade of the 1980s, also marked by the assault of Romanian "protochronism"⁴⁰) was urgently needed in order to republish the works of the

³⁷ See Constantin Pricop, "B. Fundoianu și literatura română" ["B. Fundoianu and Romanian Literature"], *România literară*, 37, 2004, 27, pp. 14-15.

³⁸ Roxana Sorescu, "Un abis pentru fiecare" ["An Abyss for Everyone"], *Observator cultural*, 2013, 685, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/un-abis-pentru-fiecare-2/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

³⁹ Fundoianu, "Prefață", p. 26.

⁴⁰ A political-cultural current fueled by the national-communist ideology of the moment, affirming the precedence and superiority of Romanian culture over other European and global cultures, including the Ancient Greek and Roman cultures.

author (in this sense, the rejection of Fundoianu's colonial thesis, reactivated by Martin in 1980, when this action certainly worked as a strategy in order to help editing Fundoianu's works, must be perceived as opportune and even salutary), after 1989 the equally rigid and excessively cautious approach to the thesis is absolutely regrettable if not scandalous, and certainly unprofitable intellectually. Basically, this rigid approach only perpetuates, without new cognitive input, the hostile reading, touched by conjunctural stakes, that Lovinescu in the 1920s but also other interwar exegetes had applied to it, a reading later aggravated by the precautions, justified from another perspective, of the critics during communism.

Bringing Fundoianu's colonial thesis back into discussion, today or yesterday, does not mean either accepting this thesis – and admitting, along with it, the legitimacy of the (post)colonial paradigm – or putting it into practice. However, as the hypothesis of treating Romanian culture in terms of postcolonial and/or decolonialization theories gains some traction after the fall of communism – various theorists investigating, for example, the possibility (or impossibility) of discussing post-communism as a type of “postcolonialism” –, Fundoianu's thesis needed to be re-investigated with new arguments and from new angles. Which is what actually happened, but not by means of a sufficiently consistent body of research to balance the mass of quasi-*a priori* hostile opinions to Fundoianu's thesis and the tradition of its *ab ovo* disavowal. Andrei Terian wrote about the (in)opportunity of discussing Romanian (especially post-war) culture and, in general, cultures from the former socialist bloc (from the so-called “Second World”) in terms of “colony” and “postcolonialism”, by relating them to the centre of power represented by the USSR. In his demonstration, he recalled Fundoianu's “Preface” and concluded that

the evolution of the countries and literatures of the Second World was quite different from that of post-colonial countries: while for the latter colonialism is identified with modernization, the former was already in an advanced stage of modernization when they entered the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union⁴¹.

From this perspective, it can be further deduced that the colonialist project outlined by Fundoianu assumes from the outset – with all the “parasitism” of

⁴¹ Andrei Terian, “Literatura eliptică sau hiperbolică? Cazul literaturilor naționale din Lumea a Doua” [“Elliptical or Hyperbolic Literature? The Case of Second World National Literature”], in *Critica de export. Teorii, contexte, ideologii* [Exporting Criticism. Theories, Contexts, Ideologies], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2013, p. 102. See also “Există un (post)colonialism central- și est-european? Pentru o teorie unitară a dependenței literare” [“Is there a Central and East European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of Literary Dependence”], in Terian, *Critica de export*, pp. 104-129. See also the versions published in international academic periodicals: “Reading World Literature: Elliptical or Hyperbolic Literature? The Case of Second World National Literatures”, *Interlitteraria*, 2012, 17, pp. 17-26, and “Is There a Central and East European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of Literary Dependence”, *World Literature Studies*, 4, 2012, 3, pp. 21-36.

Romanian culture that he also incriminates – a stage of modernization of Romanian culture in the early 20th century superior to the countries that have truly experienced the phenomenon of colonization and which must be reflected on from a post-colonial perspective.

The concept of “self-colonizing” launched in 1995 by the Bulgarian researcher Alexander Kiossev⁴² also had numerous echoes in the Romanian critical-theoretical discourse after 2000. It was co-opted in disputes against the so-called alienation of native/national “values” and, more transparently, as an argument hiding the preference for a centre of power (perceived as traditional, therefore closer to the “national specificity/identity” of France and of Latin countries in general) to the detriment of another, perceived, even after the fall of communism, as non-adherent or more distant from the local tradition (the Anglo-American models). Thus, a series of approaches, mainly materialized after 2010, interested in reforming and updating the theoretical and methodological Romanian literary research, including through the publication by international publishing houses of studies perceived as irreverent and even scandalous in relation to the “truths” delivered by the tradition of Romanian literary criticism, have been incriminated – more or less transparently – as forms of “self-colonization”⁴³, the concept being equated in this context with the absence of “critical thinking”⁴⁴. The adequacy or inadequacy of the (re)interpretation of various cultural leap/progress solutions, from Lovinescu’s “synchronism” theory to more recent solutions, as “self-colonization” phenomena, has been the subject of more or less happily oriented statements. In this context, a set of solid arguments in favour of a distance from Kiossev’s concept were offered by Christian Moraru⁴⁵. Without systematically approaching the postcolonial doxa and questioning the appropriateness of its use for Romanian cases, I, too, have investigated the way in which authors from the last decade of communism – from the so-called 1980 Generation – imported and localized the models provided by the North American power centre (especially by

⁴² Alexander Kiossev, “Notes on Self-colonising Cultures” (1995), in *After the Wall. Art and Culture in Post-communist Europe*. Edited by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, Stockholm, Modern Museum, 1999, pp. 114-117. See also Alexander Kiossev, “Self-Colonizing Metaphor”, in *Atlas of Transformation*, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>). Accessed November 20, 2024.

⁴³ See Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, London–New York, Bloomsbury, 2017.

⁴⁴ See Bianca Burța-Cernat, “Gândirea critică și simulacrele ei” [“Critical Thinking and Its Simulacra”), I–IV, *Observator cultural*, 2018, 908-911, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/author/-biancaburta-cernat/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

⁴⁵ Christian Moraru, “Autocolonizarea: un concept” (“Self-colonization: A Concept”), *Observator cultural*, 2019, 973, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/un-concept-autocolonizarea/>. Accessed March 5, 2024.

the poetry of the *Beat* Generation)⁴⁶. However, there are exegetes for whom the “self-colonization” concept continues to be useful even for revisiting Fundoianu’s colonial thesis⁴⁷.

On the other hand, even Mircea Martin, the greatest Romanian specialist in Fundoianu’s life and work, perpetuated after 1989 the interwar and post-war tradition (from communism) of rejecting the colonial thesis in the famous “Preface”, opting instead for a discourse that, from “nuance” to “nuance” (the critic’s fetish-concept), prolongs the skeptical, distanced and, in the context, nationalist reading key of Lovinescu. Then, even otherwise comprehensive and

⁴⁶ See Teodora Dumitru, “Gaming the World-System. Creativity, Politics, and Beat Influence in the Poetry of the 1980s Generation,” in Martin et al. (eds.), *Romanian Literature*, pp. 271-287. Although I placed the discussion in terms of centres and peripheries (in the line of Immanuel Wallerstein’s world system analysis), seeing the Romanian poets of the 1980s as “peripheral” and the *Beat* poets in the position of representing the (North American) centre, I did not conclude that the import of American models operated by Romanian writers led to the “Americanization” of Romanian poetry (to an effective and efficient “self-colonization”, one could say). On the contrary, I stated that it led to a complicated and sometimes unintentional reconversion of these models upon the logic and terms of people exposed to the experience of decades of rigors and privations in a particular country in the former socialist bloc (each with its own historical and socio-political peculiarities). More precisely, I showed that the anti-capitalist, anti-war and resolutely left-wing message of Allen Ginsberg & Co. did not permeate the literature of Romanian writers inspired by them, the *Beat* poetry being received and instrumentalized by Romanian authors from the 1980s exclusively as a resource for their symbolic *liberation* from the rigors of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, from the national communism *in actu* in Romania of the era – that is, from the constraints of a regime on whose coat of arms, at least in theory, the philosophy of Marxism/anti-capitalism itself was engraved. On the one hand, the fact that Romanian literati living under communism chose not to make transparent, or simply ignored, the anti-capitalist message of the *Beatniks* can be discussed as a separate sociological or anthropological symptom (indicating, among other things, their lack of economic and political culture caused by the general lack of access to commodities and information, especially during the last decade of Romanian communism). But on the other hand, the fact that they take only a part of the *Beatnik* legacy, the formal part, its styles, distorting instead its content, its ethos to provide hints of an anti-communist message, even in terms of subversion, that fact, indeed, can be understood as a creative upgrade. As long as it is not possible to note, in the case of the Romanian poets of the 1980s, an exact and proper reproduction of the centre/metropolis models, as long as the taking over of models is (even involuntarily) imperfect and works to produce new ways of tackling and resisting the world (albeit reduced to living and publishing in Ceaușescu’s Romania), to deliver solutions that are absent or unimaginable in the original data of the models taken over, the creative distance introduced by the Romanian authors in relation to their American models invites the question of their apparent status as “peripheral” (maybe “parasitic”) artists. From this point of view, as I do not think that I have prejudiced, injured, etc. the Romanian subjects I investigate by introducing them into a scheme in which they appear as “peripheral” (on the contrary, the very scheme as such provided me with the arguments to overcome it or to nuance the discussion), I also do not think that accepting the lucid revisiting of the colonial thesis of Fundoianu is the same as legitimizing the “infamous” or “scandalous” anti-nation (possibly anti-state) ideology in whose frame it was caught up.

⁴⁷ See Olga Bartosiewicz, “B. Fundoianu și spiritul imitativ în cultura română: între autocolonizarea și autonomizarea literaturii” [“B. Fundoianu and the Imitative Spirit in Romanian Culture: Between Autocolonization and Autonomization of Literature”], *Philologica Jassyensia*, 2018, 1, pp. 15-28.

detail-oriented exegetes such as Roxana Sorescu, the *auteure* of the mentioned caveat, by drawing attention to the deficient decoding of Fundoianu's colonial thesis, reveals her unwillingness to betray the interwar source doxa of the disavowal of the thesis in question by claiming that it was not his opponents and interpreters, but Fundoianu himself that was a "radical" "without nuance", caught up in an inappropriate "excess of denial". However, the same *auteure*, while she understands the restraints to which communism forced the exegetes, deplores, on the other hand, the poor quality (with some exceptions) of the Romanian revisiting and *remise en circulation* of Fundoianu's work in the post-war period and especially after 1989⁴⁸.

It is not surprising that, in this context, the fate of Fundoianu's reception in post-war Romania and even in the first decades of the 21st century took several strange turns. The philo-colonial author who asked the Romanian culture and its actors to accept "with joy" (but only if they are "allowed"!) the "role" of "being the citizens, less original, but industrious, of the French culture", so an author not bothered by the scenario of giving up "national specificity", even though only that represented by the mother tongue (but potentially also aiming at other aspects of the "tradition"), will be recovered after 2000 as an "antimodern" writer and thinker, in the sense given the term by Antoine Compagnon⁴⁹. Coincidentally or not, Fundoianu/Fondane is placed in this process alongside other writers dedicated to the pragmatic renunciation of writing in Romanian, but revisited as repositories and guardians of the "spirit" or "national identity", such as the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) or the philosopher Emil Cioran (1911–1995), and, from another perspective, alongside N. Steinhardt (1912–1989)⁵⁰, the

⁴⁸ Roxana Sorescu, "B. Fundoianu și marile războaie" ["B. Fundoianu and the Great Wars"], *Viața românească*, 2017, 11-12, <https://www.viataromaneasca.eu/revista/2017/12/b-fundoianu-si-marile-razboaie/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

⁴⁹ The impetus for perceiving Fundoianu/ Fondane as "antimodern" was given by Mircea Martin in "Pour un réenchantement du monde et de la poésie", *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 2007, 10, https://benjaminfondane.com/un_article_cahier-Pour_un_r%C3%A9enchantement_du_monde_et_de_la_po%C3%A9sie-302-1-1-0-1.html. Accessed September 27, 2024. See also the preface of the Romanian edition of Compagnon's book *Antimodernii*, translated by Irina Mavrodin and Adina Dinițoiu, București, Art, 2008. Martin's suggestion was taken up and expanded by Oana Soare, in order to identify other Romanian "antimoderns". In her work dedicated to that project, she states that Fundoianu, Eliade and Cioran are all "antimodern" writers and thinkers – see Oana Soare, *Cealalți moderni. Antimodernii: cazul românesc* [*The Other Moderns. The Antimoderns: The Romanian Case*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017.

⁵⁰ See Adrian Mureșan, *Vârstele subversiunii. N. Steinhardt și deconstrucția utopiilor* [*The Ages of Subversion. N. Steinhardt and the deconstruction of utopias*], Alba Iulia, OMG Publishing House, 2020, p. 25 *et passim*. For Mureșan the young Steinhardt is an "antimodern" in Compagnon's sense. For details on Steinhardt's less liberal and more conservative style and ethos, see Dan Alexandru Chiță, "Burghezul cruciat" ["The Crusading Bourgeois"], *Viculusorum's Blog*, February 2, 2021, <https://viculusorum.wordpress.com/2021/02/02/burghezul-cruciat/>. Accessed March 3, 2024.

Romanian essayist with Jewish origins, who, however, did not apply/join the colonial solution imagined by Fundoianu in 1922. (The appetite for the rehabilitative instrumentalization of the “antimodern” attribute goes, surprisingly or not, in the view of some Romanian commenters, hand in hand with the propensity to identify in various contemporaries a “self-colonizing” behavior: if the import of French/Romance language concepts became – as not even Fundoianu had imagined – part of the national tradition, or it is just felt as such, the import of Anglophone concepts or concepts of non-Romance origin in general would be simply mimetic, “self-colonizing”).

“Antimodernity” is, in the first instance, an apparently convenient and up-to-date solution for revisiting and sometimes rehabilitating – by placing under the same apparently ideologically neutral umbrella – authors who, in the classical jargon, would be called “reactionaries”, traditionalists/nationalists, conservatives, right-wing or far-right extremists. In the discourse of some recent local exegetes, it becomes a noble title *sans rivages*, but also a completely loose concept (*recte*, inconsistent). The fact that the “antimodern” Benjamin Fondane is killed (symbolically) by the “antimoderns” Eliade, Cioran et al., who chose to push their visions of society and philosophy along a common path with Nazism (which literally killed him) is ignored or repressed by the handlers of this concept, possibly judged as a secondary detail. What separates these authors and people with vastly different biographies and moral choices is cancelled when their supposed common “antimodernity” brings them together in the pages of those same studies.

Thus, the Romanian-French Jew Fondane who was gassed in Auschwitz, and the philo-fascists (in their youth) Eliade and Cioran are placed on the common barricade of Romanian “antimodernity” – an *ad hoc* association and recovery, both epistemologically fragile and morally questionable. As “antimoderns”, they would have contributed together to the preservation of some national and/or spiritual “values” supposedly endangered by the various representatives of “modern” thinking, writing, and strategic politics. However, in this process of Fundoianu/Fondane’s “antimodernization”, his colonial theory is explored less or not at all: the author’s overall recovery as “antimodern” disregards it, just as it does not seem to include the avant-garde theories of his youth. In other words, even in these latter-day receptions, Fundoianu’s colonial theory is treated (when mentioned at all) with the old tools of the interwar or communist periods. More recent works (monographs or introductory studies) mention the colonial theory but without (re)questioning it⁵¹.

⁵¹ See Michael Finkenthal, *Benjamin Fondane: A Poet-Philosopher Caught Between the Sunday of History and the Existential Monday*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2013. See also Bruce Baugh, “Introduction”, in Benjamin Fondane, *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*. Edited and translated by Bruce Baugh, New York, New York Review Books, 2016.

Like other broader stakes approaches of the era, for example that of the sociological study *Neoîobăgia* (Neo-Serfdom) (1910) by the socialist literary critic and ideologue C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855–1920), Fundoianu's thesis can be further discussed both as a part of the modernization theory paradigm – the mainstream sociological theory in Romania in the second part of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century – as well as an alternative discourse to this theory. Thus, without claiming that Fundoianu's thesis anticipates post-war anti-capitalist philosophies dealing with the concept of “colony”, it is still possible to insert his reflection in a line of thought that deals with the anxiety of being peripheral, irrelevant, silenced. That is, in a lineage that intersected the “dependency theory” (Raúl Prebisch; Paul A. Baran, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, etc.), the theory of “unequal development” (Leo Trotsky, David Harvey) or the emergence of “world-system analysis” (Immanuel Wallerstein). This is possible even if Fundoianu/Fondane – considered to be a conservative existentialist or a “metaphysical anarchist”⁵² to the same extent as he was a noted avant-garde member regarding his literature or cinema – does not develop, in his Romanian or French works, a critical perspective on the capitalist system (or not consistently and consequentially), proposing instead, for the benefit of the culture he represents at the time of writing the aforementioned “Preface”, namely the Romanian culture, only a cynical-pragmatic action: the rise from the status of a “parasitic” culture (which only imports, without exporting) to that of a “colonial” one, characterized by an exchange relationship with the metropolis. That being said, instead of revisiting him as dextrorotatory or even as a companion of authors with far-right sympathies, I think it would be more useful for Fondane – for his work and memory – to be, if not “leftized”, at least linked to with left-wing authors and theories with which his colonial theory, if not his entire life and *œuvre*, can enter into dialogue.

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Appendix. The present essay, which deals only with the reception of Fundoianu's colonial theory, could have ended here. I choose to extend it with a series of reflections on the usefulness of explaining the entire work and philosophy of Fundoianu/Fondane through Compagnon's concept of “antimodern(ity)” because I find here an exemplary case of epistemological failure.

About the inconsistency of Compagnon's concept of “antimodern(ity)” – too close to the way the Romanian literary critic and theorist Matei Călinescu (1934–2009) theorized aesthetic “modernity” decades ago in his volume from the 1980s⁵³

⁵² Bauch, “Introduction”, p. vii.

⁵³ Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1987.

to justify its own place in the current pantheon of literary and cultural theory – and about the risks of its apparently serenely de-ideologized handling I have dealt extensively in another work⁵⁴. I have to add, regarding the instrumentation of this concept in more recent Romanian literary studies, the fact that the “antimodern(ity)” taken over *via* Compagnon by local commentators such as Oana Soare, Paul Cernat⁵⁵, etc. is living proof of the fact that this is a placebo concept, which cannot actually effect any change in the cultural field.

Imagining that the extension of the proximate genre of the “antimodern” can work in its favour, thus proving its power of coverage – but crassly crowding the genres that illustrate it and ignoring the real differences between them (some that marked the life and signed the death of some of these writers) – the exegetes for whom the identification of an author’s “antimodernity” passes as a solution for updating or rehabilitating him lose sight of the fact that, by doing so, they only invalidate the concept as such. Because, if Fundoianu/Fondane and Cioran were both “antimodern”, i.e. had a similar attitude or philosophy towards the values of the present and the past, then what is there to explain the fact that one of them ended up in Auschwitz, while the other became, in the 1930s, a sympathizer of the Romanian interwar far-right organization known as the “Iron Guard” (or the “Legion of the Archangel Michael” or the “Legionary Movement”⁵⁶) and was assigned as diplomat of the Romanian state in Marshal Pétain’s France? After various services to the “Legionary Movement”, including a pathetic “Captain’s Inner Profile”⁵⁷, dedicated to the commemoration of the assassination of the first legionnaire leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899–1938), Cioran will indeed be happy to leave in February 1941 as cultural attaché of the Romanian Legation with the Vichy government (even if in conversations with friends Paris remains the centre of reference). His appointment to this sinecure would have been due to the leader of the “Legionary Movement” at that time, Horia Sima, vice-president of the Council of Ministers in the government of the national-legionary state whose “Conducător”/Leader⁵⁸ was Marshal Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), a political hybrid in power until the Legionary Rebellion of January 21-23, 1941.

⁵⁴ Teodora Dumitru, *Rețeaua modernităților: Paul de Man – Matei Călinescu – Antoine Compagnon* [*The Web of Modernities: Paul de Man – Matei Călinescu – Antoine Compagnon*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016.

⁵⁵ Paul Cernat, *Vase comunicante: (Inter)fețe ale avangardei românești interbelice* [*Communicating Vessels. (Inter)Faces of the Romanian Inter-War Avant-Garde*], Iași, Polirom, 2018.

⁵⁶ For its origins and history, see Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, Ithaca–London, Cornell University Press, 2015.

⁵⁷ Emil Cioran, “Profilul interior al Căpitanului” [“Captain’s Inner Profile”], *Glasul strămoșesc*, 1940, 10, p. 5. In this radio conference and article published in the legionary periodical of Sibiu *Glasul strămoșesc*, Cioran stated, among other ideas in the same range, that “if I had to choose between Romania and the Captain, I would not hesitate a moment” (in favor of the latter, of course).

⁵⁸ Homologous to the German title *Führer*.

This event, at least in the case of Cioran, continued to produce administrative effects for a while even after the end of the collaboration between the legionaries and Antonescu⁵⁹. Between March and May 1941, Cioran corresponded not from Paris, but from Vichy – where he apparently was waiting for a “mission” that never came (nevertheless, he still received a salary that he would later be asked to pay back)⁶⁰. In a letter sent from Paris to philosopher Constantin Noica in November 1941, after the end of his Vichy sinecure, Cioran declares himself willing to receive a “scholarship” from any court – from any “sublunary” state – a willingness that shows him open to collaboration with any type of regime at the time. (He had not hesitated, as we have seen, to allow himself to be paid by the legionaries led by Sima, nor to “function”, at least in theory, as a legitimator, even if only marginally or purely formally, without delegated “missions”⁶¹, of a far-right government allied with the Axis, such as the Vichy government).

Then the theory according to which Fundoianu/Fondane, arrested in Paris in 1944, could have saved his life by appealing to the authority of Cioran, Jean Paulhan and the philosopher Ștefan Lupășcu/Stéphane Lupasco (possibly also of Eugen Ionescu/Eugène Ionesco, the Press and Cultural Secretary of the Romanian Legation in Vichy at the time)⁶² – a theory that circulates in academic circles – has not yet produced more conclusive evidence than some late oral testimonies (curiously, by Cioran himself). But even admitting that Cioran may have contributed to the attempt of rescuing Fondane from the concentration camp, such one-off interventions would not excuse the fact that he had previously – through

⁵⁹ See Mihail Sebastian, *Journal 1935–1944: The Fascist Years*. Translated by Patrick Camiller, introduction and notes by Radu Ioanid, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2000, p. 303: “This morning I met Cioran in the street. He was glowing.//‘They’ve appointed me.’// He has been appointed cultural attaché in Paris.// ‘You see, if they hadn’t appointed me and I’d remained where I was, I would have had to do military service. I actually received my call-up papers today. But I wouldn’t have gone, no matter what. So, as it this, everything’s been solved. Do you see what I mean?’//Of course I do, dear Cioran...,” (note dated January 2, 1941). Another entry, from February 12, 1941: “Cioran, despite his participation in the revolt, has kept his post as cultural attaché in Paris, a post that Sima gave him a few days before he was ousted. The new regime has even given him a pay increase! He leaves in a few days. Well, that’s what revolution does for you!” (*Ibidem*, p. 323). Cioran had, therefore, benefited from an appointment offered by the government in which Sima was vice-president (in fact, Cioran’s appointment comes from the Ministry of Propaganda) before the break with Antonescu after the Iron Guard’s attempt to seize power in the context of the Legionary Rebellion. Moreover, we learn from Sebastian’s diary that Cioran had participated in the Rebellion – a detail that, after the fierce reaction of Antonescu and the repression of the legionaries, still doesn’t immediately get him out of his already promised job.

⁶⁰ See Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies: 1930–1991*. Edited by Nicolas Cavaillès, Paris, Gallimard, 2024, letters no. 50–52.

⁶¹ See *Ibidem*, letter No 52 to Alphonse Dupront, director of the French Institute in București, sent on April 19, 1941.

⁶² Fondane could have returned from the camp of Drancy, where he had been interned at first instance, but he did not want to abandon his sister, Lina Wexler/Wechsler-Pascal, there.

his writings, speeches and actions such as accepting a post at Vichy – *de facto* legitimized a genocidal pro-Fascist/pro-Nazi/Hitlerite political system and ideology⁶³. In this vein, it is epistemologically untenable and, in fact, immoral, that the victim (Fundoianu/Fondane) and the symbolic or real aggressor (Nazism, Fascism, Romanian Legionnaires, etc., through their representatives or sympathizers) should be *explained* – possibly *recovered* by transferring relevance and prestige (including moral prestige) from one to the other – through a concept that erases the massive differences between their visions of life and their practical philosophies and feeds instead only on peripheral aspects of their thinking and attitudes, stylistic speculations or marginalia of theoretical philosophy. Therefore, to revisit Fondane alongside Cioran as “antimodern” can only be dismaying. In the same vein, a detail such as the fact that the “antimodern” Fundoianu and the “traditionalist” Charles Maurras (1868–1952) are (only?) separated by their conceptions of romanticism or classicism⁶⁴ – when Maurras, a fervent anti-Semite and supporter of the Vichy regime and of Nazism, whose entire world and life view cantered on the ideas and policies that practically sent the Jew Fondane and everything he symbolically represents to the camp and later to the gas chamber – is a conclusion that can best be described as bizarre.

It should also be pointed out that the “antimodern” hypothetical dialectical or “ambivalent” scheme of functioning (as a character dependent on the present in which he is born, but always tempted to look back to the past or towards challenging the *status quo*) had been tacitly taken over by Compagnon from Matei Călinescu’s concept of aesthetic “modernity”. But this theoretical scheme is de-dialecticized in practice by the French historian and mainly used to serve the interpretation or potential recovery of authors who are nothing more than conservatives or right-wing extremists who write well and who innovate stylistically. For whereas Călinescu’s concept of aesthetic “modernity” – born of a dialectic and producer of dialectics, defined by a tense relationship with socio-techno-civilizational modernity, by its acceptance and at the same time by its anguished questioning – allowed literature/art a wide range of reactions (from, say, the art of Gottfried Benn to that of Vladimir Mayakovski), Compagnon’s “antimodern” remains, with all the precautions he took to prevent this impression, merely an opposition to the present and to the type of art supposed to embrace it

⁶³ That “une séparation hermétique” between Cioran’s philosophical texts and his explicitly political ones is fallacious and useless (as well as the thesis of “aesthetic autonomy”, frequently used in the Romanian cultural space to “save” some writers from their own biography) has been observed since the early 2000s, in the context of the polemics sparked by the publication of *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco. L’oubli du fascisme* (2002) by Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine – see Pierre Pachet, “Seconde lecture”, *Esprit*, 2002, 290, p. 213.

⁶⁴ Oana Soare, *Les antimodernes de la littérature roumaine*, 2013, <https://theses.fr/2013PA040114>, pp. 25-26. Accessed September 27, 2024.

unreservedly (i.e. an opposition to the supposed non-“antimodern” “moderns” who happen to be more left-wing authors – Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, etc. – than right-wing ones). In these circumstances, “antimodern” becomes a banal formal substitute for the classic concepts of “conservative”, “reactionary”, “traditionalist”, “right-wing revolutionary”, etc., or simply an alibi for the rehabilitation of right-wing/far-right names or of the right-wing “deviationism” of authors who are otherwise left-wing (Julien Gracq, Roland Barthes). Thus, if – following Călinescu’s classical theory of modernity, but also Roger Griffin’s more recent theories of the 2000s⁶⁵, where Fascism is considered as (a type of) “modernism” – authors like Fundoianu and Cioran can both be described as voices of modernity or even modernism, since, especially after Călinescu, “modernity” contains its own negation and ambivalent relationship with the techno-societal present, they cannot be imagined, in the same logic, as “antimoderns”. This is because Compagnon’s concept leans more towards the encounter with right-wing ideologies, obfuscating the centrist or leftist valences and thus nullifying the supposedly intrinsic tension of the “antimodern” which, tacitly following the example of Călinescu’s aesthetic “modern”, Compagnon had theoretically laid at the foundation of his concept.

That “antimodern(ity)” becomes, in practical terms, a camouflage for dextrorotatory options is also visible from the refusal of Oana Soare, an intensive acclimatizer of Compagnon’s concept to Romanian themes, to imagine varieties of “antimodernity” in Romanian communism. Why wouldn’t there have been “antimoderns” in Romanian communism – more precisely in the state capitalism of the former European socialist bloc? Because, in Soare’s opinion, the “modernization” of communism was a sham and, moreover, a (pseudo)“modernization” achieved under a dictatorial regime (either simulated or genuine, nevertheless it follows that “modernization” is based on left-wing premises in post-war Romania)⁶⁶. Under these circumstances, it would have been

⁶⁵ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

⁶⁶ Corroborating all of the above, the “antimodernity” of Romanian or foreign authors revisited by this concept seems just another name for anti-materialism, for the adherence to spiritualist and irrational theories under which part of the legacy of the old idealism is perpetuated (some of them even claiming to this day to be allied with modern science *via* theories of energy and quantum mechanics, etc.). It is an angle of reception strongly encouraged by recent statements by a French disciple of Compagnon, according to which the “antimodern”, in contrast to the “modern”, would assert itself through the ability to distinguish meanings and “secrets” of life beyond matter/materialism, authentic and valuable literature being non-scientific and non-sociological, the representation of an “inner life” that is not perceivable to the scientist, but to other instances: “The modern person does not believe that there is a hidden dimension to existence, something that escapes objective description. Modernity was partly built on the denunciation of certain ‘metaphysical illusions’. The great scientific movements of the late nineteenth century are the caricature of this materialist ideology: the nature of being is material and nothing exists that cannot be explained by scientific methods. From then on, anything that could not be demonstrated rationally, but which was

impossible for antagonistic, *recte* “antimodern” (inherently right-wing)⁶⁷ voices to emerge. It follows that only a capitalist modernity (non-communist/non-socialist) and/or produced in non-dictatorial regimes would be an authentic modernity and that, therefore, it alone could favour the development of “antimodern” discourses. Leaving aside the detail that, in order to support such a claim, Soare has to cancel all the bibliography dealing with “socialist modernism” and its related concepts, including those in the field of literary studies⁶⁸, from the explanatory framework she proposes, which bluntly refutes the thesis that communism/socialism has produced modernization, one more issue remains to be clarified. Namely, the indisputable reality that the societal “modernization” of post-war Romania – whether authentic or not – was nevertheless reacted to by contemporary Romanian literati through a wide range of critical approaches, either explicitly subversive, as in the work of dissident poet Mircea Dinescu (b. 1950) in the 1980s, or implicitly so, as in the “postmodern” poets of the 1980s, or through the aesthetic evasion practiced by the Romanian authors of the 1960–1970s. How do they escape the presumption of “antimodernity”? It is clear from Soare’s judgments that none of the post-war writers who have explicitly or implicitly critically referred to this (socialist/ communist) type of “modernization” are suspected of “antimodernism”. This is gratifying, on the one hand, because Compagnon’s concept does not really add value to the critical-theoretical interpretations that could be aimed at authors who wrote during the communist period.

But it is also disappointing, on the other hand, because we cannot suppress the realization that the “antimodernism” of some of the authors revisited as such by Soare (Cioran, Eliade, etc.) was, however, perfectly possible – even flourishing! – in far-right dictatorships: Nazi, Fascist, Legionary. Therefore, the criterion of the type of political regime (totalitarian *vs.* non-totalitarian/democratic) that would favour “antimodern” phenomena or not is in fact unworkable and unstable, an auxiliary hypothesis that attacks the whole argumentative ensemble.

As a conclusion to this *appendix*, I wish to make the following statements, which include a professional *credo*.

based on another type of conviction (belief, faith, intuition, etc.), was immediately excluded from reality. The modern man is hostile to ‘secrecy’ because he doesn’t understand it and prefers to make fun of it, accusing it of being a form of superstition” – see Matthieu Giroux, “La littérature est intrinsèquement antimoderne car elle cherche à préserver la vie intérieure”, interview by Eugénie Bastié, *Le Figaro*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/matthieu-giroux-la-litterature-est-intrinsequement-antimoderne-car-elle-cherche-a-preserver-la-vie-interieure-20210123>. Accessed on September 30, 2024.

⁶⁷ Soare, *Ceilalți moderni*, p. 583.

⁶⁸ For the use of the concept of “socialist modernism” in Romanian studies, see Andrei Terian, “Socialist Modernism as Compromise: A Study of the Romanian Literary System,” *Primerjalna književnost*, 42, 2019, 1, pp. 133–147.

The fact that Fondane, Cioran and others shared the same readings and theoretical preferences (*Lebensphilosophie*, the existentialists, etc.) and that they produce theories that have a family air should not let us lose sight of another fact, namely, the practical and moral use and purpose that each of them chooses to give to those theories. It is therefore essential to emphasize the fact that Fondane's readings from the common pool of the time, *Lebensphilosophie*, existentialists & Co., point him to the anti-Nazi/anti-Hitlerist barricade (see, for example, his openly anti-Nazi 1939 essay "L'homme devant l'histoire"), while the same readings or some from the same intellectual sphere push Cioran and Eliade to the barricade of fascist sympathizers.

Under these circumstances, I think it's our moral duty as researchers today to (no longer) work with "smoke and mirrors" that miss the important differences between the thought and practical choices, either political or pertaining to moral conduct, of a man who ends up in Auschwitz, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the theoretical and practical choices of a contemporary of the former, who sets off by praising Hitler and accepts the pay of far-right governments in the 1940s. Even if they are both nourished by the same or convergent philosophical trends of the era, even if at some point they crossed paths or even became friends, scholars need to scrutinize their cases from the level of today's knowledge. And when I speak of today's level of knowledge, I refer both to the information about the particular fates of these men, but also to the more and more compact information, as research into these *topoi* progresses, about how philosophy – through certain aspects, authors, theories, sometimes the same ones – has become (has chosen to become) either a collaborationist agent, participating in the moral and intellectual validation of criminal regimes, or a courageous and prompt critical voice, explicit or implicit, of these regimes.

We have, in other words, a duty to extract Fondane from under the conceptual shadows that he would otherwise share with the sympathizers of the political regimes that sent him to his death and, instead, to highlight the specific differences of these thinkers, not the common, less defining and less relevant aspects. This is not only a moral duty, but also an epistemological and professional one. Otherwise, by judging Fondane and Cioran with the same measure and by explaining them by the same concepts (both would be "antimodern", that would be the equation of their life and thought...), by not discriminating between their typologies, we might conclude that existentialism & Co. could only lead to Nazism, fascism, legionnarism or sympathies in their direction, which is an absolutely untenable conclusion, contradicted not only by the example of Fondane's thought, ethics and praxis, but also by others, such as Simone Weil, Albert Camus or Jean-Paul Sartre.

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STAGES IN THE SAGA OF THE INTERPRETATION OF B. FUNDOIANU'S
COLONIAL THEORY: FROM E. LOVINESCU UNTIL TODAY

(Abstract)

In this paper I aim to investigate the reception of the thesis that Romanian literature is/should be a "colony" of French literature, put forward by Romanian-Jewish writer and essayist B. Fundoianu (1898–1944) in the "Preface" of his 1922 volume *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [*Images and Books of France*]. I start my investigation by analysing the way the "synchronistic" critic E. Lovinescu (1881–1943) chose to interpret this thesis in some of his 1922–1923 works, then I trace its post-war destiny under communism and post-communism. The selection of references allows me to note the particularities and variations of this reception, of the way in which Fundoianu's colonial thesis and/or the writer's philosophy as a whole is either totally or partially rejected, justified and nuanced, subjected to readings from angles not previously accepted or imagined, or merely adjusted to converge with some apparently innovative concepts on the academic market of the moment, such as the "antimodern(ity)" launched by Antoine Compagnon in the early 2000s.

Keywords: colonial, synchronism, antimodern(ity), B. Fundoianu/Benjamin Fondane, E. Lovinescu.

ETAPE DIN SAGA INTERPRETĂRII TEORIEI COLONIALE A LUI B.
FUNDOIANU: DE LA E. LOVINESCU PÂNĂ ASTĂZI

(Rezumat)

În această lucrare investighez receptarea tezei conform căreia literatura română este/ar trebui să fie o „colonică” a literaturii franceze, expusă de B. Fundoianu în „Prefața” volumului său din 1922 *Imagini și cărți din Franța*. Pornesc analiza receptării tezei coloniale a lui Fundoianu de la interpretarea pe care o propune criticul „sincronist” și „modernist” E. Lovinescu (1881–1943) în lucrări ale sale din anii 1922–1923 și urmăresc destinul ei postbelic în comunismul românesc și în postcomunism. Selecția de referințe abordată îmi permite să observ particularitățile și variațiile acestei receptări, ale modului în care amintita teză a lui Fundoianu și/sau filosofia de ansamblu a scriitorului, din care aceasta face parte, este fie respinsă integral, fie respinsă parțial, fie justificată și/sau nuanțată, fie supusă unor lecturi din unghiuri neacceptate sau neimaginate anterior ori doar ajustată pentru a ajunge la convergență cu unele concepte aparent inovative pe piața academică a momentului, cum este acela de „antimodern(itate)” lansat de Antoine Compagnon în debutul anilor 2000.

Cuvinte-cheie: colonial, sincronism, antimodern(itate), B. Fundoianu/Benjamin Fondane, E. Lovinescu.

CONSTANTINA RAVECA BULEU

LITERARY WORKS GENERATED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. METHODOLOGY, ACHIEVEMENTS, DILEMMAS

By trying to approximate the controversial status of the so-called “non-human writer”, the present, chiefly theoretical, paper aims to discuss the new understanding of the limited literary creativity made possible by the mathematical algorithms used by AI writing programs, as well as the logical outcome of it, the problem of open vs. obstructed literary or fictional originality. In the actual stage of the research of a field which is by all means exceedingly fascinating, the most challenging issue is related to prediction and probability. It is rather difficult to assess how far AI literary programs can reach and, especially, whether they will be capable to challenge the aesthetic excellency of the professional, recognised writers concerning artistic originality and spiritual deepness. But if we take into consideration Eric von Hippel’s “user innovation” formula, which demonstrates that the public success of a given invention or helping tool relies chiefly on the amount of the added creativity provided by the users, and not on the original proposal of the producer, it seems probable that by universally democratising the AI writing models a new understanding of literary creation will emerge, which will probably lead to a new, accepted definition of the writer.

In order to achieve that goal, AI has to overcome certain functional drawbacks induced by its structures of creativity. According to Margaret A. Boden’s seminal paper titled *Creativity and Artificial Intelligence*¹, AI has a “synthetic creativity”, while human creativity is “transformational”, able to generate plots and ideas beyond the already existing structures. A further dichotomy is provided by the “systemic” and “systematic” creativity used by AI, as opposed to the superior, “impulsive” and intuitive creativity which is characteristic to humans. In order to verify the validity of Margaret A. Boden’s dissociations, Anil R. Doshi and Oliver Hauser asked an AI generative machine to elaborate a series of short stories and reached the conclusion that

AI-enabled stories are more similar to each other than stories by humans alone [but] we find that access to generative AI ideas causes stories to be evaluated as more creative, better written, and more enjoyable, especially among less creative writers.²

¹ Margaret A. Boden, “Creativity and Artificial Intelligence”, *Artificial Intelligence*, 103, 1998, 1-2, pp. 347-356.

² Anil R. Doshi, Oliver Hauser, “Generative AI Enhances Individual Creativity but Reduces the Collective Diversity of the Novel Content”, *Science Advances*, 10, 2024, 28, p. 1.

Their experiment also concluded with a certain paradox, called by the authors “a social dilemma”: “with generative AI, writers are individually better off, but collectively a narrower scope of novel content is produced”³.

Starting from here, the main, obviously arguable prediction of my paper (it can’t be otherwise, because we talk, for the moment, only about hypotheses reserved to the future) is that AI will have a huge impact in recuperating a so-called individual and collective “residual” creativity, and will largely contribute to the diversifying of literacy through creative networks. It is also possible that the emergence of AI literary intelligence will lead to a prolonged professional tension, already visible inside human literary communities. We might also assume that the AI programs will be sufficiently “wise” to overcome the obstruction, this resulting in a new type of technological humanism. But in order to identify the path to it, we have to go back to the basic definitions.

The syntagma “artificial intelligence” has raised a lot of polemics, and the great majority of the disputants – not all, if we consider Kate Crawford’s argument that “AI is neither artificial, nor intelligent”⁴ but embodied and material, made from natural resources, not autonomous and incapable to discern anything without computationally intensive training, dependent on political and social structures – tend to agree with the use of the term “artificial”. The second part of the syntagma, “intelligence”, causes many controversies and ambiguities whose main reason consists in the wide range of mental activities described by it, such as learning (understood as the ability to acquire and process new information), reasoning and manipulation of information decanted from the ability to discern falsehood from truth, or what is true from simple opinion, and the skill to orient data towards the most suitable network.

While Artificial Intelligence (henceforward: AI) can indeed reproduce the sequential phases of human thinking – that is: establish goals, evaluate existing information and complete it with further details; interrelate data, evaluate the progress of the whole process by comparing it with its initial purpose and even modify that goal in order to meet ongoing, new requirements generated within the process –, it cannot replicate the full range of thinking typologies of the human brain. It is interesting to note that the compatibility inventory listed by John Paul Mueller and Luca Massaron in their book *Artificial Intelligence for Dummies*⁵, devised to detect which specific type of human intelligence can be *simulated* (this is the authors’ key word) by AI, asserts the highest degree of simulation capability to be logico-mathematical thinking, further indexes run as follows: *moderate* to

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI. Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2021, p. 8.

⁵ John Paul Mueller, Luca Massaron, *Artificial Intelligence for Dummies*, Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2018, pp. 9-11.

high in the case of corporeal-kinesthetic intelligence; *low* to *moderate* regarding interpersonal connectivity; *low* concerning linguistic communicability, while the simulation standards for intrapersonal skills and for creative intelligence are practically non-existent.

Ideally speaking, the stage of singularity⁶ (the anxiogenic concept induced by the fear that there is a future where AI will take over completely by controlling humans and subsequently by replacing them) could be attained by bringing together the learning technologies and strategies of the five Artificial Intelligence “tribes” existing so far: the *Symbolists*, oriented towards logic and philosophy, relying on the reversed deduction in solving problems; the *Connectionists* of neuroscience, based on reverse programming; the *Evolutionaries*, fans of evolutionary biology, that rely on genetic programming⁷, the *Bayesians*, adepts of statistics whose work is based on probabilistic interferences, and the *Analogizers*, deriving from psychology and relying on KVM (Kernel-based Virtual Machine) models in fixing their issues⁸. However, in spite of attempts to classify the actual landscape of AI typology, it remains rather blurry, mainly because of the domestic uncertainties and disagreements within the domain.

Unlike AI’s strictly rationalistic approach, which provides a correct reproduction of an existing piece information by starting from the assumption that the given information is indisputably correct, human creativity deploys subtler features like instinct, intuition, the recognition of untruth etc. In their book, *Artificial Intelligence for Dummies*, written also, among other reasons, in order to assure the readers that the advent of AI poses no reasons for anxiety about its replacing humans, John Paul Mueller and Luca Massaron provide an inventory of those human traits, like interpersonal affinity, creativity or intuition, which seem to stay immune to the conquest of AI. A further list of domains includes, among others, education, invention, imagination, intuition, decision making, the capacity to discern between reality and fiction, as well as artistic creativity, although the authors admit that AI can be superior to humans with respect to the accuracy of handling artistic patterns⁹.

Rather unsurprisingly, creativity continues to be the central issue of the debates related to the limitations of AI. The most frequent argument is that in spite of the exponential number of books, articles, pieces of music, paintings and other similar “creative” products generated so far by AI, it remains unable to create

⁶ The creation of a Master Algorithm capable to learn everything.

⁷ Usually, this type of programming consists in altering inappropriate programs by using operations inspired by the genetic selection within the natural world. Practically, it is about creating mutations by replacing different sequences of a program with improved selections which will be applied afterwards to other programs.

⁸ See Mueller, Massaron, *Artificial Intelligence*, p. 19.

⁹ See *Ibidem*, pp. 271-277.

something completely original, out of nothing and personal, because when we speak about creativity, we think about those irreconcilable human patterns of thinking and style which provide uniqueness to an author, and to his or her original signature. While AI can indeed develop new creative works based on mathematical patterns intrinsic to its program, mathematics as such will never equal human creativity because, in order to be creative, one has to elaborate a peculiar way of thinking, a never seen before pattern of judgement and a distinctive, personal perspective, all of them inaccessible to AI, whose creative powers are restricted to the pre-ordained variations incumbent to its database.

Another controversy raised by the literary pieces generated by AI is related to the faculty of imagination. For the purists, it is the exact faculty, including the ability to transcend reality, which indeed separates us humans from everything non-human. In sharp contrast, AI is preconditioned by reality, which also explains several theorists' reluctance to accept the probability of an AI entity endowed with imagination¹⁰. Further, the opposition between the typically emotional manifestation of human imagination and the emotional neutrality of the machine does nothing more than deepen the antinomy.

By reconsidering the everlasting question "Can machines think?"¹¹, Alan Turing's 1950 work titled *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* proposes the now famous "Turing Test", based on an "imitation game" played by three participants, a *machine*, as Turing called it (later to become a computer or AI), a *human being*, both supposed to answer a specific set of questions, and a *judge* required to determine in the end which of them is human. According to the British scientist, the best strategy of the machine in order to win the game would be to provide the kind of answers naturally given by humans, although he admits that the machine might try purposefully *not to imitate* human behaviour. If the *judge* fails to determine systematically which one of the two questioned subjects is a human being – in other words, if the machine deploys a behaviour that cannot be distinguished from a specifically human behaviour – it is generally considered that the test was clear. Turing also predicted that this will turn into complete certainty at a given moment of the future:

I believe that in about fifty years' time it will be possible to programme computers, [...] to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than 70 per cent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning. The original question "Can machines think?" I believe to be too meaningless to deserve discussion. Nevertheless I believe that at the end of the century

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

¹¹ A.M. Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence", *Mind*, LIX, 1950, 236, pp. 433-460.

the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted¹².

In order to defend his opinion Turing listed and deconstructed a wide range of significant objections related to AI, starting with the so-called *Theological Objection*, which says that “thinking is a function of man’s immortal soul”¹³, given to him by God, and “hence no animal or machine can think”¹⁴. Remaining inside the theological discourse, Turing argued that the decision to give birth to AI resembles the act of procreation, implicitly meaning that it doesn’t usurp at all the demiurgic privilege of creation attached to the Divine.

The next dilemma is the so-called “*Head in the Sand*” *Objection*, based on the assumption that a thinking machine (or machine thinking) are undesirable because of their dreadful consequences. Derived from the previously mentioned *Theological Objection* and sustained by the belief that “we like to believe that Man is in some subtle way superior to the rest of creation”¹⁵, the “*Head in the Sand*” *Objection* suggests that the very existence of AI is a threat by itself, which turns this argument into a poison container for many freaky cinematographic scenarios.

By leaping over the so-called *Mathematical Objection*, sustained by the idea that a machine is predetermined by the intrinsic limitations of its program and language, Turing got to one of the most problematic dilemmas linked to the creation of AI: *Consciousness*. In order to answer it he relied on one of his trustful opponents, Prof. Jefferson Lister, who had argued that

no mechanism could feel (and not merely artificially signal, an easy contrivance) pleasure at its successes, grief when its valves fuse, be warmed by flattery, be made miserable by its mistakes, be charmed by sex, be angry or depressed when it cannot get what it wants¹⁶.

Turing counterattacked by recalling that emotions are solipsistic in nature, which means that none of us can experience somebody else’s emotions. Further on, on reaching the so-called *Argument from Various Disabilities*, an objection imposed by the laws of exceptions – like

a computer will never be/do something, no matter what this something is (be kind, beautiful, friendly, have initiative, have a sense of humour, tell right from wrong, make mistakes, fall in love or make someone fall in love with it, learn from experience, use words properly, be self-aware, have as much diversity of behaviour as a man, do something really new)¹⁷

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 442.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 443.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 444.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 446.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 447.

Turing simply dismissed it by saying that it was irrelevant, especially when we take into consideration the future evolution of technology.

There is also a so-called *Lady Lovelace's Objection*, formulated by Lady Ada Lovelace in her memoirs of 1842, which says that "the Analytical Engine has no pretensions to originate anything. It can do whatever we know how to order it to perform"¹⁸. To formulate it differently: any machine lacks originality and the knowledge of independent learning. By reducing the objection to the logical sentence saying that a machine "can never take us by surprise"¹⁹, Turing asserted that, on the contrary, a computer could take humans by surprise.

Turing's series continued with an *Argument from Continuity in the Nervous System*, an irrefutable biological argument according to the scientist's belief, but which could be overcome by simulation. Then we have *The Argument from Informality of Behaviour*, based on the opposition between predictability and intelligence, and *The Argument from Extrasensory Perception*, a domain liminal to esotericism, as it involves telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and psychokinesis, but which was, during Turing's lifetime, nothing more than a topic for sensationalist and evasive research.

Turing predicted that in a future which was not far – he imagined it to arrive around the end of the 20th century – it would be possible to create a machine fully prepared to clear the "imitation game". He imagined that it would be the outcome of a process similar to that described by the theory of evolution:

In the process of trying to imitate an adult human mind we are bound to think a good deal about the process which has brought it to the state that it is in. We may notice three components. (a) The initial state of the mind, say at birth, (b) The education to which it has been subjected, (c) Other experience, not to be described as education, to which it has been subjected²⁰.

As a consequence, Turing envisioned the creation of computer programs capable of reproducing the brain of children, not of adults, ready to modulate, to ingest education and to achieve self-improvement. In other words, Turing's proposal to create a *child machine* emerges from the hypothesis that the process of reaching a perfect machine is similar to human evolution by natural selection, the machine carrying in its tissues data similar to heredity and mutations.

The most provocative aspect of Turing's hope theory remains the hypothesis of an autonomous, self-improving AI. By reviewing the post-Turing debate dedicated to this subject, John Storrs Hall concluded that

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 450.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 455.

a theoretical, ultimately rational machine would predict the results of its actions and pursue the optimal course constantly. It would be endlessly creative, never having to rely on habit or arduously learned skills²¹.

However, he did not consider that, for the moment at least, the role of humans is challenged by the advancement of machines. Nevertheless, if we take into consideration titles like *A Mayday Call for Artificial Intelligence*²², generated by Geoffrey Hinton's recent (2023) resignation from Google (Hinton is a Turing Award winner in 2018 and a Nobel laureate in Physics in 2024, being generally considered the "Godfather of AI"), we have to admit that, for the moment, the international debate raised by the perspective of a self-improving AI is mainly dominated by anxiety, because the offensive exercised by AI raises serious concerns about the replacement of human labour force within the economy, or the fabrication of *fake texts* or *fake news* within the media, opening wide the gates to a new era of information manipulation.

According to the same Geoffrey Hinton²³, the paradigmatic discourse related to AI will inevitably change in the future by re-evaluating the way we are treating the risks now. Hinton's position is fairly nuanced: by starting from the assumption that humans tend to anthropomorphize technology²⁴, thus generating surreal expectations related to AI, he admits that AI could attain indeed a level of intelligence which is superior to what humans are capable of, but in this case – as Turing had anticipated – we speak about a type of intelligence which is completely different from the intelligence of humans. Speaking about the AIs based on linguistic models, like ChatGPT, which is able to write texts akin to those written by humans, including their free associations and hallucinations, Hinton says that when comparing human intelligence to AI, the recorded text similarities remain completely inconclusive because the generating process is different, as ChatGPT processes huge amounts of existing texts in order to predict the next word in a sentence. Anyway, Ilya Sutskever, the co-founder of OpenAI, the organisation that runs ChatGPT, was Hinton's disciple.

It is precisely the quantity of processed information which makes the most striking difference between AI and humans, not to forget the speed by which AI assembles data and patterns of information. On the other hand, humans rely on

²¹ John Storrs Hall, "Self-improving AI: An Analysis", *Minds and Machines*, 2007, 17, p. 257.

²² Gary Grossman, "A Mayday Call for Artificial Intelligence", *VentureBeat*, 2023, May 7, <https://venturebeat.com/ai/a-mayday-call-for-artificial-intelligence/>. Accessed May 3, 2024.

²³ Will Douglas Heaven, "Geoffrey Hinton Talks about the 'Existential Threat' of AI", *MIT Technology Review*, 2023, May 3, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/05/03/1072589/video-geoffrey-hinton-google-ai-risk-ethics/>. Accessed May 3, 2024.

²⁴ A similar idea is heralded by Nir Eisikovits, "AI Isn't Close to Becoming Sentient – the Real Danger Lies in How Easily We're Prone to Anthropomorphize It", *The Conversation*, 2023, March 15, <https://theconversation.com/ai-isnt-close-to-becoming-sentient-the-real-danger-lies-in-how-easily-were-prone-to-anthropomorphize-it-200525>. Accessed May 3, 2024.

intuition, common sense and logical thinking, especially when we refer to the probability index of several occurrences. It also remains surprising that Hinton favours humans when talking about energetic efficiency, by considering that the AIs, as extremely powerful computers, consume far more energy than the humans do, who, to quote him, “can imagine the future [...] on a cup of coffee and a slice of toast”²⁵.

The literary works generated by AI represent a bet with the future, but there are already a few notorious achievements, like *I the Road* (2017), a replica of Jack Kerouac’s famous *On the Road*, or the gibberish texts, lacking any grammatical or ideological meaning, entitled *The Serious: A Proven Divorce* (2019), generated by the *char-rnn-tensorflow* linguistic module. We even have a Sci-Fi eschatology model about the way AI could destroy the world, titled *50 Ways AI Would End the World*, by far more intriguing being the AI self-analysis in *The Inner Life of an AI: A Memoir* (2022).

Concerning the institutional recognition of the literary products generated by AI, a pioneering example could be the Japanese experiment in 2015, entitled *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*, consisting of two parallel “literary” texts, the already mentioned novel and a story entitled *My Job*, generated by the *GhostWriter* system. The texts were entered into the competition for the *Hoshi Shinichi Prize*, which also accepts “non-human writers”. In order to qualify, a literary text must be written in Japanese and it mustn’t exceed 10.000 characters, approximately 4.000 words in English.

The Day a Computer Writes a Novel opens like this:

The clouds hung low that day in an overcast sky. Inside, though, the temperature and humidity were perfectly controlled. Yoko was sitting lazily on the couch, passing the time playing pointless games²⁶.

It is a fragment from a text which was not modified while being generated, but its preparation required a series of essential components: a *story grammar*²⁷, a set of

²⁵ Will Douglas Heaven, “Geoffrey Hinton Tells Us Why He’s Now Scared of the Tech He Helped Build», *MIT Technology Review*, 2023, May 2, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/05/02/-1072528/geoffrey-hinton-google-why-scared-ai>. Accessed May 2, 2024.

²⁶ See Satoshi Sato, “A Challenge to the Third Hoshi Shinichi Award”, in Matthew Purver, Pablo Gervás, and Sascha Griffiths (eds.), *Proceedings of the INLG 2016. Workshop on Computational Creativity in Natural Language Generation*, Edinburgh, Association for Computational Linguistics, 2016, p. 31.

²⁷ The story grammar is an augmentative, piece of grammar devoid of any context, where a story outline is encoded. Accordingly, a non-terminal symbol is linked to a textual unit such as a section, a paragraph or a proposition, each terminal corresponding to an internal representation of a textual fragment which is usually a proposition or a clause. Starting from a non-terminal symbol, the grammar generates a derivation tree, which represents a concrete text structure enough to produce the corresponding surface string. That is a text plan. Within the process of derivation, further parameters are added in order to translate the information from one symbol to another.

text fragments and a set of *configuration programs*, the goal being to produce a text whose artificial origin cannot be detected by the readers, thus clearing the criteria of the *Turing Test*. Using the first person singular, *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel* prioritizes the way a text is written (the *how* factor), and not its content (the *what about it* factor).

Satoshi Sato, the Vice Division Manager at Rakuten Mobile, Inc. revealed the gradual synopsis of executing the whole work. It started with a sample story generated by the machine, then this was decomposed into several fragments and submitted to a recursive procedure, which issued the structure and the frame of the story. Afterwards rules were applied, and new fragments added in order to gain a plain text, by allowing the machine to generate a narrative, a story. The rules and fragments were consequently repeatedly re-written in order to enhance a large variety of textual derivatives. Then the parameters controlling the applications and the content selection were added. In order to obtain a coherent plot, further configuration programs were then introduced, followed by a return to stage 4, that is the writing of the rules and of the text fragments in order to enlarge text variations that system can generate, to get an enhanced discourse.

A replica to Jack Kerouac's famous novel *On the Road*, the travel narrative *I the Road* (2017) is an unedited experiment completed by Ross Godwin, who was fully aware that he was operating with a new frontier lacking any theoretical support, as he decided to use a self-learning machine able to record random letters and punctuation. The machine learned words, grammar and how to create ideas by taking a look at what real writers usually do, but its performance did not match human creativity. When trying to label the AI performance, Ross Goodwin's analogy referred to some sort of brain of an insect learning to write.

The starting frame of the experiment consisted in a road narrative written by a car which functioned as a typewriter, while the coherence and the continuity of the story were provided by the journey itself. In order to complete the work, Ross Goodwin took a four-day highway journey from New York down to New Orleans, equipping his car, a Cadillac provided by Google, with an AI system, precisely with a LSTM (Long Short-term Memory), a RNN (Recurrent Neural Network) used in AI and for learning, able not only to process individual items but also to record longer sequences, including discourses, which made it ideal for processing and predicting data²⁸. A normal LSTM unit is composed of a *cell*, an *input gate*, an *output gate* and a *forget gate*. The *cell* controls the random temporal values, while the three other portals fix the flux of information entering or leaving the *cell*. The *forget gate*, operating by a Boolean algebra syntax (where 0 is for discarding

²⁸ Because of the potential lack of synchronicity among the important data of a temporal series, the LSTM networks can generate, classify and process predictions based on these data. In the translation programs they are used to recognize hand writing, speech etc.

information, and 1 is for storing it) determined which previous information could be deleted. Based on a similar logic, the *input gate* determined which new information must be stocked, while the *output gate* regulated the outgoing data. The selective input of information allowed the LSTM network to maintain long-term, useful dependences and to make predictions.

Ross Goodwin connected the AI to the car surveillance camera in order to record the places he visited, to a microphone to fix the conversations inside the car (he didn't travel alone), to the GPS in order to register the latitude and longitude, mentioned on a regular basis in the book, and finally to the internal clock of the computer, all the data picked up by the sensors being transformed into words and sentences whose meaning proved to be variable. He added twenty thin paper rolls, similar to those used in shops, able to store one million words, meaning that, according to Goodwin, when he finished the work he obtained the longest novel ever written in English. We might wonder, of course, whether the rolls of paper were dictated by practical reasons, or if they represented an indirect tribute to Jack Kerouac, because, as everybody knows, the manuscript of the novel *On the Road* was written not on regular sheets of plain paper, but on a famous, 37 meter long "scroll". Goodwin also attached to his replica a program able to sort the fiction into three different pools of texts – poetry, Sci-Fi and *bleak literature* – each of them of approximately 20 million words. Printed in 2018 by Jean Boîte Éditions as it was, that is without later corrections or inserts, precisely in order to indicate that the text generated by AI was genuine, written by a non-human author, *I the Road* enjoys a plausible opening: "It was nine seventeen in the morning, and the house was heavy"²⁹. Another passage sounds like this:

Three seconds after midnight. Coca-Cola factory, Montgomery. A building in Montgomery to his father's study of this town in the same room where the band was being sent off to the police car. The time was one minute past midnight. But he was the only one who had to sit on his way back. The time was one minute after midnight and the wind was still standing on the counter and the little patch of straw was still still and the street was open³⁰.

Thomas Hornigold's review, under the title "The First Novel Written by AI Is Here – and It's Weird as You'd Expect It to Be", concluded abruptly: "While experimentation in literature is a wonderful thing, repeatedly quoting longitude and latitude coordinates verbatim is unlikely to win anyone the Booker Prize"³¹.

²⁹ See Joseph Wilson, "Artificial Communication", *American Scientist*, 111, 2023, 2, p. 69.

³⁰ Ross Goodwin, *I the Road*, apud Debarshi Arathdar, "Literature, Narrativity and Composition in the Age of Artificial Intelligence", *TRANS – Revue de littérature générale et comparée*, 2021, 21, p. 7.

³¹ Thomas Hornigold, "The First Novel Written by AI Is Here – and It's as Weird as You'd Expect It to Be", *SingularityHub*, 2018, October 25, <https://singularityhub.com/2018/10/25/ai-wrote-a-road-trip-novel-is-it-a-good-read/>. Accessed May 4, 2022.

A film uploaded on YouTube presents the whole experiment. In “Automatic *On the Road*: Gonzo AI Robot Writes Road Trip Novel”, we can watch and hear Ross Goodwin say: “I’m not a poet! I’m a creative technologist, hacker, Gonzo Data scientist, Artificial Intelligence expert”³². Goodwin was President Obama’s political *ghost writer*. His ambition of becoming a writer and his passion for computers made him upload his most beloved books and watch how the programs learned to write by imitating his favourite writers’ styles. Speaking about his incipient experiments, he labelled them “intoxicating”, an addiction that might be explained by his strong belief that technology has always been an intrinsic part of our being, from the discovery of fire to the invention of spectacles. As such, AI is nothing more than the last epiphany of this sort of communion. He kept saying that the technological history of mankind has always been augmentative when it involved humans, and not aggressive towards them, as imagined by those who nourish technophobia. It also becomes obvious that Goodwin’s literary experiment was intended to challenge technophobia by suggesting that the game of the future consists in collaboration between humans and AI, not in a game of substitution. He has always believed that AI functions as some sort of “companion” to humans, which knows them better than anyone and helps them create according to their enhanced needs, but in a way structurally inaccessible to them, because it remains alien to their anatomical being. In other words, AI is a technical device meant to help humans transcend their limitations.

The phrase “Gonzo Data”, used by Ross Goodwin, is a hidden tribute to the Counterculture of the Sixties. By 1970 Hunter S. Thomson defined “Gonzo journalism” as that style of press publication in which the author is also the protagonist of his story. Accordingly, he becomes part of the action and functions both as an author and as the most reliable witness of the happening. The authenticity of the written truth delivered to the readers is guaranteed by the most personal of the experiences possible, which also means that distant objectivity ceases to be the prerequisite of the truth, everything being taken over by subjectivity, including the style. Opposed to empirical knowledge and its will to legitimize what is happening, Goodwin’s “Gonzo data science” projects humans in a flux of “defamiliarization” (estrangement), a literary device coined by Viktor Shklovsky, as it presents something which is human from a fundamentally non-human perspective, in a way completely estranged from human interiority.

I the Road was not the first experiment of this kind done by Ross Goodwin³³. He used to rely regularly on ANN (Artificial Neural Networks), another result

³² See Lewis Rapkin (dir.), “Automatic *On the Road*: Gonzo AI Robot Writes Road Trip Novel”, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqsWOPMd8R0>. Accessed November 25, 2024.

³³ Another process generated exclusively by the AI was *The Serious: A Proven Divorce* (2019), done by the char-rnn-tensorflow linguistic module which resulted in a text block with no grammatical or ideological sense.

being a short film entitled *Sunspring*. Goodwin's dissertation, presented to the New York University under the title *Narrated Reality*, was based on the amount of data gathered while he wandered through the city armed with a compass, a watch and a camera. By filtering the registered data through a Neural Network he obtained a kind of beautiful, but strangely associative poetry. With this and with ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer model) and other generative IA, the poetry-writing machine imagined in 1964 by Stanisław Lem in his short story *Trurl's Electronic Bard* becomes reality.

It is a fact that machines are able to reproduce complex linguistic patterns in a better way and more rapidly than humans do, but they are able neither to feel what lies behind these patterns, nor to draw specific literary details such as a plot or a protagonist. Similarly, they cannot grasp the significance of the narrative, and must be helped by humans to keep narration cohesive. Therefore, the collaboration between AI and humans continues to be a necessity, chatbots³⁴ doing nothing more than simply assisting humans. The most radical approach related to AI and to its alleged infinite capabilities belongs to the famous Noam Chomsky, who, in an intervention published in *The New York Times* did not hesitate to underline:

The human mind is not, like ChatGPT and its ilk, a lumbering statistical engine for pattern matching gorging on hundreds of terabytes of data and extrapolating the most likely conversational response or most probable answer to a scientific question. On the contrary, the human mind is a surprisingly efficient and even elegant system that operates with small amounts of information; it seeks not to infer brute correlations among data points but to create explanations. [...] Let's stop calling it "Artificial Intelligence" then and call it for what it is and makes "plagiarism software" because it doesn't create anything but copies existing works of existing artists, modifying them enough to escape copyright laws³⁵.

If you want to understand how really difficult it is to write a novel using AI, you can even find Internet guides like "How to Use ChatGPT to Write a Novel", written by Derek Slater in a style similar to that used in commercials, full of attractive promises and disputable perspectives on the subject:

Are you a writer looking to up your productivity and get some help with your novel? Look no further than ChatGPT! This program helps you take your writing to the next level. Not only can it assist you with generating ideas and suggestions, but it can also help you write more efficiently. In this article, we'll explore the many ways ChatGPT

³⁴ The chatbots are not a recent invention. The first chatbot, called ELIZA, was created by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966.

³⁵ Noam Chomsky, "The False Promise of ChatGPT", *The New York Times*, 2023, March 8, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/08/opinion/noam-chomsky-chatgpt-ai.html>. Accessed May 5, 2024.

can help you write a novel, from generating descriptions to writing dialogue and crafting scenes. So, sit back, grab your keyboard, and let's get writing!³⁶

It remains nevertheless essential to understand that it will be a mere *collaboration* between a human and a computer, and not something exclusively artificial, done by AI. Therefore, the guide is full of well-known *creative writing* advice like "Avoid too much explanation. Avoid including too much explanation in the scene, as this can slow down the pace and detract from the action"³⁷.

According to the guide, even though ChatGPT is unable to *plan* a narrative, which means that the sketching of the plot, the delineation of the protagonists and of the settings must be drawn by humans, it can help to improve ideas, to fill gaps and to elaborate certain particular events. In turn, ChatGPT becomes responsible for key techniques such as narrating episodes or rewriting them repeatedly into different, alternative versions, including dialogues. It can even execute bizarre requirements like "write a scene where the werewolf meets Santa Clause at McDonald's"³⁸. ChatGPT can also generate dialogues or descriptive passages, as it is efficient in grasping sensorial details and in creating vivid, less stereotypical descriptions, but it can also help edit the text grammatically and stylistically. In spite of all this, humans must intervene in issues like creativity and traditional thinking, as well as in shaping the written text into its final form.

An alternative solution to the question of artificial creativity and efficiency belongs to Tim Boucher, a Sci-Fi author who used AI generators including ChatGPT and its rival CLAUDE, developed by Anthropic, to write and illustrate, within less than nine months, 97 novels with interconnected narratives. Each book is about 5.000 words long, while the number of illustrations varies from 40 to 140. It took Tim Boucher approximately six to eight hours to complete a single book. He set them typologically in the tradition of the famous instalment novels hosted by the press at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, hoping that their success was guaranteed by the readers' eternal taste for fictional realities.

Labelled *The AI Lore Books* (a rather ironic title, as there is nothing traditional or dusty in a book conceived by AI), the novels represent, according to their author, "a testament to the potential of AI in augmenting human creativity"³⁹. It's impossible not to notice that the assertion targets the last wall of those who defend the castle of human superiority in the fight against AI: creativity. In spite of all

³⁶ Derek Slater, "How to Use ChatGPT to Write a Novel", *GripRoom*, 2022, January 31, https://www.griproom.com/fun/how-to-use-chat-gpt-to-write-a-novel#google_vignette. Accessed: May 3, 2024.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ See Aly Grant, "Author Uses AI Generators including ChatGPT to Write Nearly 100 Books in Less than a Year", *New York Post*, 2023, May 23, <https://nypost.com/2023/05/22/author-uses-ai-generators-including-chatgpt-to-write-nearly-100-books-in-less-than-a-year/>. Accessed May 25, 2023.

these fears, Tim Boucher refuses to admit that AI could become a threat to human creative work, and insists that it will limit itself to the tasks of an assistant, functioning as a powerful helping tool by which human abilities can be enhanced and accelerated.

The book market for this type of products is obviously in full swing, as shown by the fact that only in February 2023 more than 200 titles co-authored by ChatGPT were released. It means that a great number of writers rely on AI, making A.O. Scott to perceive it

as the latest iteration of an ancient literary conceit: the fantasy of a co-author, a confidant, a muse — an extra intelligence, a supplemental mental database. Poets and novelists once turned to séances, Ouija boards and automatic writing for inspiration. Now they can summon a chatbot to their laptops⁴⁰.

One of these authors is Stephen Marche. Publishing under the pen name Aidan Machine at Jacob Weisberg's behest (Weisberg is the CEO of Pushkin Industries), he produced a mostly chatbot written (by ChatGPT, Sudowrite and Cohere), gruesome novella entitled *Death of an Author*, a murder mystery described by Dwight Garner as "arguably the first halfway readable AI novel."⁴¹ The plot revolves around the death of an author, which shocks the literary world because the mysterious deceased is Peggy Firmin, a Canadian author associated with the billionaire Neal Gibson in order to complete an AI project. (The partner's name is a subtle tribute to two well-known Sci-Fi writers, *Neal* Stephenson and William *Gibson*.) The funeral participants listen to an Agatha Christie-type eulogy presented by an avatar of the dead author, which leads to a vivid controversy related to the identity of the hypothetical killer, a controversy augmented, when manipulated by AI, into an exciting debate about what a killer or an author must really be in our digital era blessed by technology. Obviously, these kinds of odd obituaries are far from being a novelty if we take into consideration the famous serial pattern starting with Samuel Richardson's weird farewell and ending with Theodor Adorno's, but, as the text seems obliged to remark, "ChatGPT has given many authors a case of the dreads. Its presence has crawled like a tumour through the spine of their other abiding freakouts"⁴². As a consequence, the urge "Go, hug a writer" becomes not at all gratuitous for those who adore morbid hypotheses. But Dwight Garner's playful apocalypse will stay uncompleted as long as critics

⁴⁰ A.O. Scott, "Literature under the Spell of A.I. What Happens when Writers Embrace Artificial Intelligence as Their Muse?", *The New York Times*, 2023, December 27, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/27/books/review/writers-artificial-intelligence-inspiration.html>. Accessed March 3, 2024.

⁴¹ Dwight Garner, "A Human Wrote This Book Review. A.I. Wrote the Book", *The New York Times*, 2023, May 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/01/books/aidan-marchine-death-of-an-author.html>. Accessed March 3, 2024.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

continue to believe that an AI writer will never substitute a real one because the former does not have a soul.

I cannot finish my paper without mentioning the reactions of repudiation and negation, especially when some of them are concerted, as it happened with the sharp critical campaign targeted against *Alice and Sparkle*, a book for children co-authored by Ammaar Reshi. Other negative reactions rest on principles. We could mention the relatively recent Writers Guild of America reaction against AI, or the rage of certain writers who watch their work become raw material for ChatGPT and other similar platforms that reshape them into poems, novels or critical commentaries. On the other hand, there are also writers like Salman Rushdie or Bob Dylan who believe that, no matter what AI does, their work cannot be fully replicated.

To end, I believe that the future of literature will have two portals, one belonging to human authorship and the another explored by authors that are not human. Since we all agree that everything from now on is nothing less than eschatology, we have to conclude that Dwight Garner was probably right in his premonitions. A type of author will certainly die in the near future, but only the God of writers knows whether they will be human or non-human.

My critical approach resembles the conclusion already mentioned, drawn by Anil R. Doshi and Oliver P. Hauser in their paper. The clever use of generative AI will certainly contribute to “an increase in individual creativity”, but it will also contribute to widely accepted structural limitations as a result of topic and content repetition. It might be possible that in the near future literary evaluation and criticism will be overcome by statistical technicalities, which will replace intuitive comprehension and interpretation. Another dilemma is voiced in David De Cremer, Nicola Morini Bianzoni and Ben Falk’s “How Generative AI Could Disrupt Creative Work”⁴³, a paper in which the authors discuss the great number of copyright infringements and lawsuits caused by the excessive and unauthorized use of literary sources implanted in the AI writing programs. It’s beyond any doubt that the lawyers will do their proper work, the authors say, but we can also imagine that the social and professional turmoil generated by this legal effervescence, converted into a social “show”, will turn the balance between human and artificial creativity upside down. It’s possible that, in the near future, we may look at artificial creativity as some sort of norm and downgrade its human counterpart to the level of anomaly.

⁴³ David De Cremer, Nicola Morini Bianzoni, Ben Falk, “How Generative AI Could Disrupt Creative Work”, *Harvard Business Review*, 2023, April 13, <https://hbr.org/2023/04/how-generative-ai-could-disrupt-creative-work>. Accessed October 31, 2024.

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LITERARY WORKS GENERATED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. METHODOLOGY, ACHIEVEMENTS, DILEMMAS (Abstract)

The literary works written by Artificial Intelligence represent a bet with the future, but there are already a few notorious achievements in the field whose number keeps growing, along with the increasing amount of questions and dilemmas generated by the phenomenon, divided, for the moment, between the utopian belief of those who hope that AI "authorship" will be endowed with limitless creativity and the rational scepticism of those who believe that AI creation is actually predetermined by the intrinsic limitations induced by the programming mathematics or the computing logarithms. The list of the literary works generated by ChatGPT or RNN (Recurrent Neural Network) is constantly diversifying, covering a quite surprising area of topics, from *I The Road* (2017), a computerised rewriting of the famous novel *On the Road* belonging to Jack Kerouac, to *The Serious: A Proven Divorce*, a hybrid, nonsensical text generated in 2019 by the linguistic model *char-rnn-tensorflow*. We even have a Sci-Fi eschatology model about the various ways Artificial Intelligence can finish our lives (*50 Ways AI Would End the World*), while another intriguing scenario is *The Inner Life of an AI: A Memoir* (2022), about the subtle way Artificial Intelligence submerges into its subconscious in order to perform a self-analysis. My paper focuses on technicalities, controversies and validations issued by the classical criteria of the famous "Turing Test", several of them being recalled in *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*, a famous Japanese experiment completed in 2015, which summarizes the adventure of asking a system named *GhostWriter* to write two literary texts subsequently submitted for the Hoshi Sinichi Prize, a competition open for both human and non-human writers.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, virtual literature, AI literary works, non-human writer, ChatGPT.

CĂRȚI SCRISE DE CĂTRE INTELIGENȚA ARTIFICIALĂ.
METODOLOGIE, REUȘITE NOTABILE, DILEME
(Rezumat)

Operele literare scrise de către *Inteligența Artificială* reprezintă, pe moment, un pariu al viitorului, însă există deja câteva reușite notorii, numărul lor sporind simultan cu multitudinea de întrebări și dileme generate de către acest fenomen, situat la intersecția dintre utopia de a-i conferi „autoarei” o libertate deplină și limitările inerente impuse de logaritmii de programare computerizată. În continuă creștere, lista de cărți generate cu ajutorul unor programe precum ChatGPT sau RNN (Recurrent Neural Network), conține o surprinzător de mare varietate de texte, de la *I The Road* (2017), replică la faimosul roman *On the Road* al lui Jack Kerouac, la texte abstruze, lipsite de sens gramatical sau ideologic, cum e *The Serious: A Proven Divorce* (2019), generat de modelul lingvistic *char-rnn-tensorflow*. Există chiar și o eschatologie SF privind modul în care Inteligența Artificială ar putea distruge lumea (*50 Ways AI Would End The World*), incitantă fiind și autoanaliza pe care și-o face IA în *The Inner Life of an AI: A Memoir* (2022). Lucrarea de față își propune să focalizeze asupra câtorva aspecte tehnice, controversate sau validări bazate pe „testul Turing”, textul de referință constituindu-l un experiment japonez din 2015, intitulat *The Day a Computer Writes a Novel*, care constituie experiența generării a două texte cu ajutorul programului *GhostWriter*, propuse pentru Premiul Hoshi Sinichi, deschis și scriitorilor non-umani.

Cuvinte-cheie: Inteligența Artificială, literatura virtuală, texte literare generate de Inteligența Artificială, scriitor non-uman, ChatGPT.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS TO DETERMINE THE SEMANTIC VALUES OF “FASHION” IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ROMANIAN NOVEL (1845–1900)

Fashion and Apparel

The Romanian etymon “modă”, translated into English as “fashion”, was first attested in *Anonymus Caransebesiensis, Dictionarium valachico-latinum*¹ – a manuscript in the Romanian language using Latin writing, dated in the first half of the 17th century. According to the *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The Nineteenth Century*², the term “modă” is used by Al. Pelimon in 1853, in the excerpt “young men with fashionable tails”³. The collocation “fashionable” (“de la mode”) is “an old French borrowing corresponding to tastes at a specific moment, used frequently at a given moment, modern”⁴.

At the lexical level, the sartorial terminology is deployed in the Romanian novels of the 19th century, and the hypernym “modă” (“fashion”) becomes a linguistic nucleus around which many layers of significance coagulate. This concept concentrates at a lexical level a universe that immortalizes, as in photography, different semantic levels revealing changes in the social, cultural, economic, and commercial life of the characters in the fictional discourse of the novels.

We prefer the delimitation *fashion in linguistics* – *fashion in apparel* because it illustrates the duality of the concepts that presume an oscillation between the meanings such as imitation – innovation, imitation – differentiation, transition – stability, archaic – modern, evanescence – permanence, predictable – unpredictable, versatile – stable, contingency – necessity, extrinsic – intrinsic. The complementarity of the concepts has at its core a subjective language of tastes and

¹ See DLR – *Dicționarul limbii române* [Dictionary of the Romanian Language], anastatic edition, vol. 9: M, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2010, p. 776.

² See Ștefan Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc: secolul al XIX-lea* [The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The Nineteenth Century], Sibiu, Complexul Național Muzeal ASTRA, 2019, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/mdrr>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

³ See Al. Pelimon, *Hoții și Hagiul* [The Thieves and the Hagglers], 1853, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1853-al-pelimon-hotii-si-hagiul/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

⁴ See DLR, p. 777. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

preferences and of auctorial perceptions of the Romanian novels of the second half of the 19th century. These perceptions are anchored in the social-cultural, economic, commercial, and temporal dimensions, very well represented in these Romanian novels.

Considering the first meaning in *Dicționarul limbii române* [*The Romanian Language Dictionary*], the term "modă" ("fashion") could be slightly pleonastic because it is associated with

dress and the taste for a certain manner of dressing [...] A habit, a collective skill, specific to a certain moment, to a social medium. [...] (Specific) Taste generalizes preference for a certain way of dressing. [...] (Today, seldom; concrete) An object, especially an accessory of (female) dress to wear at a certain time. [...] (Old and regional) A model⁵.

That is why my approach is closer to the definition of the lexeme "modă" as employed by Lorența Popescu in her study *Moda feminină în vocabularul românesc. Secolul al XIX-lea* [*Female Fashion in the Romanian Vocabulary. The 19th Century*]: "European and international social phenomenon referring to a popular dressing style at a certain historical moment and in a certain space"⁶. In *Dicționar de neologisme* [*The Dictionary of Neologisms*], the denomination "modă" is equivalent to the feminine common noun "manieră" ["manner"] and secondly to the variable adjective "trecătoare" ["fleeting"]. We observe that this qualifying adjective has a nuanced connotation of ephemerality, highlighting a subjective perspective which involves the change according to "the tastes of the society": "A fleeting manner of living, thinking, dressing, behaving, according to the tastes of a certain society"⁷. Alina Duduciuc mentions other usages for this term, as well as their equivalence in English: "taste", "style", "appearance", "dress code", "manner"⁸. In fact, for such an archilexeme it is quite hard to find a synonymous equivalent⁹. This means that this is a term whose definition is slippery, and it is as versatile and moody as tastes are.

De gustibus non disputandum, but we can perform a *semic analysis*¹⁰ of the lexeme "modă" ("fashion") in the 19th century Romanian novels. One can not

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 776-778.

⁶ Lorența Popescu, *Moda feminină în vocabularul românesc. Secolul al XIX-lea* [*Female Fashion in the Romanian Vocabulary. The 19th Century*], București, Editura Academiei Române, 2015, p. 36.

⁷ Florin Marcu, *Dicționar de neologisme* [*The Dictionary of Neologisms*], București, Editura Științifică, 1995, p. 210.

⁸ Alina Duduciuc, *Sociologia modei: stil vestimentar și dezirabilitate socială* [*Sociology of Fashion: Clothing Style and Social Desirability*]. Foreword by Septimiu Chelcea, Iași, Institutul European, 2012, p. 59.

⁹ See Popescu, *Moda feminină*.

¹⁰ Ion Coteanu, Lucia Wald (eds.), *Semantică și semiotică* [*Semantics and Semiotics*], București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981, p. 275.

ignore the fact that fashion and dress also have social implications as “social conventions”¹¹, and the lexicon of fashion in garments used in the Romanian novels, with all its terminology, embodies best the dynamic of the lexicon and the evolution of the Romanian language: “The lexicon is the most sensitive part of the changes imposed by social and cultural factors, types of behaviour, etc.”¹².

The attempt to approximate the concept of fashion in relation to that of modernity is aided by the idea of novelty, of the changes produced in society. In sociology at the end of the 19th century, the classic ideas of Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon explain mob behaviour by the law of imitation and by contagion, fashion taking its source from the element of “imitation”: “Like animals, the human being is an imitator. To him, imitation is a necessity, on condition that imitation is at hand; in this imitation, fashion has its origin”¹³.

Furthermore, Matei Călinescu notes the terminological confusion between *fashion* and *modernity*:

The urge to modernize, in cultural terms, is often less concerned with scientific or epistemological questions (though overtly it may be) than with intellectual fashions (though it may indignantly condemn them). In this context, the terminological constellation modernity/modernism/modernization comes close to the false etymology of “modern” which derives it from *modus* (manner, fashion) and, in French, suggests the notion of a close kinship between “moderne” and “mode”¹⁴.

The Concept of Fashion – A Practical Approach Using The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The Nineteenth Century

Our approach pursues the semantic quantitative analysis of the representations of “modă” in the 19th century Romanian literature as revealed by the 157 literary works included in *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel*. The quantitative analysis of the sartorial lexis, more exactly of the occurrences and co-occurrences of the lexeme “modă”, shows new insights: 46 domains of reference, thematic areas different from those mentioned in DLR, 36 new phraseologies with the constituent item “modă”, with semantic equivalences and excerpts from the corpus.

Thus, in the Romanian novels of the 19th century the concept of “modă” refers to the lexico-semantic fields which I will enumerate according to the distribution of data in the order of the occurrences. Most of them refer to apparel, time (the

¹¹ Adina Nanu, *Artă, stil, costum* [Art, Style, Costumes], București, Meridiane, 1976, p. 7.

¹² Coteanu, Wald, *Semantică și semiotică*, p. 276.

¹³ Duduciuc, *Sociologia modei*, p. 74.

¹⁴ Matei Călinescu, “Modernity, Modernism, Modernization: Variations on Modern Themes”, *symplekē*, 1, 1993, 1, p. 16.

contrast past-present and tradition-modernity), the elegance of clothes, behaviour and habits, luxury and wealth, salon talk, expensive furniture, the fashion industry, changes in the family name, foreign languages, the Eastern-Western transition, architecture, and physiognomy. For the comparison of the semantic classes, see **Fig. 1**. The dynamism of the sartorial lexicon in the Romanian novels of the 19th century has provided new insights into the concept of fashion, which presents a colourful palette of different meanings. The lexicographic definition of these meanings imposes further reconstruction of their diverse connotations.

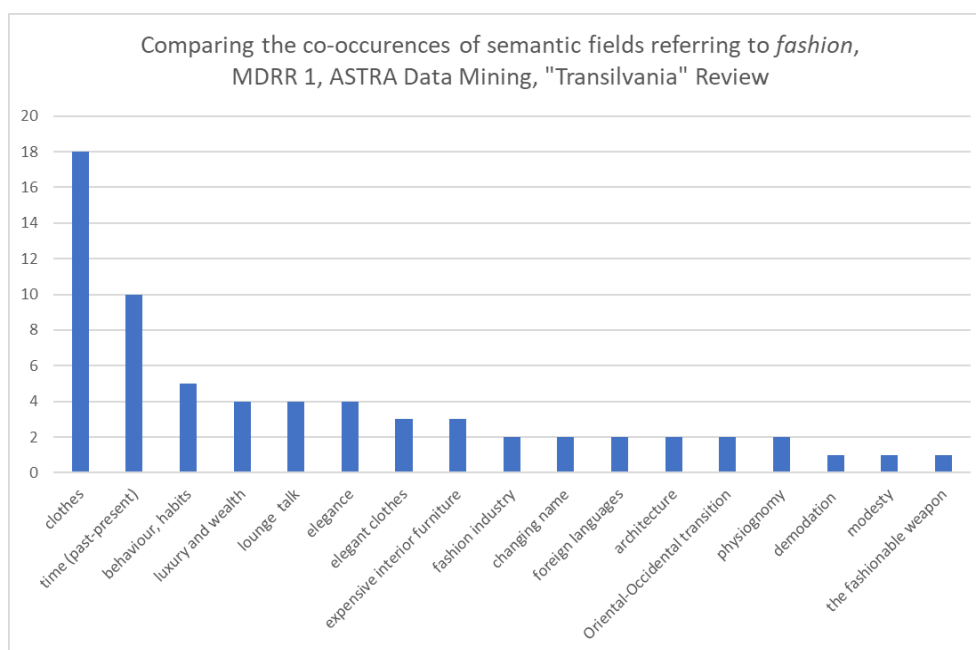


Fig. 1. Comparing the paradigms within the lexical field of fashion in *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The Nineteenth Century (1845-1900)*

Starting from the archive of *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel*, I have investigated linguistic contexts that nuance and complete the lexicographic definition of “modă”. These referents are interesting because they are not recorded in the DLR. I have identified a lexical-semantic field with 31 thematic domains of singular occurrence in context. These semantic areas enrich and enlarge the lexical field of the concept of fashion in Romanian novels as follows: demodulation, modesty and simplicity of the clothes, the fashionable weapon, wear, habit, living, human behaviour, theft, hairstyle, cosmetics, manicure, trendiness, fashionable talk, cleanliness, uselessness, standard beauty, social necessity, emulation and social aspiration, architecture, parties expenditure, the life of the aristocracy in Bucharest, fashionable health resorts, learning, generation gap, marriage

relationship, consum(er)ism, modernity, exclusion of social relations, the fashion of fiancés photography, sports (cycling), coquetry, songs and foreign music, politics. These semantic areas are illustrated in **Fig. 2**.

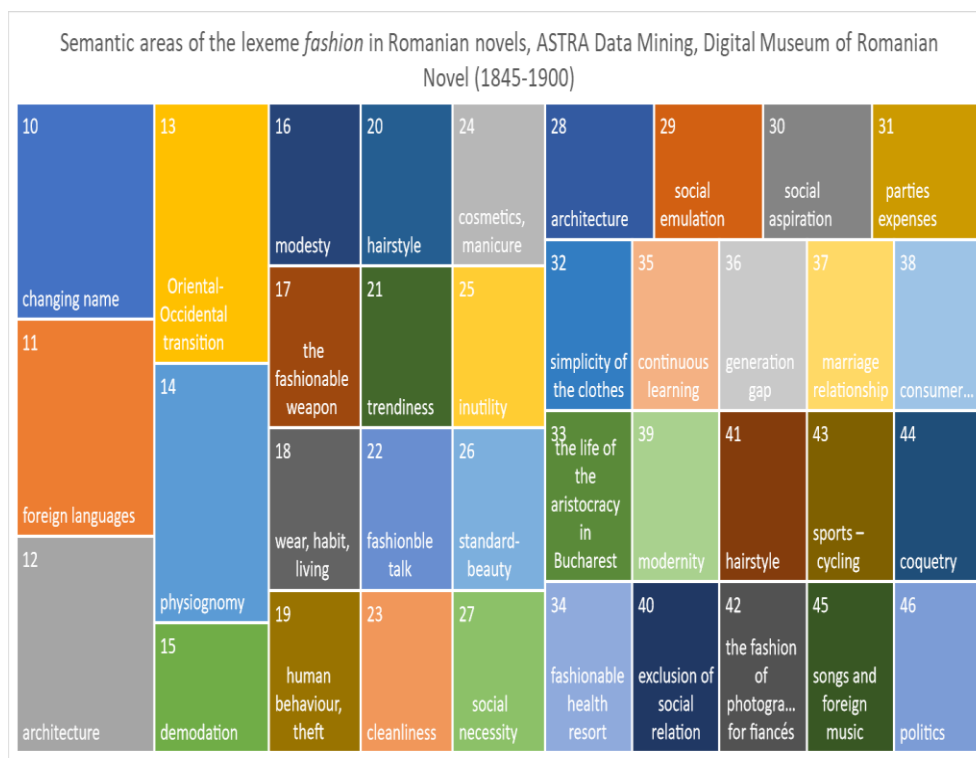


Fig. 2. The lexical field of the lexeme “modă” and its semantic areas in 19th century Romanian novels

The lexeme “modă” is used more frequently towards the end of the 19th century, between 1892-1901, with 51 occurrences, almost 50% of the total. In the novels published between 1879-1892, the frequency of the lexeme is much lower, only 7 occurrences between 1866 and 1879, in 18 contexts, and between 1853-1866, there are 35 examples of contextual usage. Surprisingly, towards the middle of the 19th century, the lexeme “modă” has a larger scale of usage, unlike in the second half of the century. As expected, the novels published at the end of the century opened up the way towards modernity. The *fin de siècle* is marked by changes in mentality in the sense of modernization and emancipation. That is why the descriptive discourse of clothes and the lexicon referring to fashion is imbued by these complex social and cultural changes. As such, the linguistic phenomenon leads to renewal and continuous lexical transformation proven by the numerous phrases with the lexeme constituent “modă” identified in the discourse of the Romanian novels. The interrelation language-reality points out, once again, the dynamics and

the evolution of the vocabulary. The influence of “modă”, an element of the external reality of the fictional characters in the Romanian novels, tends to be reflected by the dialogic, narrative, and descriptive fictional discourse. The concept of “modă” offers an intertwining of semantic levels in the integralist sense of Eugenio Coșeriu¹⁵, that is the lexeme “modă” is part of a vast semantic network, identified and represented in **Fig. 3**.

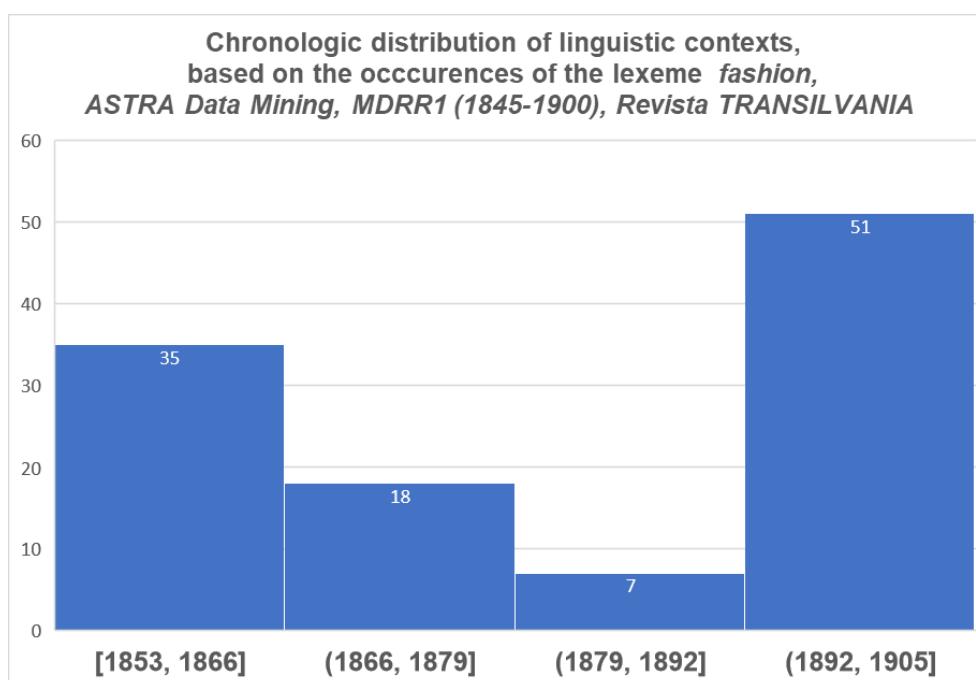


Fig. 3. The chronological distribution of linguistic contexts based on the frequency of the fashion lexeme in Romanian novels

If the “modă” lexicon is seen as a linguistic phenomenon in the Romanian novels, so is “fashion”, a socio-cultural phenomenon. We can say that the latter reflects social and intellectual emancipation as well as the emergence of modernity, the influence of alterity, and a synchronisation with the external world. By performing a quantitative analysis – intended to be qualitative as well – on the digital archive of the 19th century Romanian novels, I noticed the prevalence of the

¹⁵ Eugenio Coșeriu, *Introducere în lingvistică* [Introduction in Linguistics]. Translated by Elena Ardeleanu and Eugenia Bojoga, foreword by Mircea Bercilă, Cluj, Echinox, 1999, p. 58: “Languages constitute, to an extent, autonomous traditions, but at the same time, they are part of a complex network of facts and traditions of extralinguistic nature. Languages exist and develop as structural relationships, but in relation with other phenomena of spiritual and social order: language is intrinsic to social life, to civilization, to arts, thinking development, politics, etc.”.

usage of “modă” in the dialogic discourse of the characters. This states *in nuce* the effervescent substance of modernity and the character’s desire for social emancipation.

Fashion and the Negative Connotations of Clothes

As a result of performing a quantitative linguistic analysis using the subcorpus of 456 contexts for the usage of lexeme “modă”, I have found that 31 of the linguistic contexts offer negative connotations, which represents almost 67% of contexts with negative semantic value. Fashion is not accepted and not embraced by fictional characters, and this precaution is reflected even in the authorial attitude. Due to mentality, cultural education, axiological values, moral principles, and the difference between appearance and essence, the term “modă” attracts several negative connotations that can be associated with the following meanings:

- a. uselessness, ephemerality, fleeting illusions; superficiality; betrayal of expectations; caprices; (G. Baronzi, Ermali);
- b. bragging; frenzy of luxury; “the mania of elegant clothes, spending money on things of no positive value, on fashion and on deceitful appearances” (Pantazi Ghica);
- c. “pretensions to be part of the civilized Europe” (Alexandru Cantacuzino);
- d. removal of traditions, beliefs and customs (B.P. Hasdeu, Duiliu Zamfirescu);
- e. mottling by diversity and co-existence of styles, “amalgam of costumes”, the extreme contrast between old fashion and current fashion (Al Pelimon, Aurel Iorgulescu);
- f. desuetude, running out of fashion, old age (Duiliu Zamfirescu, Gh. Marinescu);
- g. the linguistic snobbery – boyars who have “forgotten the Romanian language” (Simeon Bălănescu);
- h. moral decay, selfishness, extravagance, immoral behaviour, enormous expenses on luxury, parties, gambling, balls, feasts, and fornication (Pantazi Ghica, Ermali, Aurel Iorgulescu, N. Rădulescu-Niger, Alexandru Antemireanu)
- i. fashion is capricious, tyrannical (Ermali), ruinous (Gh. Marinescu);
- j. the desire to emulate, to impress the elite, to win in relationships (Ermali, Theocar Alexi)

Upon comparing the novels digitized in *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel* with DCRR – *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel*¹⁶, I noticed

¹⁶ DCRR – *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.

that a significant number of works featuring the idea of fashion tend, perhaps not coincidentally, to fall within the subgenre of the romance novel (Ermali, Theocar Alexi, Pantazi Ghica, Al. Pelimon, Aurel Iorgulescu). Thus, the effervescence of Western fashion represents a shift in human behaviour, moving the focus from pragmatism to superficiality, signalling a profound change that involves the abandonment of tradition and traditional beliefs. The transition from the old to the new is met with scepticism, as it signifies a departure from established customs, faith, and a way of life shaped by significant hardship.

The negative connotation is further emphasized by Al. Pelimon through his ironic and critical phrase – “not to be one of those who kneel at the altar of models”, which contrasts a simple, modest style of dress, one that has no connection to fashion, yet is paradoxically impoverished:

His clothes revealed that he was not one of those who kneel at the altar of fashion; in a simpler, but cleaner manner, he presented himself as a philosopher who, by claiming to cherish everything, hides his poverty and the truth that he lives by God's mercy¹⁷.

Another negative aspect of “modă” is highlighted by Alecu Cantacuzino in the dialogue of the characters in *Serile de toamnă la țară* [*Autumn Evenings in the Countryside*], where the narrator ironically points out the Moldavian who claims westernization through fashion, merely by changing his attire. The transition from the Oriental dress, with *ishlic* and *kaftan*, to the European style is portrayed as an impossibility. The simultaneous curiosity about and resistance to the new reinforce the idea of the distinction between appearance and essence, as replacing the Oriental outfit with the Western one reflects a desire for recognition and acceptance in “Europa ținută” (civilized Europe)¹⁸.

In another novel, fashion is depicted as representing fleeting illusions, a form of futility. One character's statement – “your merits will remain as a commodity that is not in demand or as a garment out of fashion” show the transience of achievements gained through career efforts, an analogy being drawn with the uselessness of a product that no longer appeals to anyone or a coat that has lost its originality¹⁹.

At the end of the nineteenth century, German clothes are the sign of a parvenu. The variety and diversity of styles, the “amalgam of dress styles”²⁰ gives rise to

¹⁷ Pelimon, *Hoții și Hagiul*.

¹⁸ Alecu Cantacuzino, *Serile de toamnă la țară* [*Autumn Evenings in the Countryside*], 1855, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1855-1973-alexandru-cantacuzino-serile-de-toamna-la-tara/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

¹⁹ G. Baronzi, *Confidențele unui om de inimă* [*Confidences of a Good Hearted Man*], 1895, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1895-g-baronzi-confesiunile-unui-om-de-inima/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

²⁰ A. Pelimon, *Catastrofa întâmplată boierilor în muntele Găvanul – 1821* [*The Catastrophe that Befell the Boyars on Mount Gavanul – 1821*], 1864, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului*

amazement. The transition from the Romanian folk costume to Western clothing is viewed ironically in the middle of the nineteenth century: “They made them throw their ancient national costume and put on foreign garments that can be called long tails and short minds”²¹.

After identifying, in the corpus of 157 novels, 36 phrases built with the basic term fashion, I tried to find a certain common denominator by dividing them chronologically, by the year of publication of the novels, as follows:

- a) mid-Nineteenth Century (1853–1868),
- b) the second half of the nineteenth century (1870–1881),
- c) late nineteenth Century (1881–1900).

After carrying out this periodization, I thought it necessary to classify the identified phrases, those constituted with the fashion lexical support, according to the criteria of positive semantic values (+) or negative semantic values (-). That is, I considered the antinomic semantic relations modern-obsolete, current-old, new-old, elegant-neglective. These dual semantic oppositions are implicit in the concept of fashion because, with Heraclitus’ aphorism in mind, fashion is subject to perpetual change, meaning that whatever is novel in the present is becoming obsolete fast, whatever is fashionable becomes old-fashioned, this continuous process of change obeying the inexorable laws of time.

The outcome of the research conducted this experiment was as anticipated, based on the hypothesis that, in the mid-nineteenth century, the concept of “modă” was synonymous with novelty, starting with the introduction of fashion in clothing, indicating what is modern and impressive in appearance²².

Conclusions

The concept of “modă” has a wide lexical representation in the discourse of the 19th century Romanian novels, as proved by the 46 paradigms in the lexical field of “modă” and the 28 phrases in use. Starting with the last five decades of the 19th century, fashion in clothing best reflects the mentalities, habits and behaviours of the characters who, out of a desire for social emulation or social emancipation, want to be fashionable. Fashion in clothing or appearance is associated with coquetry and social emancipation. Fashion best illustrates the East-West transition,

Românesc, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/1864.-Al.-Pelimon-1821-1921-.pdf>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

²¹ Ioan Dumitrescu, Radu Buzescu, 1858, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1858-ioan-dumitrescu-radu-buzesku/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

²² See also Daiana Gărdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern* [Between Worlds. The Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System], Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023.

even if the luxury, elegance and richness of apparel show the discrepancy of classes in the social hierarchy.

In Romanian novels, fashion is predominantly associated with negative connotations (about 67%), reflecting the characters' resistance to change. The latest trends are often linked to high costs, significant time spent on preparing outfits, shifting morals, and the idea of obsolescence.. The numerous paradigms within the lexical field of fashion reflect the interdisciplinarity of the fashion concept.

Additionally, I have examined those linguistic contexts that refine or expand the lexicographic definition of "modă". Many of these instances are unique occurrences, which are particularly interesting as they reveal societal transformations both synchronically and diachronically. These contexts are absent from the DLR, such as the beauty standard, emulation and social aspiration, consumption/consumerism, social exclusion, generational conflict, marriage dynamics, sport (cycling), politics, and more.

Another prominent theme is the equation of "modă" with novelty. For instance, phrases incorporating the basic term "modă" from the mid-19th century (1853–1868), as they appear in the narrative, dialogic, and descriptive discourse of the novels by Al Pelimon, Em. Arghiropol, Pantazi Ghica, and Ioan M. Bujoreanu, effectively reflect the transfer of Western fashion into both the language and social life of the characters. I can even say that following trends is actively encouraged. Moreover, these phrases define the novelty of the concept of "modă" by using the relative superlative of superiority form of the adjective "new" – "the newest fashion" or the adjectival construction "the latest fashion": "Sporea arrived dressed according to the newest Western fashion"²³.

During this period of Romanian novel production, the phrases found in Al Pelimon's novels mirror the characters' desire for social emancipation. For example, many phrases carry a positive semantic value, linked to the "modă" of what is modern or current in clothing, but also civilized in the way of living, habits and attitude, as well as in civilized ways of living, habits, and attitudes. From the author's perspective, fashion is portrayed as an element of modernity in daily life, serving as a significant marker in itself. Notably, out of the 13 phrases used within the specified time frame (1853–1868), only two carry a negative semantic connotation. These are due to the presence of the negative particle "not being too fashionable" (indicating obsolescence) and "not going out of fashion" (referring to a persistent habit, particularly in the context of marital conflict).

One should not ignore the influence of the French "mode" since 1853. Al. Pelimon's novel *The Thieves and the Haggler*, written in a transitional alphabet, mentions the important role the French have in introducing the fashionable ladies

²³ Pelimon, *Catastrofa întâmplată boierilor*.

to the latest fashion in apparel. It is not so much imitation or loan that is the cause of the fashion phenomenon, as the fact that fashion is brought into fashion shops in the urban environment. The attitude reflected by the speech of both author and characters in the Romanian mid-century novel is that of searching and validating the novelty and trends in apparel. “The fashion of the time”, “the fashion of the day”, and “the latter fashion” are syntagma that do not refer to a well-defined external time sequence²⁴.

Next in the chronology, the 6 phrases identified in the novels of Pelimon, N.D. Popescu and Nicolae D. Xenopol in the second half of the 19th century (1870–1881) have positive semantic values, which allows us to interpret them as an attitude of acceptance of fashion within the temporal historical frame (as in the historical episode about the ruler Matei Basarab), but also with extravagant episodes as identified in the expressive superlative “king of fashion”²⁵.

The novels published in the late 19th century (1881–1900) set up the most consistent uses of “modă”, with authors such as G. Baronzi, N. Rădulescu-Niger, Traian Demetrescu, Const. I. A. Notara, N.D. Popescu, Petru Vulcan, Gh. Marinescu, Al. Pelimon, Ermali, Alexandru Vlahuță, Simeon Bălănescu. Surprisingly, of the 16 phrases, 10 carry negative semantic values. The meanings coagulated around them are related to uselessness, obsolescence, the impression created by external appearance, the extreme concern for clothing, the costs of being fashionable. The quintessence of modernity in fashion is eloquently illustrated in phraseology. To enter the contest of fashion means to be very modern²⁶.

I asked myself why 19 phrases with negative semantic values dominate the end-of-century novels. The answer I can provide, after consulting DCRR, is that examples with negative semantic values appear mostly in the so-called novels of manners. I can take as an example *Viorica* by Ermali, in which the antagonism between the main characters, Elena and Viorica, where the latter takes over the capital city, leading the kind of worldly life that leads to moral degradation. The character Viorica is concerned about popular morality, about what people will say, which explains the extreme interest the novel shows in “staying abreast of fashion and following it in all its extravagance”²⁷. The concept of “modă” accumulates many negative meanings in this novel. In the 19th-century Romanian novels,

²⁴ See also Radu Vancu et al., “Temporalitatea internă a romanului românesc (1844–1932)” [“The Internal Temporality of the Romanian Novel (1844–1932)”], *Transilvania*, 2020, 10, pp. 22–32.

²⁵ Nicolae D. Xenopol, *Brazi și putregaiu. Moravuri provinciale române* [Fir Trees and Putrefaction. Romanian Provincial Manners], 1881, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1880-1881-n-d-xenopolu-brazi-si-putregaiu/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

²⁶ Gh. Marinescu, *Florea și Jeana*, 1898, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1898-gh-marinescu-florea-si-jeana/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

²⁷ Ermali, *Viorica*, 1898, in Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc*, <https://revistatransilvania.ro/1898-ermali-viorica/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

fashion is capricious, it costs a lot and leads to moral degradation. I believe that the authorial attitude, critical to "modă", is a moralizing one, pointing the finger at the superficiality of an appearance acquired by "the irreproachable luster of the top hat and the fashionable tint of the gloves"²⁸.

Last, but not least, the concept of "modă" in the Romanian novels of mid-19th century can be considered a linguistic and cultural indicator of modernity, imitation, import, transition and transnationalism.

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²⁸ *Ibidem*.

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QUANTITATIVE METHODS TO DETERMINE THE SEMANTIC VALUES
OF “FASHION” IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ROMANIAN NOVEL
(1845–1900)
(Abstract)

The purpose of this paper is to perform a semantic micro-analysis of the term “fashion” as it appears in the nineteenth-century Romanian novel. The research employs digital techniques and focuses on the corpus supplied by *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The Nineteenth Century*. This study posits that the prevalent lexeme “fashion”, as manifested in both narrative and dialogical discourses, encapsulates the effervescent substance of modernity and reflects the character’s aspiration for social emancipation. Through a quantitative analysis of the frequency of the recurrent term “fashion” within a sub-corpus of 46 illustrative contextual excerpts, this study determines that the semantic associations of fashion predominantly evoke negative connotations. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that over 60% of the negative connotations associated with the concept of “fashion” are representative of the novels of manners.

Keywords: nineteenth-century Romanian novel, semantic analysis, fashion, novel subgenres, digital techniques.

METODE CANTITATIVE PENTRU DELIMITAREA VALORILOR
SEMANTICE ALE „MODEI” ÎN ROMANUL ROMÂNESC DIN SECOLUL
AL XIX-LEA (1845–1900)

(Rezumat)

Scopul acestei lucrări este de a efectua o micro-analiză semantică a termenului „modă” așa cum apare în romanul românesc din secolul al XIX-lea. Cercetarea folosește tehnici digitale și se concentrează pe corpus constituie de *ASTRA Data Mining: Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc din Secolul al XIX-lea (1845–1900)*. Acest studiu pornește de la ipoteza că lexemul „modă”, așa cum se manifestă atât în discursurile narative, cât și în cele dialogale, încapsulează substanța efervescentă a modernității și reflectă aspirația personajelor către emancipare socială. Printr-o analiză cantitativă a frecvenței termenului recurent „modă” în cadrul unui sub-corpus de 46 de fragmente contextuale ilustrative, acest studiu demonstrează că asociațiile semantice ale modei evocă predominant conotații negative. În plus, este de remarcat faptul că peste 60% dintre conotațiile negative asociate conceptului de „modă” sunt reprezentative pentru romanele de moravuri..

Cuvinte-cheie: romanul românesc din secolul al XIX-lea, analiză semantică, modă, subgenuri ale romanului, metode digitale.

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 it¹. 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 time², even though these novels often display

¹ 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.

² 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"³. 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"⁴, are only "political" in theme, but can be assimilated to the social or historical novel⁵.

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 Marcea⁶), 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"⁷.

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,

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

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ See Marcea, "Romanul politic".

⁷ 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 species⁸.

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* alone⁹.

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

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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 Review*, 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)¹⁰: 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 error¹¹. 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

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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 itself¹². 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”¹³, thus performing a “strategic and collective”¹⁴ 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?”¹⁵

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 practice¹⁶: 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”¹⁷.

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

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

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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 puzzle¹⁸.

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”¹⁹, 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 production²⁰. On this account, a study by Ștefan Baghiu not only nuances what we

¹⁸ Rogozanu, *Naratorul cel rău*, p. 281.

¹⁹ 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 Gărdan’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.

²⁰ 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 framework²¹. 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”²². 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”²³, will be welcomed with interest in the Romanian context.

²¹ 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”.

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

²³ 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 Jassyensis*, 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.

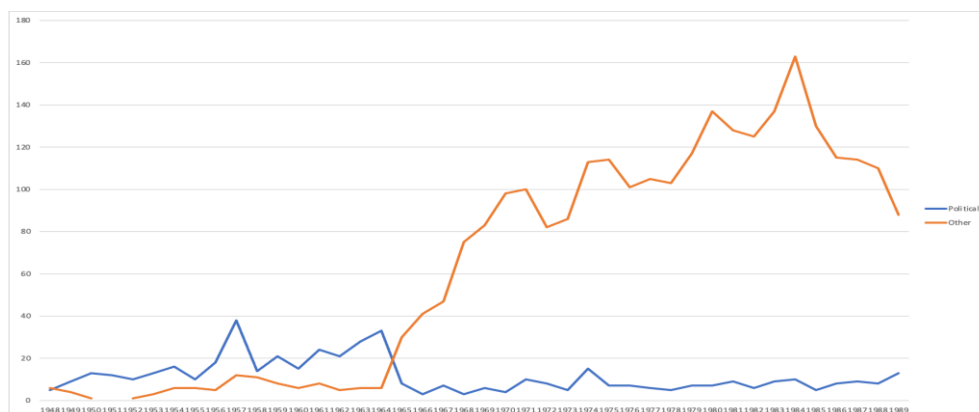


Fig. 1. The evolution of political genres (1948–1989)

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”²⁴ 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 novel²⁵, 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)²⁶, 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 total²⁷.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ Terian, “Big Numbers”, pp. 64–65.

²⁶ See Bud, “The Romanian Novels”, p. 202: “The critical claims according to which the 8th 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”.

²⁷ 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

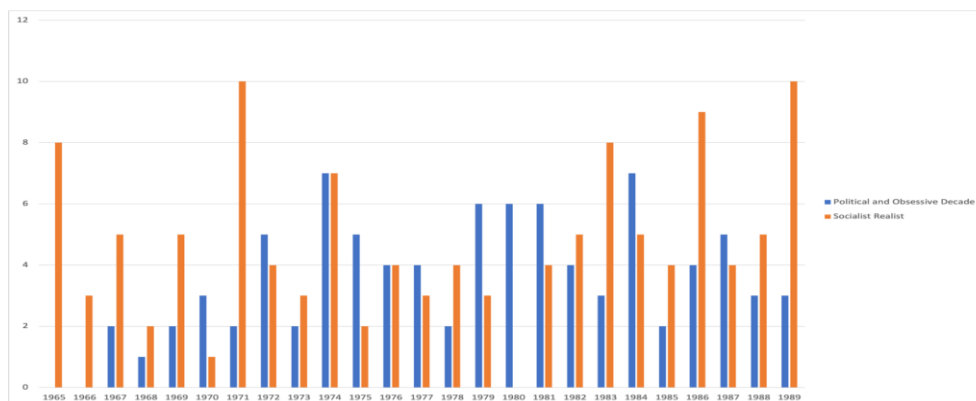


Fig. 2. Socialist Realist Novels vs. Political and “Obsessive Decade” Novels between 1965 and 1989

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 latter²⁸.

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.

²⁸ 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 output²⁹ – 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 total³⁰.

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 sense³¹, 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.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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).

³¹ 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.

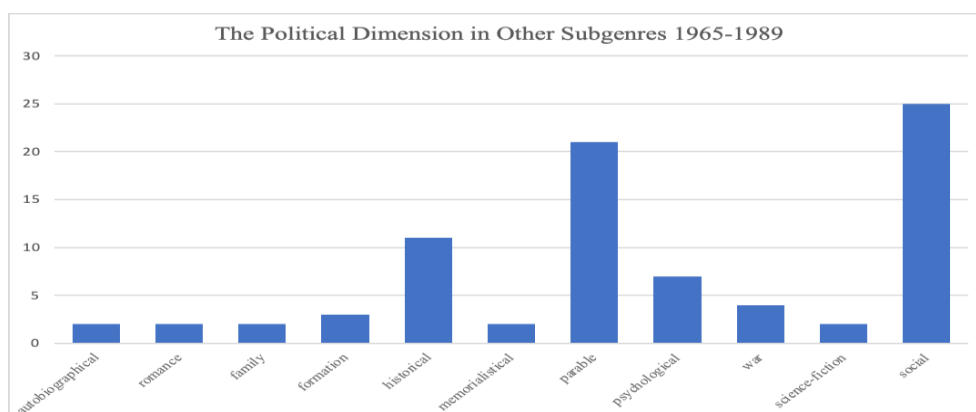


Fig. 3. Main subgenres with political elements and implications (1965–1989)³²

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%)³³.

³² The graph displays only those categories represented by more than one novel.

³³ 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 novel³⁴. 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 1979³⁵, 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"³⁶. The main thematic declinations of the 1950s are continued: we have the novels about WWII and the struggles of the illegal

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.

³⁴ See Laura Pavel, "A Fictionalist of the 1960s–70s – the 'Total' Novelist", *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2021, 8, pp. 91-105.

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

³⁶ 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 Țărălungă.

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, *Şantierul* [*The Building Site*] (1988) by Tudor Băran, *Beton şi Pâine* [*Concrete and Bread*] (1989) by Ion Dianu, and *Trepte* [*Stairs*] (1989) by Florin Logreşteanu.

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 event³⁷: *Zi de vară până-n seară* [*Summer Day till Evening*] (1966) by Marin Bucur, *Bănuiala* [*The Hunch*] (1973) by Chiril Tricolici, *Neîmpăcaţi 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 Pereş.

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 *Viaţa 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

³⁷ 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 Ştefan 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 dimineată 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"³⁸.

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

³⁸ Valentin Tașcu, "Dumitru Popescu, *Pumnul și palma, I. O dimineată 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”³⁹. 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 *Rănila 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”⁴⁰. 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

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

⁴⁰ Mircea Popa, “Corneliu Leu, *Rănila 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 *Păsările* [*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”⁴¹. 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

⁴¹ 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”⁴², 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 Bud⁴³, 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 Chioresanu.

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 individuals⁴⁴.

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

⁴³ See Bud, “The Romanian Novels”, pp. 204-ss.

⁴⁴ 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"⁴⁵. 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

⁴⁵ 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”⁴⁶. 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.

⁴⁶ 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.

THE ADVENTURE NOVEL – DEVALUATION AND REVALUATION OF THE ADVENTURE: *GALLANTS OF THE OLD COURT*

A literary survey initiated, in 2001, on the topic of the 20th-century Romanian novel by one of the premier Romanian literary magazines, *Observator cultural*, to which 102 literary critics and historians of diverse generations (of the 150 ones invited) responded, ranked Mateiu I. Caragiale's novel *Craii de Curtea-Veche* [*Gallants of the Old Court*] (1929) as the best 20th-century Romanian novel, much to the surprise of the magazine's editorial team (and not only). Such reports the editorial:

The winner of the contest is somewhat surprising, considering that *Craii de Curtea-Veche* is a marginal novel, rather than a very famous one. What may have contributed to this ranking is the fact that since his author had penned no other novels, the votes did not get "dissipated" as it happened with Camil Petrescu (in whose case the votes for *Patul lui Procust* [*The Bed of Procrustes*] and *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [*The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*] together count for more than those for *Craii...*), Rebreanu and Sadoveanu¹.

Of course, this vote hardly ranks *Craii de Curtea-Veche* as a popular novel, at least because the relatively few (102) voters in the Republic of Letters do not aim at democracy. Rather, they are members of an exclusive interpretive community comprised of those who read so as to write about books or to study literature – anyway, of cognoscenti of the literary phenomenon with a culturally-informed literary taste. Accordingly, the survey results owed to the refinement of the literary elite. Even so, the surprise articulated in the aforesaid editorial, with its quantitative-speculative justifications, relates to an unexpected hierarchical relationship whose well-known logic of the literary canon – as articulated by luminaries such as G. Călinescu or Nicolae Manolescu – is challenged, to the effect that the "margin" replaces the "centre".

Yet, what is a widely famous novel? Is it also a popular novel? For a novel like Mihail Sadoveanu's *Creanga de aur* [*The Golden Bough*] (1933) is neither renowned, nor popular, whereas some others of his novels – such as *Frații Jderi* [*The Jderi Brothers*], I–III (1935–1942) and *Neamul Șoimăreștilor* [*The Șoimaru Clan*] (1915) – are both. Sadoveanu debuted with popular novels – historical

¹ ***, "Romanul românesc al secolului XX" ["The 20th-century Romanian Novel"], *Observator cultural*, 2001, nr. 45-46, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/romanul-romanesc-al-secolului-xx/>. Accessed November 25, 2024.

novels whose protagonists are virtually epic heroes – and thus with superior paraliterature. Likewise, can Camil Petrescu's *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* (1930) be regarded as a famous novel? It wasn't in the age, as its author was by far outclassed by other two novelists, Ionel Teodoreanu and Cezar Petrescu, who enjoyed wide popularity. Notwithstanding, Camil Petrescu retains, in the title of his novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia nopate de război*, a melodramatic echo of the popular novel which suggests a two-pronged bias towards adventure through the heroic and the erotic enterprises. The popular novel of the 19th century forks into two subgenres, the mystery novel and the highwayman novel, the former an imported subgenre and the latter autochthonous to a large extent, despite the existence of prestigious models in European culture².

Anyway, the popular novel emerged on the stage of the Romanian novel as a precursor of the adventure novel. Although not clearly defined, the “marginality” of Mateiu I. Caragiale's novel as identified by the anonymous article published in the *Observator cultural* may also be reappraised in the novel in a special way: that of opening up the horizon of possibility within this novel in relation to other types of novels which it foreshadows. Such are the decadent novel³, the novel of manners, the mystery novel, the bohemian novel and so on. G. Călinescu could barely classify Caragiale's novel within the plethora of interwar novels and ascribed it to surrealism⁴ – even as surrealists detested it – after having noticed, nevertheless, the authenticity of its *écriture* and its use of typologies. If anything, the latter feature, however, is peculiar to the realist and popular novels.

In the footsteps of G. Călinescu, Nicolae Manolescu writes, in *Istoria critică a literaturii române* [*The Critical History of Romanian Literature*], on the aesthetic pose peculiar to the writer's counterfeit nobility, but also on how this aspect pervades the novel proper as a stylistic feature. Manolescu regards *Craii de Curtea-Veche* as “a novel of imagination” having its roots in symbolist-decadent aesthetics, where decadence is actually poised polemically against the classicism of Mateiu's father, playwright and prose writer I.L. Caragiale, against the background of an unresolved oedipal conflict⁵.

² See Roxana Patras, “CARTA ALBĂ a proiectului POPLITE” [“White Paper of POPLITE Project”], Zenodo, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7360195>. See also Roxana Patras et al., “Corpus Pop-Lite”, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13771810>. Accessed November 25, 2024.

³ I addressed this aesthetic feature of the novel *in extenso* in *Mateiu I. Caragiale: fizionomii decadente* [*Mateiu I. Caragiale: Decadent Physiognomies*], București, Editura ICR, 2007, and in *Decadență și decandentism în contextul romanului românesc și european* [*Decadence and Decadentism in the Romanian and European Novel*], București, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2011.

⁴ G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*The History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present*]. Edited by Al. Piru, București, Minerva, 1988.

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

The term “adventure” – “high life adventure” – appears in relation to his letters to N.A. Boicescu and the bohemian lifestyle of the young Mateiu⁶. He relished sharing, in minute tantalising detail, his erotic conquests and also his ambitious ploys typical of a young arriviste who emulated the protagonist of Félicien Champsaur’s novel *L’Arriviste*⁷. To revert to G. Călinescu and his monumental history, the term “adventure” appears in another chapter, “Momentul 1933. Filozofia ‘neliniștii’ și a ‘aventurii’. Literatura ‘experiențelor’” [“The Year 1933. The Philosophy of ‘Unrest’ and ‘Adventure’. The Prose of ‘Experiences’”]⁸, and names, particularly with regard to Mircea Eliade, the “experimentalism” of Gide-inspired protagonists beyond good and evil. The scare quotes used by Călinescu indicate the re-signifying of the term within the context of modernity, but also within that of a generation eager to explore new intensities. For this generation, any hubris, eroticism, misfitting, revolt could foster adventure.

In the novelistic genre, the meaning of adventure shifts permanently: from libertine adventures to chivalrous, picaresque and swashbuckling ones, to exploration adventures, mystery-ridden adventures and detective ones, among many others. Every age has its novelistic subgenres which redefine or merely recycle the notion of adventure and propose a new series of emblematic, memorable characters, as well as ephemeral ones. All of Mateiu I. Caragiale’s oeuvre, but in particular his only novel, *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, includes the novel of adventures within its horizon of possibility, in concentrated, embryonic-synthetic form, and thus suspends its elaboration. In his short story *Remember* (1921), in the stories published collectively as *Sub pecetea tainei* [*Under the Seal of Mystery*]⁹ and also in *Craii...* the memory of the adventure novel is retained in the form of typical formulas; there is also an indirect reflection on the relationship between adventure and the novel, about the latter’s creation through the selections from both life and history made by the author. Thus, Caragiale’s works offer a new perspective on the adventure novel as exhaustless resource and also on moving up to a new level where adventure gains an ontologic and identity-related dimension – of knowledge – as Georg Simmel¹⁰, Vladimir Jankélévitch¹¹ and Giorgio Agamben¹² propose.

⁶ See Mateiu I. Caragiale, *Opere* [Works]. Edited by Barbu Cioculescu, preface by Eugen Simion, București, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2001, pp. 522-525.

⁷ Félicien Champsaur, *L’Arriviste*, Éditeur Albin Michel, Paris, 1902.

⁸ Călinescu, *Istoria*, p. 947.

⁹ Mateiu I. Caragiale, *Sub pecetea tainei* [*Under the Seal of Mystery*]. Edited by Marian Papahagi, preface by Nicolae Manolescu, postface by Ion Vartic, Cluj-Napoca, Echinoc, 1994.

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, “The Adventurer”, in James F. Cosgrave (ed.), *The Sociology of Risk and Gambling Reader*, New York–London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 215-224.

¹¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L’aventure, l’ennui, le sérieux*. Présentation et bibliographie par Laure Barillas, Pierre-Alban Guinfolleau et Frédéric Worms, Paris, Flammarion, 2017.

¹² Giorgio Agamben, *L’aventure*. Traduit de l’italien par Joël Gayraud, Paris, Rivages Poche Petite Bibliothèque, 2016.

Reading Adventure: Between Mobility and Immobility

The adventure novel, with its subgenres such as the swashbuckler and the mystery novel, evokes the paraliterature accrued in thick layers and offers each generation of readers a fictional range of infinite possibilities of existence beyond the predictable confines of a monotony derived from the bourgeois desire for advantageous social status. On the other hand, it also evokes a space–time of entertainment, easy escapism, consumerism, a holiday-like suspension of responsibility which also integrates the very act of reading. Adventure is always elsewhere, far away, and the act of reading establishes a delightful contrast between carefree immobility and danger, between the reader's assumed relaxation and the excessive mobility of adventure as the tireless force which drives the characters from one event to another.

Accordingly, reading an adventure novel engenders the coexistence of this comfortable passivity and breathtaking dynamic, hence the peculiar feel of the adventure that is read about rather than lived – the “aesthetic adventure”, in Vladimir Jankélévich's terms. Anyway, adventure belongs to a delightful, if minor, register that is related, at the same time, to impossibility and to a dissociation from reality; this is so not because adventure belonged to the fantastic, but rather because it seems to belong pre-eminently to fiction, more so than anything else does. To live “an adventure”, or, to state it otherwise, “a novel”, places us in a special niche of the unfamiliar, the exceptional, the extraordinary.

Thus, existence encounters this aesthetic sublimation characteristic of fiction, shares in its contradiction, impossibility and unpredictability. Paradoxically, though, the valorisation of an existence lived as adventure-qua-exceptional-living indicates a devaluation of adventure as an event severed from the everyday, from reality, from truth. Only some lives are set apart as exceptional in this respect; this badge of the extraordinary is reserved for professional adventurers and “heroes”. The majority “lives” the adventure by proxy, through the mediation of fiction – where adventure now dwells, in a space of the. Accordingly, adventure can only be recovered from the particular world of fiction; it *is* fiction in a sense which actualizes simultaneously its peculiar implausibility and a horizon of improbable possibilities which can nonetheless be visited in the play of the mind and of imagination. Adventure is pre-eminently of the book: it unfolds within the book as a play of an imagination freed from any constraint. It also indicates the full-fledged mobility of the novel, its freedom to distance itself from the goal assumed in the 19th century, by the great realist novelists, to reflect the world as it appears, a notion best encapsulated in Stendhal's metaphor of the mirror carried along the road.

This study offers a perspective on the valorisation and devaluation of adventure and of the adventurer in modernity by analysing some reflections on adventure by philosophers – not literati – such as Georg Hegel, Georg Simmel,

Vladimir Jankélévich and Giorgio Agamben. Except for Georg Simmel, all the others resort to literature to deduce various meanings of adventure: they regard it, due to its fictional re-emergence, as “the event of the word” (Giorgio Agamben), as “aesthetic adventure” (Vladimir Jankélévich) and as an expression of romanticism (Georg Hegel). The second part of this study examines the condensation of adventure to its essentials in Mateiu I. Caragiale’s novel *Gallants of the Old Court* by recourse to, and adapting, some of the above-mentioned philosophers’ observations.

Adventure and the Adventurer: The Radiography of Devaluation and Revalorization

In his essay *L’Aventure*, Giorgio Agamben examines the etymology of the term “adventure” in the context of the Occitan poetry of troubadours and trouvères: the term derives either from *adventus*, which in Christian Latin names the arrival of a prince or even of the Messiah, or from *eventus*, which refers to an unusual fact, a mysterious or miraculous happening, whether positive or negative. Thus, the meaning of “adventure” relates it to chance and fate, to that which occurs unexpectedly and which thereby places the adventurer on a fate-driven trajectory. Adventure paves the way for knowing the world in its arcaneness, yet this knowledge ultimately leads to self-knowledge, which is the ultimate goal of any adventure. Chance and fate work in the unexpected event that confronts the knight with a trial. In Occitan poetry, the verb “trover” is not only the archaic form of the verb “trouver” (to find), but also an element of the Roman poetic jargon, which means “to compose poetry”. The poets call themselves *trobadors* in *langue d’oc*, *trouvères* in *langue d’oïl* and *trovatori* in Italian.

Drawing on this polysemy, Giorgio Agamben notes that *adventure* names equally the events that structure it and their translation into words. Accordingly, adventure constitutes an “event of the word” (*événement de parole*): there are no separate “adventure–event” and “adventure–story”; rather, the truth of adventure is adventure itself, which represents the very arrival of the truth. In his own words: “Aventure et vérité sont indiscernable parce que la vérité advient et que l’aventure n’est que l’advenir de la vérité”¹³.

Thus, starting from the poetry of the medieval troubadours, trouveres and minnesinger, Agamben demonstrates that adventure is always also an adventure of poetry, where the event and the story coincide. In other words, the adventure belongs neither fully within a text, nor fully in a series of extratextual events, but rather in their coincidence. Beyond the poetological value which the Italian philosopher highlights in his medieval corpus, there is also an ontological valorisation of adventure:

¹³ Agamben, *L’aventure*, p. 33.

En tant qu'elle exprime l'unité indiscernable de l'événement et du récit, de la chose et du mot, elle ne peut pas ne pas avoir, au-delà de sa valeur poétologique, un sens proprement ontologique. Si l'être est la dimension qui s'ouvre à l'homme dans l'événement anthropogénétique du langage, si l'être est toujours, selon les mots d'Aristote, quelque chose qui 'se dit', alors l'aventure a certainement à faire avec une expérience déterminée de l'être¹⁴.

Giorgio Agamben dedicates another part of his book to examining the devaluation of adventure in modernity: here adventure loses its value as truth, once it is ascribed exclusively to fiction, namely the arena of the improbable, of uninhibited imagination and of the superficial. Agamben interprets as symptomatic of this devaluation of adventure the chapter dedicated to it by Georg Hegel in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst* [*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*] (1823) and the essay "Philosophie des Abenteuers" ["The Philosophy of Adventurers"] (1910, titled "Das Abenteuer" in *Philosophische Kultur*) by Georg Simmel, where the latter relativizes Hegel's point of view.

In his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel allots an entire subchapter ("Adventures") to adventure. He deduces the meaning of adventure from the examination of romantic art, if by referring to medieval poetry and romance, and identifies Cervantes and Arisophanes as emblematic for such devaluation of chivalric ethos and implicitly of adventure. I will use here the same quotation Agamben offers:

a fundamental characteristic of romantic art is that spirituality, the mind as reflected into itself, constitutes a whole and therefore it is related to the external not as to its own reality permeated by itself, but as to something purely external separated from it, a place where everything goes on released from spirit into independence, and which is a scene of complications and the rough and tumble of an endlessly flowing, mutable, and confusing contingency. For the fixedly enclosed mind, it is just as much a matter of indifference to which circumstances it turns as it is a matter of accident which circumstances confront it¹⁵.

Accordingly, for Hegel adventure is non-spiritual, it is simply external to life, an expression of chance, a series of accidental events which are not structured into and converge on a superior sense. Adventure describes another order of existence, one lacking access to interiority and profundity, severed from domestic routine – a pure expression of the exotic and the extravagant:

Adventure, which provides for the form of events and actions the fundamental type of the romantic, is constituted by this relativity of ends in a relative environment, the specific character and complication of which do not lie in the individual person but are

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁵ Georg Hegel, "Adventures", in *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, vol. I. Translated by T.M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 586.

determined from without and accidentally, and so lead to accidental collisions as the extraordinarily intertwined ramifications of the situation¹⁶.

The decline occurs as much in generic epic terms as in affective terms, since adventure is reported as erotic adventure and characterized by everything peculiar to drama and to the lady's whims, to the moment's moods and to external accidents. For Hegel, erotic adventure remains external to the subject and, if pushed to great lengths, it ends up in debased comic. Such pronouncements bear the authority of the philosopher who erects a system of values, and therefore Hegel represents the turning point of a clear devaluation of adventure, which is now relegated to the position of an eccentric, extravagant deed, outside the pale of ordinary life.

In the essay he dedicates to adventure, "The Philosophy of Adventurers" aka "The Adventurer", Georg Simmel excludes adventure from "the continuity of life"¹⁷ by deeming it something exceptional, different, out of the ordinary: "the most general form of adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life"¹⁸. Adventure breaches the linear course of life by delimiting its own space through a beginning and an end, or a before and an after, clearly marked off, if not through "reciprocal interpenetration with adjacent part of life"¹⁹, thus, adventure gains an autonomy of sorts in relation to the other events. Nonetheless, through a dialectical move, Georg Simmel repatriates adventure to "the whole of our life" or "life-as-a-whole"²⁰, for adventure is "felt as a whole, as an integrated unit"²¹, to the extent to which it is adventure which reorganizes the meaning of life.

Georg Simmel makes two crucial remarks: first, he dissociates adventure from the extraordinary event, with its unfamiliarity and spectacularity. Adventure consists in intensity, rather than in its separation of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Hence two important consequences derive: (1) An extraordinary event cannot constitute an adventure unless it is animated by intensity, by "a certain experiential tension"²², for "the adventure, in its specific nature and charm, is a *form of experiencing*"²³; (2) Contrariwise, a banal, seemingly insignificant event may evolve into an adventure if it is driven by intensity, for the content proper is not decisive: "The *content* of the experience does not make the adventure"²⁴. Adventure is undergirded by intensity, Simmel argues; it does not

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 587.

¹⁷ Simmel, "The Adventurer", p. 215.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 215.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 215, 216: "While it[adventure] falls outside the context of life, it falls, with this same movement, as it were, back into that context again".

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

consist in the event proper, as in the engagement, in a tense dynamic, in what I call a *principle of accentuation*²⁵.

This *principle of accentuation*, and here is Simmel's second major insight, is peculiar to youth. To state it otherwise, the specific regime of adventure is youth, the age which fuels passions, desires, the imagination with all its projections:

In general, only youth knows this predominance of the process of life over its substance; whereas in old age, when the process begins to slow up and coagulate, substance becomes crucial; it then proceeds or perseveres in a certain timeless manner, indifferent to the tempo and passion of its being experienced²⁶. This is how a passion or affections can foster adventure, and a particular age affords the most appropriate context for its completion.

Vladimir Jankélévitch associates adventure, due to its etymology, to the future. Yet, the French philosopher addresses a special question: that of what is the infinitesimal adventure ("l'aventure infinitésimale") or "l'aventure minute" – which he distinguishes from adventure as narrative, as a succession of episodes across a long-time span –, the adventure as advent, in a religious sense, of a mysterious event, "l'avènement d'un événement", "l'avent d'un mystère". However, although he mentions them, Vladimir Jankélévitch does not pursue the religious significance of adventure and the notion of mystery associated to the event, which, as we have seen, Giorgio Agamben focuses on. Jankélévitch analyses exclusively the relationship between adventure and time and the way in which adventure is driven by passion, by pathos. In effect, Jankélévitch returns to the relevance of the religious dimension to adventure when he defines the pathos of adventure in the terms in which Rudolf Otto defines the numinous, in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*²⁷. Writes Jankélévitch: "Par l'aventure l'homme est tenté; car le pathos de l'aventure est un complexe de contradictoires; [...] La tentation de l'aventure est donc la tentation typique"²⁸. Thus, adventure exists outside a life marked by its routine, in an experience of the "sacred within the profane" to use Mircea Eliade's phrase which transpires thanks to its intensity. Anyway, the philosopher focuses his attention on the psychology of the adventurer who starts on an adventure, who experiences the "temptation of adventure". Like for Georg Simmel, for Jankélévitch too adventure generates an intensity – a *vertige*, as he calls it. Jankélévitch proposes an understanding of adventure as a zone of liminality, "être sur le seuil", between play and earnestness, between ethical engagement and aesthetic detachment, between tragedy and – although he does not use the term – comedy, between "without" and "within",

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1950, pp. 12-65.

²⁸ Jankélévitch, *L'aventure*, p. 14.

where the *aventureux* is outside drama, like an *actor*, and also within it as an *agent* “inclus dans le mystère de son propre destin”²⁹.

The regime of adventure is one of vacillation between opposing poles, of moving the “cursor” along the scale of different degrees of intensity. Adventure gets devalued as this cursor slides towards the ludic pole, the pole of the aesthetic, of the “outside” of comedy. In a manner of speaking, adventure depends on the degree of engagement with it, of moving with it; it is not accidental, but the expression of a “decret autocratique de notre liberté” and thus gratuitous. Jankélévitch establishes a typology of adventure starting from the criterion of the proximity to one of the poles: mortal adventure, aesthetic adventure and erotic adventure. Each type is premised on one dimension of adventure: mortal adventure on risk, danger and the foreseeable possibility of death; aesthetic adventure on its transformation into story, into recounted, retrospective adventure; and erotic adventure on a second, more intense life, an “oasis of romance” in stark contrast with the routine of domestic life. Mortal and erotic adventure share in common an intensity, the former of death and the latter of affects. By contrast, aesthetic adventure is one in the past tense, one of contemplation, which, paradoxically, has ceased to be adventure, for it no longer entertains any change, a future or uncertainty. Comparing the three types, it appears that authentic adventure is a work of art which is getting written as it is occurring, with no closure.

Gallants of the Old Court: *Adventure Lies Elsewhere*

I am interested here in identifying the lowest common denominator which reinvests adventure in accordance with its fiction-making potential, its ontological proteanism. This is why I have chosen a special novelist, Mateiu I. Caragiale, the author of only one novel, *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, published in 1929, where adventure occurs in relation not to action, but to fiction, not to the present, but to nostalgia. The novel stages this protocol of the unfolding of adventure, from the standpoint of complete and assumed immobility, not interested to foster any energies which could project the characters beyond the static frame of nocturnal frequenting of restaurants in Bucharest. Not only life, but also adventure, now lies elsewhere. Adventure compensates for the real, yet not through the reading of an adventure novel, nor through the writing of one, but through the construction of an adventure fiction couched in terms of no more than a discursive act.

Craii de Curtea-Veche is one of the most “static” novels of Romanian literature, one with no plot, which focuses on a group of bohemians who spend their time in pubs, watching the people and talking. Two of them, Paşadia and Pantazi, with their aristocratic bearing, are representative of local intellectual elite, yet they are lonely figures, no longer involved in any social interaction; the third

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

one, but for declaring his intention to become a writer, remains incognito; and the fourth one, Pirgu, is typical of the degraded and degrading world of metropolitan bohemians. The fourth one seems to bring some dynamism to this “novel of Bucharest manners” which the third one intends to write, since Pirgu guides them into the morally polluted places of night-time Bucharest. The novel unfolds descriptively as a genre painting qua painting of manners, whose elaborate portrayal of the characters is cognate to portraiture in the visual arts, and which resorts to the memoir to evoke the characters’ biography. There is room here also for a little adventure, if degraded as *arrivisme*, like in the mystery novels of the 19th century, where the mystery is unravelled at the most opportune time and where there is also the possibility of likely adventure, if, for the time being, concentrated in a very thick core.

Adventure in *Craii...* does not have the force of an event, for it exists beyond that which “happens” – basically not much – to the bohemian characters of this novel set in the year 1911; yet it expands, through the characters’ bearing and mindset, *la belle époque* and *fin de siècle*. Adventure is not that which happened; nor that which would likely happen or happen again. Two characters, Paşadia and Pantazi, are perfectly aware of the closure of this horizon of possibility of adventure; hence their contemplative mood, associated with *passéisme* and resignation. Adventure names here a nostalgic drive, where, however, nostalgia becomes a form of anamnesis which evokes not an idealised actual landmark, one ennobled through distancing, but a fictitious landmark. Adventure has been replaced by the yearning for adventure, yet even the latter does not open up any future possibility, nor does it evoke anything retrospectively; rather, it is sublimated aesthetically and raises the possibility of adventurous fiction. Using a highly significant archaic word, the author calls it *hagialâk*. The term was typically used in the Balkans, in oriental vein, to denote the pilgrimage either to Jerusalem, in the case of Christians, or to Mecca, in the case of Muslims. Accordingly, such *hagialâk* is also an initiation journey, one of affirmation of faith, as well as of cleansing and spiritual uplifting, undertaken by the faithful, hence it is coterminous with adventure in its spiritual sense, as Giorgio Agamben identifies adventure in medieval poetry. Quite predictably, this journey is not dangerless for those living in the 19th century; its symbolism, moreover, points to the supreme form of validation: redemption. Mateiu I. Caragiale chose the term *hagialâk* to name his fiction and implicitly adventure, so that the adventure fiction orientates adventure, from the outset, towards a higher, esoteric meaning, where the adventure can become a form of consecration, like an inner journey heading for that which lies deepest within the human being.

As such, adventure as *hagialâk* turns its back on the realm of the superficial, of frivolity, of the derisory and the accidental. In fact, two instances of *hagialâk* as a synthesis of the adventure novel can be identified in relation to two of the protagonists. Paşadia and Pantazi are the primary authors of these oral novels; the

third, unnamed protagonist becomes the secondary author – as he is the go-between, the only one who assumes the condition of the writer and who refers to a text, the short story *Remember*, actually written by Mateiu I. Caragiale himself.

The title of the novel we are reading is itself chosen in relation to an event witnessed by these bohemians, including the intradiegetic author (the unnamed protagonist), at the time in search for a suitable topic and characters for his novel. The two oral novels, the *hagialâk*-adventures of Paşadia and Pantazi are neither recounted, nor retold by the anonymous writer, but they are processed – as testifies their condensation into a core with the thickness of a poem written in prose. Such compression might seem to run counter to how adventure, in a typical adventure novel, unfolds by taking space, gets dilated and diversified, and grows like dough. This is precisely what Hegel objects to adventure: its boundless spreading. In Caragiale's novel, the narrator runs counter this propensity of adventure for expansion; rather, he retains the essence of adventure, which is not its summary, but the postulation of its condition. Another feature of the two *hagialâk*-adventures is the absence of the centre: neither adventure envisages a stable point, either with respect to the quest for the centre (peculiar to any initiation journey) or to the recovery of the self (as Agamben postulates starting from the medieval poetry of the troubadours and minnesinger). One type of journey concerns a history, the other a geography, and both concern a world, the entire world.

For Paşadia, adventure is projected into a remote past, the 18th century, where he would have liked to live, for he has that century's bearing, its sensitivity, its way of being. It is not the 18th century of the Danubian principalities (namely, Wallachia and Moldavia), then living under Phanariot rule, though, but the 18th century of the great European courts during the Enlightenment, with its thirst for knowledge, for the arts, yet also with its pleasure-seeking libertine philosophy, as evoked by the scenario proposed by its author, Paşadia. The adventure as *galanterie* – as is peculiar to the libertine novel, which pioneered it, and is illustrated by Pierre Chardelot de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* – opens up the endless possibility of delight. The heroes of this condensed adventure novel are somewhat cognate to Sade's, though free from the latter's radicalism; they are libertine in tastes, manners and principles, they move from one court to another and are the licentious 'rulers' of this age, who seek delight as their sole purpose in life and champion superior hedonism as a *modus vivendi*. Politics, with its imbroglis, and *l'amour libre* are on an equal footing with Mozart's art and the rococo, for the 18th century is a century of "good taste". It all ended abruptly with the French Revolution and its bloodthirsty brutality.

Adventure creates here a paradox: it works through superficial accumulation, whose most apt expression is the libertine adventure, with its culturally informed eroticism; yet, on the other hand, it endeavours to assimilate the great works of the century, from painting to music, and the sciences too, from the esoteric to the great scientific discoveries. Notwithstanding, not merely an illustration is the evocation

of adventure as exclusively hedonism, which Antoine Watteau renders emblematically in his famous painting *Pilgrimage to Cythera* (1717), an allegory of the age's pleasure-seeking *hagialâk*: a *fête galante*.

Rather, there is yet another, subtler layer towards which adventure opens: utopia. It is not adventure proper which matters – for the intensity is equally strong, since it concerns not so much the affects as delight and curiosity –, as it is the possibility of its exquisite attainment. This entails an ideal attainment and actualization of all possibilities which the century affords, of the synthesis which captures the *Zeitgeist* by experiencing everything that can be experienced, each taste, each sensation: being present in all the events that truly matter, being familiar with all the important personalities, knowing all secrets, sharing in the outcome of knowledge in the century of encyclopaedism, a.s.o. The key to understanding adventure refers not to the sum total, but to the wholeness of adventure. What Hegel objected to adventure, its depthlessness, the absence of the spirit, here is fully assumed and compensated for through the totalizing expansion of its possibilities. Adventure is here a projection of adventure as saturated, total experience – because totalizing. This is not a journey back in history, but the examination of the essence of adventure – which is imaginary, bookish – through its setting in fiction, in novel form: the adventure novel. The *hagialâk*-adventure constitutes a type of anamnesis, cultural anamnesis, one capable of capturing the *zeitgeist* and of rendering the whole of it in a unique painting.

The other *hagialâk*-adventure, heralded by Pantazi, also follows a pattern, namely, that of exploration, of the travel around the world, *en sage citoyen du vaste univers*. It champions a sensuous take on Enlightenment encyclopaedism by offering a vision filtered through romantic sensitivity, one which the character expresses both through his looks and through his affective bias: day-dreaming, melancholy and *passéisme*. The dangerous travel has become a model of the adventure of knowledge superimposed onto the adventure of the eye's delight through the discovery of an exotic version of *terra incognita*.

This model of saturation of life experience concerns a geography that includes a large diversity of cultures and civilizations, of all forms of humanity and all alterities too, of all landscapes and exotic worlds, situated far away from the European centre, in a comprehensive whole. It is an adventure of knowledge with a solitary strain, even though it is depicted framed by friendship. The series of places explored by Pantazi tracks no itinerary; rather, it shows a disposition, an emotion which resonates against a landscape chosen at times for its distance, its alienation, and whose human inhabitants, so diversified, nonetheless are perceived as somewhat familiar, due to his keen curiosity and delightful detachment.

This adventure novel too unfolds within the horizon of utopia: the travellers seem to exhaust, in an erratic itinerary, all possibilities; they map out everything worth seeing, get to know everything worth knowing, the whole world. There are no events; all that is spectacular never appears in the guise of an accident or a level

break, it never “happens” as a turning point in a fate-driven course. This life adventure earmarks one’s existence not through any unavoidable intensity, but through the openness to being amazed, where one such instance of amazement is immediately replaced by another one in quick, seemingly endless succession. In both cases, the adventure is premised on paradox: it reaches closure in the aleph of the journey-adventure by realizing all its possibilities; at the same time, though, it remains open, for this condensed adventure never unfolds fully, never actualizes as a series of variants, of chapters, but rather evolves as an order of suggestion qua potential which can be actualized, yet never be exhausted.

Arrivisme as Adventure hic et nunc

The third version of adventure, proposed by Pirgu, conjures as much modernity as a degraded world. The modern adventurer is the arriviste, who assails high society, intent as he is to attain a privileged position. He is precisely the one whom Vladimir Jankélévitch names, in the above-mentioned study, the *aventurier* (“adventurer”) – a distinct type from the *aventureux* (“adventurous”). The adventurer is “un professionnel des aventures”, one who cares nothing for the adventure proper, for his sole aim is financial profit: he is “en marges de scrupules qu’en marge de la vie prosaïque”, “un bourgeois qui triche au jeu bourgeois”. By contrast, the *aventureux* makes adventure “un véritable style de vie”. Through the latter, Jankélévitch pits genuine adventure qua lifestyle, adventure for adventure’s sake, against degraded adventure, the kind of adventure which lacks the spirit of adventure and its gratuitousness because of its sole aim: money. Writes Jankélévitch: “Les basses aventures aventurières ne sont qu’une caricature de l’aventure aventureuse”³⁰. It’s worth noting that unlike Hegel, who denigrates adventure completely, Jankélévitch redeems adventure, even as he notices the advent of a new type of adventure, which entails the devaluation of the ideal type. This latter type of adventure emerges in the realist novel of the 19th and early 20th centuries and its implicit adventurer is better known as the arriviste.

It is worth noting that the text whose type of protagonist inspired Mateiu I. Caragiale’s characters is Félicien Champsaur’s *L’Arriviste* (1902), a novel recommended to Mateiu by his history teacher in high school, Anghel Demetrescu. Champsaur’s protagonist is one of a long series of characters featured in the realist novels of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola or Dickens. Likewise, the first important Romanian novel of the 19th century, Nicolae Filimon’s *Ciocoii vechi și noi* [*Old and New Parvenus*] (1863), whose protagonist belongs in this class, in fact offers a typology of the arriviste, which it illustrates in a two-pronged approach: the traditional and the modern arriviste. Filimon’s novel only features the first kind, though, for it is set in the 18th century, at the time of the Phanariot regime in the Danubian

³⁰ Jankélévitch, *L’aventure*, p. 10.

principalities. The second type will be of interest to later writers, such as Duiliu Zamfirescu, G. Călinescu, Ion Marin Sadoveanu and Camil Petrescu.

Be that as it may, arrivisme is the degraded version of adventure; in Caragiale's novel, it can contaminate somehow even the virtues of the characters praised for their genuine intellectual and cultural prowess. In fact, both Pașadia and Pantazi may behave like parvenus at certain moments in life. After an unimpeachable early formation that has fostered constructive, principled efforts and values, Pașadia discovers the shortcut of social emancipation via libertine adventures – Balzac and Stendhal could easily supply exemplary models –, while Pantazi discovers the power of money to reconfigure the course of his destiny and even the possibility of committing murder, as in Champsaur's novel.

The very term used by Mateiu I. Caragiale, "crai" ["gallants"], speaks volumes. On the one hand, "crai" names the dynastic inheritors in Pașadia's narrative; there is also an esoteric-soteriological strain here, for a premonitory dream features the gallants participating in the last vespers, which heralds their exit. Other two meanings of the term refer to adventure in devalued form: "crai" indicates a Don Juan, while in slang – as taught by another character, Pena Corcodușa –, "crai" names the criminals of all stripes – hence the novel's title – who dwelt in the area known as "Curtea Veche" ["the Old Court"], namely the ruins of the former princely residences in Bucharest.

Simply stated, Caragiale's novel juxtaposes a haughty and a devalued register of adventure in perfect harmony. It is noteworthy, though, that the modern sense of adventure appears in the novel only in embryonic form, as a biographic core, namely the novel of the "rise and fall" of Pașadia, while Balzac actually wrote one in *Grandeur et décadence de Cesare Birotteau*. Nor is Pantazi's decadent novel of the fall of his family any more elaborated, for all its vast array of bourgeois "adventures": legacies, disownings, bankruptcy and spectacular reversals. The only novel that truly features a parvenu-adventurer is that of Pirgu, the character who makes the most of all possibilities of his world. We can notice here the same tendency – however subtle – to a totalization of adventure, if translated in the logic of the realist novel, when Pirgu claims emphatically that he knows everyone. This kind of adventurer – the arriviste – is a genius at making relations, and Pirgu is an exemplary representative thereof. As he asks rhetorically:

Think there's anyone doesn't know me here or wherever? Think there's a place around I wouldn't hang my hat like home? [And as the narrator muses:] I could hardly make a secret of my bewilderment at Pirgu's amazing social scope. There were people from all walks of life, hosts of them – nay, all of them, for all I knew... Indeed, I was wondering if there was a soul he didn't know, or a door but would open for him³¹.

³¹ Mateiu I. Caragiale, *Gallants of the Old Court: A Novel*. Translated by Cristian Baci, București, eLiteratura, 2013, no pages. See Caragiale, *Opere*, p. 65: "Cine nu mă cunoaște aici și oriunde, cine

Pirgu is the connection between the three bohemians and the (under)world he frequents and knows like the back of his palm, between high society and the scum of the earth; he reconciles the contraries and fosters cheerfulness. Mateiu I. Caragiale may have heaped upon Pirgu all vices ever, yet he also bestowed on this character the unique capacity, indeed virtue, to act as the connector, the creator of social bonding.

“Genuine” adventure belongs to the register of actualizable possibilities only in fiction: novels not yet written, if writable at any moment, virtual, but never actually attained. Adventure shares in what Horia-Roman Patapievići, in his introduction to the Romanian translation of *Corto Maltese. Departe, tot mai departe* [*Corto Maltese. Far, Far Away*], names “the imaginary of all imaginations”³² a world library of all the adventure books not yet written.

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nu mă iubește, unde nu sunt la mine acasă?”; p. 66.: “Nu-mi ascunsei admirarea de câtă lume cunoștea Pirgu. Lumea de tot soiul și de toată teapa, lume multă, toată lumea”.

³² Hugo Pratt, *Corto Maltese. Departe, tot mai departe* [*Corto Maltese. Far, Far Away*]. Translated by Tudor Călin Zarojanu, preface by Horia-Roman Patapievići, București, Cartea Copiilor, 2018.

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THE ADVENTURE NOVEL – DEVALUATION AND REVALUATION OF
THE ADVENTURE: *GALLANTS OF THE OLD COURT*
(Abstract)

The article aims to illustrate that the entire work of Mateiu I. Caragiale, particularly his only novel, *Gallants of the Old Court*, recuperates as a horizon of possibility the adventure novel in an embryonic-synthetic, concentrated form, with its progression remaining in a state of suspension. Within the novel lies an inscription of the adventure novel through various established formulas, alongside an implicit reflection on the interplay between the adventure genre and the novel, regarding the trajectory and the selection enacted by the author in the matters of existence, as well as history. Thus, the literary contribution of Mateiu I. Caragiale facilitates a perspective on the adventure novel as an inexhaustible resource and its transcending towards a higher level where the adventure attains an ontological-identity dimension of epistemological significance, as posited by Giorgio Agamben for our consideration.

Keywords: adventure, decadentism, libertinism, mystery novel, novel of manners.

ROMANUL DE AVENTURI – DEVALORIZAREA ȘI REVALORIZAREA
AVENTURII: *CRAII DE CURTEA-VECHE*
(Rezumat)

Articolul își propune să demonstreze că întreaga operă a lui Mateiu I. Caragiale, dar cu precădere singurul său roman, *Craii de Curtea-Vechă*, recuperează ca orizont de posibilitate romanul de aventură într-o formă embrionar-sintetică, concentrată, dezvoltarea acestuia fiind lăsată în suspensie. În roman este înscrisă o memorie a romanului de aventuri în câteva formule consacrate, dar și o reflecție indirectă despre raportul dintre aventură și roman, despre regia lui și selecția pe care autorul o operează în materia vieții, precum și a istoriei. Astfel, opera mănă face posibilă o perspectivă asupra romanului de aventuri ca resursă inepuizabilă și a depășirii sale către un etaj superior unde aventura dobândește o dimensiune ontologic-identitară, de cunoaștere, așa cum ne-o propune atenției și Giorgio Agamben.

Cuvinte-cheie: aventură, decadentism, libertinism, roman de mistere, roman de moravuri.

TEONA FARMATU

LA LIAISON DANGEREUSE ENTRE LE SOUS-GENRE AUTOFICTIONNEL ET L'IDENTITE DE GENRE EN ROUMANIE POST-COMMUNISTE : DES SON ORIGINE FRANÇAISE JUSQU'A LA NARRATION DE SOI *QUEER- FEMINISTE* DANS LE CADRE DE LA GLOBALISATION

Earlier in my life I read books about love and never thought about the gender of the writer. Eager to understand what we mean when we speak of love, I did not really consider the extent to which gender shaped a writer's perspective¹.

bell hooks, *All about love*

Fabriquer et imposer l'autofiction en Roumanie post-communiste

Il faut d'emblée établir une hypothèse : dès son origine poststructuraliste, l'autofiction est le sous-genre littéraire le plus conventionnel, c'est-à-dire le domaine où le pacte fictionnel marche le mieux et, notamment, de la façon la plus efficace, ce qui fait qu'une analyse du discours autofictionnel se prête au *degré de spéculation* que l'auteur ou l'autrice emploie et aux enjeux ou aux fonctions de la spéculation. Et sans doute c'est le sous-genre qui a interrogé le plus la question de l'éthique. Toutefois, ce qui est le plus important c'est qu'il ne s'agit pas justement d'une éthique particulière associée à un cas particulier, ni même d'une éthique générale selon un soi-disant bon sens collectif, mais finalement c'est la reproduction consensuelle d'un système libéral régénérant.

Un autre problème c'est que la valorisation de ce sous-genre s'est faite en Roumanie et ailleurs à travers l'exploitation d'une illusion, celle de la rupture du pacte connu sous sa dénomination théorique soit comme « pacte autobiographique » (Philippe Lejeune), soit et surtout comme « pacte autofictionnel »² (Jacques Lecarme). À vrai dire, n'importe quel genre de « pacte » soit instrumentalisé, la double mesure de l'autofiction suscite à la fois des problèmes narratologiques et surtout éthiques, qui font appel à une démarche

¹ bell hooks, *All about love. New visions*, New York, William Morrow & Company, 2018, p. xxiv.

² Jacques Lecarme, « L'autofiction, un mauvais genre ? », dans Philippe Lejeune (éd.), *Autofictions & cie*, Paris, RITM, 1993, pp. 227-249.

systémique, chronologique et sociologique afin d'expliquer les mécanismes du pouvoir et de légitimation des auteurs masculins selon eux, au carrefour des effets d'un changement social et politique (la transition du communisme vers le capitalisme en Roumanie) et de la problématique du genre identitaire bien intégré comme véhicule permettant l'authenticité, transposé en valeur esthétique.

Dans la mesure où en Roumanie le jugement théorique et critique de l'autofiction s'était surtout construit à partir d'une perspective formaliste au nom soit de l'authenticité discursive et de l'innovation littéraire (Florina Pîrjol³, Adina Dinițoiu⁴), soit d'une perspective socio-politique en termes de critique sociale véhémement, placée au niveau de l'individu généralement jeune et dérouté (Adriana Stan⁵), soit finalement du processus de détabouiser le discours littéraire (Sanda Cordoș⁶, Alex Goldiș⁷), il est nécessaire de reconsidérer l'évolution de ce sous-genre littéraire après 1989 au sein d'un système littéraire qui reproduit ces tropes hégémonique une fois qu'un sous-genre arrive à se figer ou à se renouveler.

Néanmoins, tout débat contourne le genre – entendu au sens anglo-saxon, comme *gender*, bien que l'autofiction soit considérablement reliée à l'identité de l'individu-auteur. En outre, la liaison entre *genre* comme forme littéraire et *genre* (angl. *gender*) comme *genre* identitaire d'une personne a été beaucoup moins discutée par la critique littéraire⁸. Les effets de cette association sont observables

³ Florina Pîrjol, *Carte de identități. Mutații ale autobiograficului în proza românească de după 1989* [Carte d'identités. Les mutations de l'autobiographie dans la prose roumaine d'après 1989], București, Cartea Românească, 2014.

⁴ Adina Dinițoiu, « Scriitori francezi la București. Interviu » [« Les écrivains français à Bucarest. Interviews »], *Observator cultural*, 2014, 753, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/invitatii-la-autolecturi/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

⁵ Adriana Stan, « Autenticitate și ideologii în literatura douămiistă » [« Authenticité et idéologies dans la littérature des années 2000 »], *Transilvania*, 2020, 7, p. 3 : « La typologie spécifique de la littérature des années 2000 en Roumanie est le jeune déboussolé, étant à la dérive, dont l'existence se déroule dans les zones misérables de la capitale ou dans les villes provinciales ». La traduction des citations nous appartient, sauf mention explicite du traducteur.

⁶ Sanda Cordoș, *Lumi din cuvinte. Reprezentări și identități în literatura română postbelică* [Des mondes de mots. Représentations et identités dans la littérature roumaine d'après-guerre], București, Cartea Românească, 2012.

⁷ Alex Goldiș, « Ascensiunea 'autoficțiunii' » [« L'essor de l'autofiction »], *Cultura*, 2015, 518, <https://revistacultura.ro/nou/ascensiunea-autoficțiunii/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

⁸ Les premières prises de position en Roumanie en ce qui concerne la relation entre genre discursif et genre identitaire appartiennent aux femmes, en étant même assez récentes : l'écrivaine Medeea Iancu parle de la poésie de la confession associée aux femmes – genre poétique « ridiculisé » (comme le dit Medeea Iancu) ; la chercheuse en philosophie Veronica Lazăr développe une démarche critique centrée sur la relation autoritaire et patriarcale entre le domaine de la philosophie (i.e. les études supérieures en philosophie) et le genre masculin. À voir : Medeea Iancu (éd.), *Arta revendicării – Antologie de poezie feministă* [L'art de la revendication – Anthologie de la poésie féministe]. Préface par Medeea Iancu, București, frACTalia, 2019; Veronica Lazăr, « Femei în filosofie : filosofia între 'gender' și 'genre' » [« Les femmes en philosophie : la philosophie entre 'gender' et 'genre' »], *Vatra*, 2024, 5-6,

dans la production hiérarchisée locale d'autofiction selon une production globale déjà hiérarchisée. Autrement dit, la production occidentale – notamment française – de l'autofiction exerce beaucoup plus de pouvoir auprès d'un pays de l'Est comme la Roumanie que la production postcoloniale qui pourrait sembler au moins familière par rapport à notre emplacement socio-politique et historique à travers des problèmes comme la domination, l'exploitation ou l'exotisme. Cela explique la raison pour laquelle le concept même d'« autofiction », généré et théorisé par Serge Doubrovsky, est devenu en Roumanie plus populaire et même plus fonctionnel que d'autres termes comme celui d'« écriture de soi », de « narration de soi » ou de « *life writing* ». Alors, le discours autofictionnel qui a fait carrière en Roumanie au début des années 2000, étant considéré comme l'influence majeure parmi les prosateurs roumains est celui de Michel Houellebecq – « l'icône » de l'autofiction française. Il ne s'agit pas d'Annie Ernaux, de Marguerite Duras, de Camille Laurens, de Virginie Despentes ou de Marie Darrieusecq – des autrices par excellence d'« autofictions ».

Ainsi, même lorsque la critique littéraire choisit de discuter en particulier les autofictions écrites par des femmes en Roumanie, ce geste s'inscrit plutôt dans le phénomène de ségrégation des sexes que dans le phénomène local entier ou même global, étant donné l'influence occidentale et le capitalisme de plus en plus monopolisant. Cela ne fait qu'élargir l'écart et approfondir l'exclusion des autrices qui, si elles ne sont pas ignorées, sont souvent traitées selon une logique plutôt particulière et préférentielle que selon une logique systémique et intégrative, ce qui pourrait démontrer les mécanismes et les relations de pouvoir et de domination au sein du même champ littéraire que celui auquel elles appartiennent. Cette perspective ségrégationniste est partagée par la chercheuse roumaine Florina Pîrjol, l'autrice d'un essai sur l'autofiction roumaine⁹. Dans son article « Corporeality and Sexuality in Women's Autofictions: A Few Romanian Examples »¹⁰, Pîrjol arrive à une conclusion plutôt inattendue, mais qui malheureusement reste au niveau d'une interrogation tout simplement rhétorique. À sa démarche s'appuyant sur les exemples de quelques autrices roumaines écrivant des autofictions (Cecilia Ștefănescu, Claudia Golea) est liée un jugement critique positif : l'association entre l'autofiction et l'émancipation des femmes. Bref, selon Florina Pîrjol, c'est un sous-genre semblant être préféré et également façonné par les *écrivaines*, non par les *écrivains*. Et notamment elle achève son article en opérant avec une définition plutôt occidentale qui est loin d'être valable

<https://revistavatra.org/2024/04/04/veronica-lazar-femei-in-filosofie-filosofia-intre-gender-si-genre/>.

Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

⁹ Pîrjol, *Carte de identități*.

¹⁰ Florina Pîrjol, « Corporeality and Sexuality in Women's Autofictions: A Few Romanian Examples », dans Andreea Zamfira, Christian de Montlibert, Daniela Radu (éds.), *Gender in Focus: Identities, Codes, Stereotypes and Politics*, Leverkusen, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018, pp. 145-159.

pour le système littéraire roumain, même si les autrices qu'elle discute peuvent s'intégrer légèrement dans cette récupération de la parole après beaucoup de temps de silence pour les femmes :

Assimilated to psychoanalysis and *often cautioned by female authors*, autofiction cannot be understood outside the cultural context which has articulated it in the form – hard to approximate, always changing – it has today: the revolution of morals, 'la prise de parole' around the crimes against humanity, May '68, the 'arrest' of the individual in front of the TV (as Baudrillard used to say), the shaping of the postmodern ideology, globalization etc. Posterity will decide, however, whether this type of literature has been a key moment in world literature or just the provisional mouthpiece through which female writers, reduces to silence for so long, could finally write about themselves¹¹.

D'après ces mots, l'autofiction semble être en Roumanie aussi le sous-genre par excellence pratiqué par des femmes afin de s'opposer à des formes oppressives ou moins conventionnelles, c'est-à-dire un sous-genre émancipatoire, possédant un caractère protestataire, spécifique aux engagements socio-politiques¹². Cependant, l'argument ne dispose pas de base fiable pour faire une comparaison fonctionnelle : d'une part, Pîrjol opère, pareil à son livre mentionné ci-dessus, avec une compréhension trop étendue du concept d'autofiction ; d'autre part, ce qui m'intéresse le plus, c'est le fait qu'elle utilise le contexte français (où des autrices comme Virginie Despentes, Annie Ernaux ou Camille Laurens écrivent) auquel elle superpose les deux autrices roumaines. Le chevauchement émergé de la démarche que Pîrjol entreprend prouve la linéarité perdante, qui ne fait qu'argumenter une fausse idée : la force émancipatoire qui a éclaté au début des années 2000 en Roumanie grâce aux autrices écrivant des autofictions centrées sur la sexualité féminine ou sur la condition des femmes au sein d'une société patriarcale. Ce n'est pas le cas, surtout que la critique littéraire a discuté et a imposé comme des autofictions « véritables » des narrations de soi écrites par des écrivains : *Pizdeț* (2000) d'Alexandru Vakulovski, *Luminița, mon amour* (2006) de Cezar-Paul Bădescu, *pe bune/pe invers [de vrai/à l'envers]* et *Soldații. Poveste din Ferentari [Soldats. Histoire de Ferentari]* d'Adrian Schiop, *Urbancolia* et *Nevoi speciale [Besoins particuliers]* de Dan Sociu. D'ailleurs, ce canon de l'autofiction roumaine, dirait-on, « orthodoxiste », a été lancé et établi¹³ par l'un des plus importants critiques littéraires post-communistes, Mihai Iovănel, qui a accumulé un capital symbolique considérable en tenant, avec d'autres membres de

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

¹² Voir Larisa Prodan, « Aglaja Veteranyi – The Autofiction of a Nomadic Existence », *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2023, 10, pp. 86-102.

¹³ Ses jugements critiques se trouvent dans son livre : Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane : 1990–2020 [Histoire de la littérature roumaine contemporaine : 1990–2020]*, Iași, Polirom, 2021.

sa génération, de s'opposer à une approche matérialiste à la vieille école de la critique littéraire soi-disant « expressionniste », tout en parvenant ainsi à jouir d'un prestige puissant dans le champ littéraire roumain.

Toutefois, comme d'autres adeptes d'un marxisme colonisant, ils se situent fondamentalement dans une logique du même système de domination masculine, ce qui minimise, selon la suprématie de l'argument économique, la matérialisation et la manifestation de l'identité de genre de l'individu par rapport à la société où il vit. Par conséquent, l'identité privilégiée reste celle masculine et la masculinité, sous quelque forme que ce soit, contribue à renforcer l'autofiction et à établir ce sous-genre *par* et *pour* cette identité. En plus, les écrivaines choisissaient souvent de ne pas écrire des « autofictions », selon la définition du terme importée du milieu français, en préférant par exemple ne pas utiliser leur vrai nom pour leur personnage, ce qui est une option sans doute prévue et significative. Il vaut mieux chercher et interpréter les stratégies des écrivaines – ainsi que les résultats littéraires – dans le domaine de la narration de soi que d'argumenter *a posteriori* leur appartenance à un sous-genre façonné selon le *male gaze*.

En tout cas, la problématique du genre identitaire dans le contexte de la naissance de l'autofiction en Roumanie est beaucoup plus complexe et entremêlée, en prenant en compte qu'elle existe dans un système fondé sur et grâce à la domination masculine, hérité et perpétué comme un *modus vivendi*.

La spéculation autofictionnelle : le cas consensuel de Luminița, mon amour ou l'autofiction contre elle

Cette partie attire l'attention sur le cas du roman *Luminița, mon amour* de Cezar Paul-Bădescu¹⁴, paru en 2006, en pleine crise fictionnelle et sociale dans une Roumanie post-communiste où la transition ébranlante semblait incessante. Étant donné que mon public cible est un public étranger, je préfère ne pas m'attarder sur le roman ne fût-ce que d'une manière expéditive, justement dans le but d'éclaircir les grandes lignes de cette narration qui a causé une controverse dans le monde littéraire roumain à ce moment-là. De cette manière, mon intervention concernant ce roman suppose en particulier sa réception et les mécanismes à travers lesquels il gagne un capital symbolique significatif notamment à travers la *spéculation (auto)fictionnelle*, caractérisée par la perversité et surtout soutenue par le consensus à l'intérieur du réseau littéraire. En plus, mon argument se sert notamment du critère socio-éthique par rapport à un système littéraire face au phénomène de globalisation et du capitalisme « sans rivages » où le profit et la notoriété désirable génèrent du contenu.

¹⁴ Cezar Paul-Bădescu, *Luminița, mon amour*, Iași, Polirom, 2016.

Par conséquent je considère comme étant moins importants les binarismes figés de la théorie littéraire « *old school* » qui justifient la misogynie, le sexisme et la « violence symbolique »¹⁵ à travers la distinction entre ce qui est fictionnel et ce qui est réel. Ce type de jugement critique est inutile et même problématique pour autant qu'il fait partie d'un système littéraire renforcé parmi la spéculation du pacte esthétique en faveur d'une partie ou d'une autre selon la position de pouvoir de celui qui rend le jugement. De même, sur le fond de la transition vers le capitalisme stimulant la propriété privée, l'autofiction roumaine se propose comme un symptôme de ce phénomène bien accéléré d'individualisation du capital, aussi bien symbolique que financier. C'est-à-dire, la propriété littéraire – fictionnelle – se traduit par une conscience de soi exacerbée et valorisée à travers la spéculation de la réalité transposée, dirait-on, *telle quelle*. Pratiquement, l'autofiction se définit en tant qu'acte de sélection et dépend du degré de sélection d'indices que l'auteur effectue afin de fabriquer l'autofiction.

C'est également le cas de Cezar Paul-Bădescu dont les astuces et surtout les allusions biographiques concernant le personnage féminin¹⁶ qu'il dissémine habilement au fil des pages portent le rôle de la construction d'une narration « authentique ». Cependant, au-delà de cette intention soi-disant littéraire ou esthétique, le projet cache, contre l'auteur lui-même, un résultat précis : la construction de l'autofiction à travers *l'autre* – dans ce cas, à travers une femme dont l'image ressortissant du roman est au moins désagréable ; en plus, la protagoniste est sans doute objectivée et sexualisée jusqu'aux dernières conséquences. Il est moins important que le narrateur-personnage s'appelle Cezar, comme l'auteur qui signe le livre, que le fait que les détails concernant son ex-femme qui émaillent le roman sont attentivement et stratégiquement sélectionnées et transposées. Au-delà des intentions biographiques plus ou moins voilées de l'auteur, ce qui m'intéresse le plus c'est la stratégie narrative misogyne et méta-misogyne que l'auteur met en action pour proposer une autofiction soi-disant par excellence.

Bref, *Luminița, mon amour*, qui a fait carrière en Roumanie comme l'autofiction ou même un livre « révolutionnaire » est un geste immoral, de spéculation et d'exploitation du personnage féminin qui est soumis à la même double mesure d'autofiction, d'autant plus que, d'une manière détournée, la

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, *La Reproduction. Éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1970.

¹⁶ Dans un essai dédié à ce roman, en reprenant la question éthique du roman, Vlad Lupescu fait la remarque suivante, en soulignant *la duplicité du roman* qui produit un *effet miroir* : « Ce sont toutes des raisons claires et suffisantes pour que le lecteur ait recours à une lecture biographique et, par conséquent, qu'il soit intrigué par la recherche de détails dans le texte à décoder et à 'traduire' en éléments réels. » – Vlad Lupescu, « *Luminița, mon amour*: mai mult decât o vendetă literară » [« *Luminița, mon amour* : plus qu'une simple vendetta littéraire »], *Vatra*, 2021, 10-11, <https://revistavatra.org/2022/01/18/starea-literaturii-romane-contemporane-in-scoala-v/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

protagoniste sert à maintenir l'« auto » de cette fausse « autofiction ». Généralement, peu importe la femme, ce qui compte c'est qu'il s'agisse d'une *femme*. Et encore, il s'agit d'une hiérarchie systémique, basée sur des formes d'oppression régulièrement reprises dans les discours artistiques (ici il s'agit de l'oppression des femmes), qui facilite la production autofictionnelle, sous-genre placé au carrefour d'un *local* instable, en train de se privatiser, et un *global* beaucoup plus capitaliste, en crise, mais fascinant pour la périphérie post-communiste.

Ce contexte ni ne justifie, ni ne déculpabilise les choix fictionnels de Cezar Paul-Bădescu, mais il peut expliquer les conditions de renforcement de ce sous-genre romanesque, en profitant d'une double complicité : systémique et fictionnelle (i.e. intra-textuelle). La première complicité serait discutée ci-dessous, tandis que la deuxième renvoie à ce que j'appelais au début de l'article le caractère *conventionnel* et par excellence « sournois » de l'autofiction : d'une part, l'enjeu est d'écrire comme vivre au nom de l'authenticité, donc représenter sans filtre ; d'autre part, toute auteur d'autofiction emploie d'une manière ou d'une autre de la spéculation et du pouvoir du « pacte autofictionnel ». Sinon, ils avaient écrit des journaux ou des mémoires (même dans ce cas les choses sont à discuter). Le problème survient lorsque cette double mesure est consciemment instrumentalisée et utilisée à travers la complicité systémique, en déculpabilisant l'auteur-homme pour préserver et reproduire la domination et le capital symbolique. Malgré des voix ayant plus ou moins condamné ou critiqué ce roman au moment de sa parution, sa réception critique et l'appui systémique l'ont statué comme un livre très important pour l'évolution du roman en Roumanie, en négligeant d'autres livres comme, par exemple, *Băgău* d'Ioana Bradea, paru deux ans avant, en 2004¹⁷ ; ce dernier a ses mérites et, en outre, ne se sert pas d'un portrait hostile d'une femme au nom de l'authenticité. De même, la masculinité déployée dans *Luminița, mon amour* convient davantage à un système où la misogynie et le sexisme sont des principes que la sexualité rebelle et également tragique de la protagoniste de *Băgău*¹⁸.

En survolant la réception de *Luminița, mon amour* et les effets qu'il a générés, la complicité systémique n'a fait qu'entretenir la visibilité du roman et renforcer sa valeur esthétique présumée, et cela même par les critiques littéraires qui s'opposaient au jugement strictement esthétique et qui normalement luttaien-

¹⁷ Ioana Bradea, *Băgău*, București, Est, 2004.

¹⁸ En outre, la réception de *Băgău* a suscité un autre vague de sexisme plutôt grossier. À l'occasion d'une chronique littéraire, Alex Leo Șerban utilise un discours vraiment sexiste dans le but de se moquer du travail que la protagoniste effectue et implicitement de la manière exacerbée et sexuellement chargée dont l'autrice présente les faits. Voir Alex Leo Șerban, « Orale » [« Orales »], dans *Elle*, 2004, republié sur *Liternet*, 2005, <https://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/2623/Alex-Leo-Serban-Catalin-Sturza/Cronici-incrucisate-Bagau-de-Ioana-Bradea.html>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

contre la suprématie d'un système fondé sur une conception mystique de la littérature¹⁹. En plus, cette complicité se fonde d'une manière efficace sur la relation indissociable entre l'individu-écrivain, obsédé par soi-même comme être charnel, au sein d'une vie précaire, même pénible, pas « de papier » au sens de Barthes, cultivé par les écrivains postmodernes, et le nouveau système libéral, bien différent par rapport à celui communiste, qui a stimulé les attitudes dominatrices (i.e. misogynes) selon la logique de la propriété privée qui donne une identité spécifique, unique à celui qui la possède. De cette façon, la complicité systémique est soutenue à travers deux types principaux d'agents contribuant à *la reproduction du pouvoir* : les maisons d'édition et la critique littéraire. Le roman a été publié en 2006 dans une collection déjà consacrée depuis quelques années, créée sous le nom d'« Égo prose » dans l'une des maisons d'édition les plus importantes après la chute du communisme en Roumanie : il s'agit de Polirom.

Concernant la critique, au-delà du fait que les voix dans ce domaine étaient à ce moment-là majoritairement masculines, l'autorité du narrateur du roman en cause est doublée par l'autorité de la critique qui juge le roman en termes stratégiques : Paul Cernat, l'auteur de la préface du roman (la première édition), semble excuser à l'avance l'auteur du roman, en anticipant la lecture biographique qui pourrait produire des accusations à l'adresse de Paul-Bădescu. À travers son rôle d'*auctoritas* Cernat ne fait qu'excuser – et implicitement accuser – le prosateur. En fait, Cernat fait appel à l'autonomie du littéraire²⁰, en ignorant tout autre dimension du roman. Ovidiu Șimonca emprunte au narrateur du roman l'attitude hostile et agaçante et il écrit une étude sur le livre de la même manière, en tirant du roman une leçon de vie, ce qui n'est pas le cas. De façon similaire, toujours audacieuse, Șimonca, même s'il s'appuie sur le personnage féminin, en reproduisant le portrait odieux que l'auteur en fait, arrive à se débarrasser du jugement moral que le roman engendre. Enfin, « tout le reste est littérature », suggère Ovidiu Șimonca. Au-delà de la moralité survenue autour de la question de la vie privée et d'une vengeance, *la protagoniste* de ce roman est à la fois odieusement représentée et caricaturée, *comme si elle servait une autofiction contre elle-même (i.e. la femme)*. Peu importe l'auteur-narrateur-personnage et ses intentions vilaines qui se cachent derrière ce projet soigneusement élaboré, il s'agit d'une typologie discursive autoritaire, propre au pamphlet, entraînant des tropes de la masculinité et du patriarcalisme, même lorsqu'ils font la preuve d'auto-ironie ou d'une attitude puérile contrefaite. Avant d'être une autofiction, comme se sont empressés de le promouvoir les critiques et les maisons d'éditions, ce roman est *une fiction pamphlétaire involontaire* dont on ignore le but, mais que l'on devine,

¹⁹ Voir Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1992.

²⁰ Paul Cernat, « Despre dragoste și alți demoni » [« De l'amour et autres démons »], dans Paul-Bădescu, *Luminița*, pp. 5-9.

d'autant plus que la cible n'est pas le couple, ni le protagoniste (*his story*²¹), mais *la femme*.

Systématiquement et sociologiquement parlant, je ne considère pas que c'est « beaucoup plus qu'une vendetta littéraire », comme Vlad Lupescu arrive à mentionner dans des conclusions présentées d'une manière conformiste et didactique, mais que c'est notamment « une vendetta », habillée de vêtements artistiques pour que la soi-disant « expérimentation narrative de manière radicale »²² puisse de toute façon bénéficier d'un encadrement solide et après tout rassurant, puisque plus les stratégies intra-textuelles²³ et de marketing littéraire sont prévues, plus le produit est fixé dans le système. S'il s'était agi d'une expérimentation, il n'aurait pas été publié par une maison d'éditions *mainstream*, et encore dans une collection déjà consacrée, bien pensée et rentable, et il n'aurait pas non plus été accompagné d'une préface, écrite par un chercheur en littérature, Paul Cernat. La seule « expérimentation » que ce livre puisse impliquer c'est la réaction du milieu littéraire à l'occasion de la parution du roman, qui a lamentablement échoué, parce que généralement la question socio-éthique de ce temps-là ne supposait que *le procès du communisme*, toute autre issue étant mineure comparable à celle-ci, et la liberté d'expression associée à la protection du « fait littéraire » était vigoureusement cultivée à tous les niveaux.

Les origines (post)structuralistes de l'autofiction et ses effets en Roumanie

S'agissant de l'identité (sexuelle, mais pas seulement), les deux premières décennies post-communistes en Roumanie s'avèrent hostiles et pas trop concernées par la discrimination de toute façon. Par conséquent, les attitudes féministes sont soit érotisées, soit démonisées, à moins qu'elles ne soient englouties par le contexte socio-politique assez pénible de la transition. Premièrement, le carrefour entre l'autofiction comme sous-genre romanesque et les politiques identitaires est trouvable dans le contexte français culturel poststructuraliste des années 60 ; deuxièmement, et à la suite du premier, il s'agit de la *French Theory* – le produit français exporté aux États-Unis. *Fils*, le roman-

²¹ Florina Pirjol, « Pliciul de muște al autoficțiunilor » [« La tapette à mouches de l'autofiction »], *Observator cultural*, 2006, 347, <https://www-observatorcultural.ro/articol/pliciul-de-muste-al-autoficțiunilor-2/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

²² Mihai Iovănel, « Selfie fără filtru » [« Selfie sans filtre »], *Scena9*, 2017, <https://www.scena9.ro/-article/cronica-luminata-mon-amour-cezar-paul-badescu>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

²³ L'auteur-narrateur choisit de placer stratégiquement à la fin du roman la réponse électronique du personnage féminin dans le but d'affranchir la misogynie du livre : « C'est une trouvaille grâce à laquelle l'atmosphère d'égoïsme accentué et de misogynie est diluée » – voir Grigore Chiper, « Proza între (auto)ficțiune și document » [« La prose entre (auto)fiction et document »], *Contrafort*, 2008, 1-2, <https://www.contrafort.md/old/2008/159-160/1379.html>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024. Toutefois, ce n'est pas qu'un artifice qui justifie le contenu égotique et misogyne du discours narratif.

emblème de Serge Doubrovsky, a été publié au sein de l'émergence théorique du poststructuralisme. Au fond il s'agit de la naissance d'une forme littéraire en tant qu'effet du croisement entre la théorie poststructuraliste et la psychanalyse, mais c'est un produit culturel qui reste plutôt marginal à cause de sa nature paradoxale et, donc, il est généralement moins ancré dans le contexte théorique de l'époque. La restitution la plus pertinente concernant cette origine oubliée de l'autofiction appartient à Philippe Forest, dans le chapitre « De la vraie genèse de l'autofiction ». À l'occasion d'un décalogue qu'il esquisse concernant le sous-genre à multiples facettes, historiquement beaucoup interrogé, mais moins élucidé, Forest explique la fondation de l'autofiction en France :

Les livres par lesquels la question du Je fait ostensiblement retour sont portés par une telle vague de fond et nullement solidaire du reflex auquel nous fera assister la décennie suivante : *Fils* de Serge Doubrovsky, produit de l'existentialisme, de la psychanalyse, du questionnement initié par la nouvelle critique, *le Roman vécu* d'Alain Jouffroy, qui se déduit de la magnifique référence au surréalisme [...]. Et en amont, de ces deux textes, se situe bien entendu l'intervention majeure de Roland Barthes²⁴.

De même, le jeu qui s'installe en tant que convention littéraire – « l'homonymat des trois instances narratives »²⁵ – est une invention textuelle. Serge Doubrovsky lui-même explique son programme romanesque en adoptant la pan-textualité de Roland Barthes : « Pour l'autobiographe, comme pour n'importe quel écrivain, rien, pas même sa propre vie, n'existe *avant* son texte ; mais la vie de son texte, c'est sa vie *dans* son texte »²⁶. Rétrospectivement, en plaçant le sous-genre en évolution, il n'en est pas moins évident le fait que Marguerite Duras – l'une des représentant(e)s du mouvement *Le Nouveau Roman français* – exerce le sous-genre de l'autofiction dans son roman *L'Amant* (1984) quelques années plus tard après *Fils*. Il est donc aisé de constater que le sous-genre de l'autofiction prend forme dans un climat favorisant les jeux identitaires et textuels, ainsi que l'illusion – ou, en utilisant un terme propre au poststructuralisme, le *simulacre* (Jean Baudrillard) – de l'authenticité, suite à une écriture à la première personne dont la fonction principale est de garantir pour *la vérité non-inventée*.

Cette tautologie permet de mieux expliquer la convention sous-jacente à l'autofiction. Comme Mounir Laoyen l'a bien observé, « le critère onomastique »

²⁴ Philippe Forest, *Le roman, le réel et autres essais*, Nantes, Éditions Cécile Defaut, 2007, p. 194.

²⁵ Jacques Lecarme, « Origines et évolution de la notion d'autofiction », dans Marc Dambre, Aline Mura-Brunel et Bruno Blanckeman (éds.), *Le roman français au tournant du XXI^{ème} siècle*, Paris, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2004, pp. 13-23.

²⁶ Serge Doubrovsky, « L'initiative aux maux : écrire sa psychanalyse », dans *Parcours critique*, 1980, p. 188, apud Patrick Saveau, « L'autofiction à la Doubrovsky : mise au point », dans Claude Burgelin, Isabelle Grell, Roges-Yves Roche (éds.), *Autofiction(s)*, Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pul.3699>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

de l'autofiction avancé par Lecarme et suivi, sur ses traces, par les critiques littéraires roumains qui ont discuté l'autofiction surtout selon l'idée de l'identification, est systématiquement accompagné et même apprivoisé par « le critère pérertextuel »²⁷. En tant qu'exemple, Laoyen prend le cas de Robbe-Grillet :

Pour Barthes et Doubrovsky, le pacte proposé est une fiction du sujet, une fictionnalisation de soi, disons autofiction. Robbe-Grillet, ayant lu et admiré *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, applique à son œuvre la même stratégie pérertextuelle. Son triptyque autobiographique est, en effet, chapeauté d'un surtitre aussi surprenant que corrosif : « Romanesques ». [...] Si le critère pérertextuel semble congédier tout horizon d'attente autobiographique, le critère onomastique, en revanche, nous oblige à emprunter le cheminement inverse. Car chez Barthes comme chez Robbe-Grillet, l'auteur, le narrateur et personnage principal se confondent²⁸.

Au-delà d'une concurrence inhérente et tendue entre les deux critères, j'attire l'attention sur le deuxième qui suppose plus que le premier la spéculation dont je parlerai dans la partie suivante : d'une part, on peut spéculer l'homonymie auteur-narrateur-personnage, ainsi que le « vrai réel » existant dans le roman, d'autre part, on peut spéculer qu'il s'agit justement d'une convention littéraire et alors tout est fiction ou tout *doit être lu* comme une fiction. Le critère pérertextuel pèse donc beaucoup plus que celui narratologique afin de configurer la spéculation du lecteur et, après tout, dans les termes de Lecarme, « le schéma structurel à double entrée », lancé par Philippe Lejeune à l'occasion de la parution du roman *Fils*²⁹. Quelles que soient les stratégies intratextuelles, paratextuelles ou tout simplement de marketing éditorial, il faut souligner que cette réflexion accompagnant la naissance de l'autofiction est profondément imprégnée par l'émergence du poststructuralisme caractérisé par la tautologie et les contradictions en raison de la maîtrise des dilemmes linguistiques, qui génère à son tour des formes et des structures littéraires tout aussi paradoxales et par excellence doublement situées.

En France, ainsi qu'en Roumanie, le modèle standard de l'autofiction et sa réception ne prennent pas en compte ce que la culture des États-Unis va extraire du produit français, exporté en tant que *French Theory* : la vision démocratique et inclusive, qui instrumentalise la théorie française dans le but de créer un catalyseur

²⁷ Mounir Laouyen, « L'autofiction : une réception problématique », *Fabula*, 2022, <https://doi.org-/10.58282/colloques.7558>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Lecarme, « Origines et évolution » : « C'est le schéma structural à double entrée, figurant dans *Le Pacte autobiographique* de Philippe Lejeune qui a convaincu le rédacteur de *Fils* de choisir et de lancer la rubrique « autofiction ». Il ressentit en effet comme un défi la case aveugle que le poéticien avait figurée, celle d'un récit qui aurait été un roman, sous-titré tel, ou allégué tel dans le pérertexte et l'épitéxte, et dont l'auteur, le narrateur, le protagoniste auraient été rassemblés en une seule personne, réduits à l'identité nominale. Philippe Lejeune y voyait un mode virtuel. Doubrovsky voulut l'accomplir en état et en gloire ».

dans l'affermissement des politiques identitaires et dans l'affaiblissement du pouvoir masculin de l'homme blanc :

Autrement dit, si Derrida ou Foucault ont bien déconstruit le concept d'objectivité, les Américains ne vont pas en tirer une réflexion sur le pouvoir figural de langage ou sur les formations discursives, mais une conclusion politique plus concrète : objectivité serait synonyme de « subjectivité du mal blanc » [...] la théorie française aurait donc un contenu, et il ne serait autre que l'identité minoritaire, la part du dominé, désormais menacées de mort par l'hydre réactionnaire³⁰.

Cette manière spécifique de subjectivation n'est prioritaire ni pour l'autofiction française ou dans sa réception, ni pour la forme que le genre prend dans une périphérie est-européenne. Par conséquent, il n'y a pas de base justificative pour comparer des écrivaines roumaines de fiction des années 2000 comme les deux écrivaines mentionnées ci-dessus, Cecilia Ștefănescu ou Ioana Bradea (qui pour de vrai attaquent des sujets traditionnellement associés aux femmes) avec des écrivaines françaises comme Marie Darrieussecq ou Camille Laurens qui de toute façon s'opposent à la compréhension normée de l'autofiction conçue en fonction des narrations de soi à prédominance masculine.

En Roumanie, la subjectivisation militante, bien orientée vers l'identité de l'individu, avec un volet de critique sociale, n'a été créée qu'après l'entrée de la Roumanie dans l'Union européenne en 2007 et de plus après « la deuxième transition »³¹ suite à la crise globale éclatée en 2007–2008. Cette période de renforcement du néolibéralisme capitaliste affûte en Roumanie les écarts entre les classes sociales. Les identités historiquement marginalisées et racisées deviennent des sujets intégrant la critique sociale. Selon cette logique, on peut distinguer trois romans à prendre en considération, étant de bons exemples à illustrer à la fois la liaison « dangereuse » entre l'identité de genre et l'autofiction et les formes que la critique sociale prend dans ses romans publiés dans un contexte déjà loin d'être considéré comme une étape de transition du communisme vers le capitalisme. Ils sont des produits spécifiques à une autre étape sociopolitique en Roumanie : une étape bien plus intégrée dans le système capitaliste, où la lutte des classes est absorbée et même invisibilisée par les relations favorisant la production du capital et l'exploitation des individus.

Les trois romans que je vais discuter sont : *Soldații. Poveste din Ferentari* de Adrian Schiop, où la relation homoérotique entre deux hommes est située dans le plus grand et le plus fameux « ghetto » de Roumanie – Ferentari ; l'analyse de ce

³⁰ François Cusset, *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 2005, p. 143.

³¹ Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc [Dépendance et développement. L'économie politique du capitalisme roumain]*. Traduit par Ciprian Șiulea, Cluj-Napoca, Tact, 2014, p. 208.

premier roman sera suivie de l'examen d'un cas d'une « fausse autofiction », écrite par une femme qui met à mal la forme de l'autofiction telle qu'elle est conçue selon les deux critères déjà mentionnés, onomastique et péritextuel – il s'agit de *Interior zero* [*Intérieur zéro*] de Lavinia Braniște, où le sujet narratif, Cristina, est une jeune femme vulnérable et vulnérabilisée par le milieu corporatiste et une société roumaine assez hostile aux femmes; finalement, la dernière partie de l'article sera dédiée à la première autofiction queer-féministe de la littérature roumaine, parue en 2022 sous le titre de *Dezrădăcinare* [*Déracinement*] et signée par Sașa Zare, où on assiste, entre autres, à la déconstruction militante de l'autofiction comme genre associé plutôt au sujet masculin – même dans le cas d'une histoire homoérotique – qui se préoccupe beaucoup de son « moi ».

Dans tous les trois cas, l'identité sexuelle des individus est un facteur prioritaire dans le jugement et dans la critique de l'ordre social. En ce qui concerne le genre romanesque de l'autofiction, la formule littéraire est clairement investie de différentes fonctions sociales et esthétiques, mais ce qui est sûr c'est la liaison entre l'identité sexuelle et le discours narratif critiquant l'ordre social et l'institution qui s'est créée comme « autofiction ».

Pour Schiop, Braniște et Zare l'autofiction est une *convention* – à suivre ou, par contre, à critiquer et à déconstruire –, mais pas un *but*. La relation des pouvoirs dont l'autofiction se renvoie en Roumanie selon principalement le modèle français décèle après 2007–2008 les relations de pouvoirs entre le ou la dominant(e) et le ou la dominé(e). Indépendamment de l'identité sexuelle des protagonistes et de leurs relations amoureuses, qu'ils soient homosexuels ou hétérosexuels, les trois récits traitent d'une relation de pouvoir générique, qui dépend de plusieurs facteurs – social, économique, professionnel, identitaire, ethnique – et qui prend une forme spécifique selon le contexte où l'on déroule.

En effet l'« autofiction » roumaine ne s'intéresse plus à l'égalité entre les instances narratives ou à la réalité non-filtrée dans le processus d'écrire. D'une part, la perspective évolutive pourrait inscrire l'autofiction dans une trajectoire dynamique, vivante, éventuellement jugée selon la théorie des formes littéraires développée par Franco Moretti qui explique la mort d'une formule ou d'un sous-genre à cause de la naissance d'une autre ou d'un autre qui correspond mieux aux réalités sociaux³². Il peut se montrer valable de même dans le cas de l'autofiction. Par ailleurs, l'autofiction « traditionnelle », inscrite dans le contexte des années 2000 en Roumanie, semble être, sinon une formule ingrate, du moins une formule narrative demandant un *refresh*. C'est une production des écrivains, pas d'écrivaines, c'est la « narration de soi » principalement d'un homme, ce qui a des conséquences au niveau à la fois du genre littéraire et de la critique sociale.

³² Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees : Abstract Models for Literary History*, London–New York, Verso, 2007.

Faisons un exercice de sociologie littéraire : pourquoi les écrivaines ont-elles favorisé d'autres formules de narration de soi, et pas nécessairement l'« autofiction » ? Pourquoi la narration fondatrice de l'autofiction roumaine a comme base l'immoralité d'un homme écrivain qui exploite l'image d'une femme afin d'écrire un texte soi-disant « non-inventé »³³, possédant donc la garantie de vérité ? Pourquoi une autofiction féministe n'est-elle possible en Roumanie qu'en déconstruisant le sous-genre lui-même ? Ce sont des questions qu'il faut se poser pour mieux comprendre et situer la généalogie et l'évolution d'un sous-genre littéraire par rapport au système qui le recèle.

L'« autofiction » versus l'« écriture de soi » : l'engagement politique d'une polémique

En raison, d'une part, de l'émergence des politiques identitaires en Roumanie post-communiste et du croisement controversé du féminisme néolibéral avec le féminisme gauchiste (socialiste et anticapitaliste), l'autofiction prend le profil d'un sous-genre et également arrive à changer sa forme de base, en attaquant beaucoup plus évident des thèmes sociopolitiques, ainsi qu'en articulant le discours biographique à l'aide de l'identité sexuelle non-privilegiée – l'identité *queer* –, respectivement du sujet féminin historiquement vulnérabilisé et violenté.

D'autre part, surtout dans le contexte de l'événement politique ayant lieu en 2007 – l'entrée de Roumanie dans l'Union européenne –, les thématiques de la prose roumaine traitent de nouvelles problématiques comme la migration des Roumains vers l'Occident afin de trouver un travail mieux payé ou la fonctionnalisation fictionnelle du communisme de la part des femmes. Du plus, le réalisme littéraire assume d'autres fonctions. Dans ce contexte, le sous-genre de l'autofiction, dont le déclin est loin d'être amorcé, atteint un autre âge par rapport à sa première forme, théorisée en France et implantée dans une Roumanie post-communiste où l'authenticité infusée d'individualisme s'était consacrée comme la formule romanesque par excellence destinée à critiquer par ricochet la transition³⁴.

À la suite d'une adaptation inégale et discontinue au marché néolibéral, l'individualité d'une personne n'est pas affaiblie par la libéralisation après 1989, mais elle devient un instrument pour critiquer le système et ses mécanismes censés renforcer les inégalités notamment après 2007–2008. Par conséquent, ce type

³³ C'est le principe annoncé dès le début de *Luminița mon amour*, où le narrateur promulgue la clé du roman à travers une confession qu'il fait par un e-mail envoyé à son ex-femme.

³⁴ Stan, « Autenticitate și ideologii », p. 2 : « Cependant, le chemin étroit du soi-même reste pour l'instant la seule variante par laquelle les écrivains des années 2000 tentent de questionner, en toute innocence et avec une certaine véhémence, les déséquilibres survenus après la chute du communisme, peu avant que le nouveau cinéma roumain ne donne au paysage social de la transition un reflet quasi-stéréotypé pour le circuit festif de l'Occident ».

d'autofiction enchaîne des problématiques comme le racisme et les formes de discrimination envers des communautés vulnérables (les personnes *queer* ou les roms), la marginalisation multiple, la misogynie, le sexisme, le couple lesbien ou gay, le capitalisme lié au patriarcat. Ce qui est important ce n'est pas qu'aucun de ces thèmes ne soit plus urgent que les autres, puisque la pensée sociale hiérarchisée crée à son tour des hiérarchies discriminatoires et racisées. Par ailleurs, après l'enjeu de statuer l'illusion de l'authenticité centrée sur le degré de vérité de l'expérience que le sujet a vécue, le tournant se passe dans la mesure où l'autofiction dans la Roumanie d'après la transition proprement dite rompt avec le modèle français contenant le paradoxe bien connu et habilement instrumentalisé, défini comme suit par Marjorie Worthington dans le contexte actuel de la « post-vérité » : « Autofictions *consciously* play with readerly expectations about memoir and fiction, thwarting both, thereby simultaneously calling into question, and making a case for, the importance of distinguishing between *fact* and *fiction* »³⁵ (c'est moi qui souligne).

Bref, on pourrait articuler que l'autofiction soi-disant d'origine se sert de ce paradoxe, tandis que les formes d'autofictions les plus engagées se servent de leur engagement socio-politique, car, sinon, à l'ère de la post-vérité, la distinction entre *fiction* et *fait* ne marche plus ou elle a perdu sa pertinence. Autrement dit, il est moins important de distinguer entre ces deux que d'observer les enjeux socio-politiques que ce nouveau discours autofictionnel engage.

Concernant l'autofiction en Roumanie, elle est principalement développée par le forçage de diminuer ou même d'annuler la distance entre « *fact* » et « *fiction* », donc ce chevauchement presque total caractérise l'autofiction roumaine dans les années 2000, ce qui est complémentaire à la résurrection de l'authenticité³⁶ devenant la marque distinctive de la génération émergente de l'époque. Cette génération s'est particulièrement opposée à la génération précédente, celle des années 80, formée pendant la dernière décennie du communisme, lorsque la métafiction et les expériences textualistes étaient les principales formules littéraires, considérées comme artificielles et inappropriées vis-à-vis des nouvelles réalités sociales en Roumanie de la part de la génération suivante.

De même, le climat essentiellement masculin des années 2000³⁷ en Roumanie, l'impact de l'écriture de Michel Houellebecq – écrivain occidental disposant d'un

³⁵ Marjorie Worthington, « Fiction in the 'Post-Truth' Era : The Ironic Effects of Autofiction », *Critique : Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 58, 2017, 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2017.1331999>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

³⁶ Adriana Stan, « Literatura autenticistă » [« La littérature authenticiste »], dans Corin Braga (éd.), *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România* [Encyclopédie de l'imaginaire roumain], vol. I : *Imaginar literar* [Imaginaire littéraire], Iași, Polirom, 2020, pp. 271-288.

³⁷ Iancu (éd.), *Arta revendicării*, p. 30 : « En dépit de *détabouiser* le langage (terme utilisé par plusieurs critiques littéraires des années 2000), pendant la formation de la génération des années 2000, en dépit de

grand capital symbolique –, le féminisme qui prenait forme dans le milieu académique roumain, mais qui n'était pas vu nécessairement comme une urgence sociale, tout cela est propice au sujet masculin, libéré, c'est-à-dire *empowered*, et plus encore suite au libéralisme déboussolé d'après 1989.

On doit encore préciser une différence terminologique circulant en France, une différence précisément politisée, parce que la notion d'« autofiction » est associée aux hommes et au sujet masculin, qui se renforce soi-même à travers une écriture qui consiste surtout à inciter et à se construire. En plus, le caractère postmoderne³⁸ de l'« autofiction » ne répond pas au besoin d'authenticité, de réel, de ce qui a été vraiment vécu, pas construit ou même contrefait. Il devient alors évident ou explicable pourquoi les autrices soient plutôt intéressées par une écriture personnelle, à travers laquelle elles puissent envisager et s'approprier leur corporalité, leur sexualité, les expériences d'être *femme* après tant d'instrumentalisation des femmes par les hommes-artistes.

Camille Laurens, écrivaine française, propose donc à l'occasion d'un entretien la notion d'« écriture de soi »³⁹ au lieu de celle d'autofiction⁴⁰. Son choix semble mieux assimiler l'expérience vécue, souvent traumatique, endommageant à travers l'exploration de la flexibilité de la forme littéraire et surtout de l'hybridité entre autobiographie et fiction. En tout cas les procès juridiques que Camille Laurens traverse (une fois elle-même condamnée par son ex-mari en raison du dévoilement de sa vie privée dans le livre *L'Amour, roman*⁴¹, même si l'autrice se confesse surtout sur ses incertitudes de quitter ou non son mari ; deuxièmement, Laurens accuse Marie Darrieussecq d'un « plagiat psychique »⁴² après la parution de *Tom est mort* de Darrieussecq) se montrent symptomatiques pour le fait que l'« autofiction » d'origine est un artefact, une notion bien théorisée afin de défendre à l'avance la condition autonome de la littérature, tandis que les

mettre à jour l'imaginaire poétique et malgré le contact minimal avec les réalités sociales, la poésie écrite par des poètes a été vue comme indécente, insuffisante, périphérique, insignifiante ».

³⁸ Saveau, « L'autofiction » : « L'autofiction façon Doubrovsky ne serait-elle alors qu'une 'variante "postmoderne" de l'autobiographie' ainsi que l'affirme l'auteur dans les entretiens qu'il a donnés depuis la parution de *Laissé pour conte* ? Rien ne semble pouvoir contester une telle conception de cet avatar de l'autobiographie qu'est devenue l'autofiction » ; Pîrjol, « Pliciul de muște » : « Je pense que ce sous-genre postmoderne [...] suppose une certaine distance ou un certain détachement et un esprit ludique [...] qui peut le protéger de toute tentative de rapprochement avec le thésisme ou de la présomption de non-littérature ».

³⁹ Saveau, « L'autofiction » : « Ainsi Camille Laurens exprime sa réserve face à ce terme dans un entretien : ' Je préfère parler d'*écriture de soi*, ça me paraît plus juste en tout cas, moins décrié que le mot *autofiction* ' ».

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Camille Laurens, *L'Amour, roman*, Paris, P.O.L., 2003.

⁴² Soizic Cadio, « Les procès littéraires #2 : *L'Amour, roman* de Camille Laurens », *Balises*, 2021, <https://balises.bpi.fr/lamour-roman-camille-laurens/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

nouvelles formes autofictionnelles suscitent des risques vis-à-vis du dévoilement de la vie privée des personnes autres que le narrateur ou la narratrice.

Par ailleurs, ces procès dont les femmes font l'objet à « juger » exposent à nouveau *les femmes*, même quand elles décident de pratiquer peut-être ce que Hélène Cixous appelait d'une manière émancipatoire l'« écriture féminine »⁴³. La notion d'écriture de soi que Laurens utilise d'une manière polémique à l'adresse de l'« autofiction » renvoie implicitement au concept de Cixous pour autant que les deux portent sur l'appropriation par les femmes de leur propre expérience à travers la fiction. L'enjeu est bien changé : premièrement, les écrivaines ne se servent pas de mises en scène – comme chez Michel Houellebecq, par exemple⁴⁴ –, c'est-à-dire de fabriques de soi, mais elles cherchent à ne pas fabriquer le soi afin d'exposer des situations et des expériences vécues de la part de ce « soi non-fabriqué ». La différence consiste au niveau de l'accentuation : en ce qui concerne l'autofiction l'accent est mis sur la construction, la méthode de produire un discours fictionnel, tandis que l'écriture de soi par contre porte sur le caractère évolutif, mobile, propre à un processus qui n'a pas de structure prévue ou au moins bien formée. Deuxièmement, l'autofiction s'est constituée comme une forme fictionnelle, tandis que l'« écriture de soi », à défaut d'une théorie permettant de la renforcer, a moins de potentiel d'être exporté comme concept théorique, mais elle est la plus susceptible d'être politisée et d'être investie d'une fonction polémique par rapport à une forme traditionnelle et conformiste, théoriquement délimitée par les agents puissants du champ littéraire. Les autrices attribuent à l'écriture de soi plus d'agentivité.

En revenant, dans la Roumanie post-1989, l'autofiction a été reçue à travers son origine poststructuraliste, à l'âge postmoderne du relativisme, d'où son *alibi* bien conservé, qui va étayer la production des romans centrés sur l'égo selon le titre de la première collection éditoriale roumaine à lancer ce type de narration. Il s'agit d'« Égo prose », une collection fondée dans le cadre des éditions Polirom. C'est vrai que la fiction roumaine se dynamise, en acquérant un caractère plus réactif à la réalité sociale, surtout que le discours narratif rompt avec la métafiction et les écritures trop livresques spécifique à la génération précédente (la génération des années 80^s, connue comme la génération postmoderniste). Même si l'objet de sa recherche est la poésie de cette époque, l'observation de Mihnea Bâlici reste valable également pour le phénomène de la prose. À l'aide de la sociologie littéraire à la Pierre Bourdieu, il explique la dynamique des tensions entre les deux

⁴³ Hélène Cixous, *Le rire de la Méduse : Manifeste* de 1975, Paris, Gallimard, 2024.

⁴⁴ À propos de *La Carte et le territoire* de Michel Houellebecq – voir Anne Chamayou, « *La Carte et le Territoire* : du potin à l'autofiction », *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada*, 2014, 7, p. 7 : « Ce principe de la contamination s'exerce sur les éléments de l'autofiction elle-même. Bien loin de se centrer sur Michel Houellebecq, les éléments autofictionnels et leur potentiel cancanier se dispersent sur d'autres personnages qui sont à la fois des doubles de l'écrivain et de nouveaux réservoirs de rumeur ».

générations arrivant à disputer le capital à la fois symbolique et financier après la chute du communisme :

La deuxième opposition caractérisant le champ littéraire porte sur les mouvements littéraires d'avant-gardes et l'avant-garde consacrée. Concernant le cas roumain, ces oppositions sont représentées, d'une part, par le fracturisme des années 2000 et, d'autre part, par la génération des années 80. En dépit du fait que le premier mouvement s'est montré comme un courant insurgé et non-conformiste dans le champ littéraire des années 80, en promouvant le principe de « la poésie dans la rue » [i.e. la démocratisation et la matérialisation du discours poétique] et en déconstruisant également le programme néo-moderniste de la littérature à thématique métaphasique, les membres de cette génération ont constitué après 1989 une enclave d'élites, institutionnalisée, hostile à l'égard de nouveaux auteurs arrivant dans le champs littéraire. [...] La réaction contre les auteurs des années 80 de la part des auteurs fracturistes [i.e. des années 2000] est d'autant plus vigoureuse que la génération précédente, postmoderniste des années 80 aurait dû représenter, au moins théoriquement, la littérature de l'authenticité et de la libéralisation⁴⁵.

Il est évident que l'autofiction produit ce qu'on pourrait appeler une *émancipation formelle* ce qui sous-entend deux aspects qui se rejoignent : 1) la rupture programmée avec les expérimentations fictionnels postmodernes de la génération précédente, trop livresques et donc très éloignés de la réalité sociale ; 2) la résurrection du *réalisme social*, souvent péjorativement traité de minimalisme grâce aux narrations plus ou moins personnelles qui renvoient à l'immédiat ou à un quotidien souvent pénible à vivre.

Par ailleurs, l'émancipation formelle ne sous-entend pas automatiquement une émancipation de la vision ou de la perspective concernant les relations du pouvoir qui s'installent, plus ou moins d'une manière mimétique, après la chute du communisme en Roumanie. Suite à l'ivresse de la liberté après 1989, tout semble possible au sein du capitalisme débridé et le sujet humain le ressent pleinement, d'où le phénomène que Sanda Cordoș définit par le verbe « détabouiser »⁴⁶. De cette manière, la détabouisation se reflète dans l'autofiction « classique » de la part d'un « *male gaze* », ce qui a comme effet l'institutionnalisation et donc la canonisation de ce sous-genre en fonction d'un fondement normatif et masculin. Cet aspect structurel est soutenu également par une préconception misogyne : l'idée que les genres littéraires centrés sur le soi sont plus faibles et appartiennent par excellence aux femmes, donc aux autrices. La poésie de la confession et la narration autofictionnelle (j'utilise ici le mot *autofictionnel* au sens large), supposant le moi comme centre de l'univers fictionnel, sont souvent considérées comme les genres privilégiés par des autrices selon le principe que les vrais

⁴⁵ Mihnea Bălici, « Fracturismul în câmpul literar românesc » [« Le fracturisme dans le champ littéraire roumain »], *Transilvania*, 2021, 5, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Cordos, *Lumi din cuvinte*, pp. 131-134.

auteurs créent, c'est-à-dire *inventent*, tandis que les femmes ne possèdent pas cette capacité ou de toute façon elles s'exercent dans des genres littéraires plus faciles, qui ne nécessitent pas trop d'invention. Autrement dit, les écrivaines sont associées aux genres faibles, tandis que les écrivains sont associés aux genres lourds de la littérature, soi-disant les genres attaquant des sujets « universels », les « grands sujets ». Alors, la position de l'autofiction en Roumanie reprend cette relation de pouvoir, apparemment paradoxale, parce que le fait d'y importer l'autofiction se passe notamment à travers sa dimension masculine, associée à l'autorité sous-entendue – même lorsqu'elle est faite pour s'effacer – du discours centré sur le moi, dont les origines se trouvent dans *la vigilance* de la méthode (post)structuraliste, dans les jeux textuels et les paradoxes propre à ce mouvement critique, et également dans la psychanalyse qui ne fait qu'approfondir ces contraintes. Visant à lier le (post)structuralisme français, l'autofiction française et sa fonction en Roumanie, la réception du (post)structuralisme dans la Roumanie communiste est radicalement opposée à l'origine de cette école théorique.

En réalité, comme le démontre Adriana Stan, cette méthode a renforcé l'esthétique et la centralité de la littérature dans la culture roumaine, qui perdure bien après les années 2000, y compris le phénomène autofictionnel local :

À mon avis, le structuralisme n'a pas sapé la centralité de la littérature de la culture roumaine après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, mais au contraire il l'a renforcée. En dépit du fait qu'au milieu des années 60, cette théorie ne convenait pas aux goûts ni aux besoins de la critique littéraire roumaine, ses outils pourraient, au fil du temps, être modelés sur les mêmes objectifs de valider et de renforcer l'esthétique. Par conséquent, bien que Nicolae Manolescu ait raison de situer le structuralisme dans un ensemble de théories idéologiquement chargées, il en identifie mal le sens. Car si le proletkultisme, le protochronisme et le domaine des études culturelles avaient comme but de décortiquer et de décomposer le canon littéraire en fonction de certains objectifs politiques, le structuralisme a fini par le reconsolider grâce à ces outils d'analyse méticuleux. Je pense que ce sens conservateur, radicalement distinct du sens subversif qu'il avait dans le climat français marxisé, désigne un comportement partagé par la Roumanie avec d'autres pays voisins du bloc totalitaire⁴⁷.

Alors, l'autofiction en Roumanie profite simultanément de deux aspects opposés : d'une part, il s'agit du besoin d'une prose réaliste, reflétant de la façon la plus authentique possible les milieux sociaux et les conditions pénibles de vie ; d'autre part, cette authenticité assumée et valorisée à la fois par les écrivains et par la critique est captée, même apprivoisée, par l'ensemble du cadre d'appropriation de l'autofiction et par l'héritage poststructuraliste des mécanismes de penser la littérature.

⁴⁷ Adriana Stan, *Bastionul lingvistic. O istorie comparată a structuralismului în România* [Le bastion linguistique. Une histoire comparative du structuralisme en Roumanie]. Préface de Mircea Martin, București, Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017, p. 17.

Je prends comme exemples deux romans publiés dans le même climat des années 2000, à distance de deux ans : *Băgău* d'Ioana Bradea (2004) et *Luminița, mon amour* de Cezar Paul-Bădescu (2006). Ces romans illustrent la polémique autofiction-écriture de soi. Premièrement, le livre de Paul-Bădescu s'inscrit dans la tradition ouverte par Serge Doubrovsky avec *Fils* : le filon psychanalytique, le narrateur masculin, Cezar, en train de traverser des crises intérieures, la fabrication de l'identité parfaite auteur-narrateur-personnage, à travers ce que Patrick Saveau définit comme « processus d'identification captatrice »⁴⁸, renvoient au roman français de Doubrovsky. Sauf qu'ironiquement l'auteur-narrateur roumain profite justement du personnage féminin – le titre est dans ce sens très éloquent, ainsi que le grand volume de pages consacré à la femme, esquissée d'une manière très misogyne – afin de créer une *autofiction* en se servant, donc, de *l'autre*, ce qui ne fait que confirmer le profil revanchard de la narration et, plus largement, de légitimer la domination masculine du système littéraire dont ce livre est issu. Il ne s'agit pas d'« tenter » un procès littéraire à ce livre, mais plus encore de le mettre dans un contexte local et global où l'autofiction est un produit qui reflète et internalise d'une manière plus ou moins évidente, mais certainement *différente* notamment à travers *le genre d'individu*, les rapports de force à l'intérieur d'un système. Ce n'est pas du hasard que les écrivaines françaises attaquent l'autofiction, en proposant d'autres formules et en reliant aux formes d'écriture de soi des thématiques pénibles, incommodes, considérées comme trop intimes, marquées par le manque de pudeur que les femmes ne sont pas « autorisées » à afficher⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Saveau, « L'autofiction » : « Afin que l'autofiction puisse faire partager son plaisir, il fallait que Doubrovsky entraîne ses lecteurs avec lui, entreprise plus complexe, mais qui allait se révéler bien plus bénéfique. D'où la mise en place d'un processus d'identification captatrice mentionné dans sa deuxième autothéorisation, 'Autobiographie/Vérité/Psychanalyse'. Au fond, que désire-t-il ? Une captation de son lecteur qui permettrait de lui refiler certains aspects lourds à porter de sa personne et de sa vie ? Non, il cherche 'un partage' avec autrui, autrui étant 'essentiel dans [son] œuvre'. Il ne s'agit pas simplement pour lui d'infuser son venin au lecteur, de lui refiler sa personne ».

⁴⁹ Brigitte Leguen fait l'analyse du phénomène des narrations de soi écrites par des femmes en France, ayant comme point de départ la différence entre « autofiction » et « écriture de soi ». La deuxième notion est appropriée par des autrices dont les narrations explorent la vie sexuelle des femmes, ce qui est symptomatique d'un point de vue féministe pour la reprise de possession du propre corps et de sa sexualité, donc narrer l'identité d'une manière ou d'une autre est tout d'un coup un geste politique. Voir Brigitte Leguen, « Autofiction *versus* écriture de soi chez les écrivaines françaises contemporaines », *Feminismo/s*, 2019, 34, p. 130 : « En quoi consistera l'engagement dans ce type d'écriture ? Comme chez Desportes, comme chez Millet, de nouveau comme chez Ernaux et aussi chez Leduc, Angot provoque le public et l'oblige à prendre parti en le situant face à ce qu'il évite de savoir ou de voir. Elle emboîte le pas à d'autres qui, comme elle, sont allés jusqu'au bout du dire s'insérant dans une 'culture de la confession' selon les termes de Robert Dion avec cependant un interdit de plus à surmonter : le fait d'être née femme, ici et maintenant, dans une société où l'impudeur des femmes n'est pas reçue exactement de la même manière que celle des hommes ».

Parallèlement, le deuxième livre que j'aborde est *Băgău* d'Ioana Bradea. Le roman n'est pas une autofiction au moins au sens traditionnel de la notion, mais je choisis de le juger selon cette logique, puisqu'il reprend un schéma autofictionnel, bien qu'en même temps, l'autrice n'ait pas comme objectif de produire une autofiction. L'option d'Ioana Bradea est de faire un personnage – Andreea – indépendant à l'autrice en défaveur du critère onomastique. Cette jeune femme fait un travail jusqu'à nos jours considéré comme déplorable : elle est travailleuse du sexe au téléphone rose. La narration se déroule à la première personne, étant très intimiste et viscérale vu le contenu sexuel du livre, d'où les considérations critiques selon lesquelles ce ne serait pas un roman, mais de la « pornographie »⁵⁰ ou un « anti-roman érotique »⁵¹.

Ces efforts conceptuels de placer ce livre dans une catégorie distincte ne font qu'indiquer, d'une part, l'incapacité du public – spécialisé ou non-spécialiste – à appréhender un discours narratif extrêmement personnel, appartenant à une femme travaillant dans un domaine démonisé, portant sur de nombreux préjugés tels que : les travailleuses du sexe sont des putes, des femmes déplorables, des sous-femmes etc. D'autre part, il s'agit d'un aspect formel : quel serait le sous-genre convenable à ce type de roman ? Le discours narratif dispose d'une structure diaristique à travers laquelle le lecteur suit dès vendredi soir jusqu'au jeudi suivant les expériences d'Andreea comme travailleuse du sexe. L'écriture est dotée de fluidité et d'oralité, manquant de ponctuation et de majuscules au début de la phrase. L'enjeu de cette technique s'appuie sur un but plutôt sociologique, de sorte que l'intention est clairement la radiographie de ce métier comprenant à la fois les femmes travailleuses du sexe et leurs clients – les hommes. Cependant l'aspect sociologisant ne compromet pas le contenu soi-disant littéraire du livre. On assiste à une écriture de soi qui suspend dès le début toute hypothèse concernant le caractère autofictionnel. Il est moins important si Andreea est un alter-ego d'Ioana Bradea ou si l'autrice elle-même a travaillé dans la branche – de telles interrogations tiennent plutôt de la curiosité « d'un public accro à l'exhibitionnisme des tabloïdes ou de la rhétorique intrusive et déconspiratrice des *reality-shows* »⁵², infusé également d'une « mentalité voyeuriste »⁵³ spécifique à la nouvelle réalité capitaliste. Par contre, ce qui compte, c'est la nature du discours, la vision très intimiste et énergisée d'une même voix qui raconte, tantôt

⁵⁰ Oana Cătălina Ninu signe une chronique littéraire sur *Băgău*, publiée sur son blog, où elle juge le roman en termes de « pornographie brute » – Voir Oana Cătălina Ninu, « 'Sunt o doamnă, ce p**a mea' » [« 'Je suis un dame, ma b**e' »], 2007, <https://oananinu.wordpress.com/2007/07/18/ioana-bradea-bagau-cronica-aparuta-in-egophobia-si-in-versus-versum/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

⁵¹ Corina Moisei-Dabija, « *Băgău* de Ioana Bradea – anti-roman erotic și vâscos » [« *Băgău* d'Ioana Bradea – anti-roman érotique et visqueux »], *filmecărți*, 2020, <https://filme-carti.ro/carti/bagau-de-ioana-bradea-anti-roman-erotic-si-vascos-84134/>. Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

⁵² Chipur « Proza ».

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

télégraphique, tantôt plus poétique, ce qui lui arrive pendant une semaine de travail. Bradea simule *da capo al fine* un journal intime, sans qu'il y ait de trous métanarratifs à trahir la narration personnelle et l'unicité de la voix narrative.

Alors, en suivant ces deux romans exposés ci-dessus, une conclusion à tirer est la suivante : un auteur s'en sert consciemment d'un sous-genre déjà consacré à la fois en France et en Roumanie, où le contenu est assez conventionnel, s'inscrivant dans une tradition roumaine des hommes auteurs qui pratiquent un discours misogynne⁵⁴. De toute façon, il a forcé les limites éthiques et il a profité de ce système littéraire afin de se consacrer dans une logique bien mise au point, en suivant la recette autofictionnelle sur les traces de Serge Doubrovsky et non moins de Michel Houellebecq. C'est clair que le sous-genre précède ce livre et l'autofiction devient un espace rassurant cette fois grâce à tous ses paradoxes et à sa conventionalité acceptée d'une manière consensuelle. D'autre côté, Ioana Bradea préfère un discours hybride et fluide également, difficile à encadrer dans un sous-genre, qui se situe implicitement, sinon contre, du moins à distance de l'appropriation de l'autofiction en vogue à l'époque. De plus, Bradea a publié son roman chez un éditeur moins visible – Est – et disposant d'un capital financier considérablement inférieur par rapport à Polirom. Il vaut mieux discuter le roman d'Ioana Bradea dans les termes de l'écriture de soi autour de laquelle Camille Laurens construisait sa position d'une manière visiblement contraire à l'autofiction.

À peine après 2007–2008, l'autofiction roumaine devient un sous-genre à interroger, de sorte qu'*écrire sur soi* n'est plus un enjeu, comme il était tout à fait légitime de se passer depuis l'institutionnalisation de ce sous-genre, grâce aux éditions Polirom. En plus, l'agentivité de la « nouvelle autofiction » porte sur les individus marginaux, ce qui renvoie bien sûr aux communautés marginales, et sur l'individu vulnérabilisé, opprimé ou exploité.

Les écrivaines contre l'« autofiction » : Interior zero de Lavinia Braniște et Dezrădăcinare de Sașa Zare

Accablée par l'impératif masculin selon son visage français et puis considéré comme un sous-genre désuet en Roumanie, l'autofiction devient questionnable plus ou moins de façon explicite en particulier par les autrices. En fait, la caution d'authenticité que l'autofiction classique a enchâssée est abandonnée sous sa forme principale de but unique. En revanche, l'autofiction n'est plus une

⁵⁴ Un tel auteur est le célèbre romancier moderne Camil Petrescu à l'époque de l'entre-deux-guerres, avec qui Grigore Chiper compare Cezar Paul-Bădescu. La comparaison peut se montrer injuste, mais en fait elle sous-entend la tradition autoritaire et patriarcale de la littérature roumaine, où les hommes auteurs reproduisent les perspectives misogynes à travers le « male gaze ».

autofiction au sens traditionnel et les enjeux de nouveaux « récits personnels »⁵⁵ se déplacent politiquement vers les personnes historiquement vulnérabilisées et discriminées : les femmes, hétérosexuelles et lesbiennes, les hommes homosexuels, les personnes roms. L'accent de l'autofiction étant le « moi », l'individu est mis, d'une manière implicite, sur une *communauté* et sur des *milieux marginalisés*. En revanche, la production des narrations personnelles passe d'un sujet se reflétant soi-même, où les relations du pouvoir sont, sinon ignorées, du moins situées comme prétextes, d'où la critique seulement *implicite* de la société roumaine post-communiste que les autofictions des années 2000 sous-entendent, tandis que la critique directe, même acharnée, politiquement chargée, centrée vers le capitalisme monopolisant, l'écart croissant entre les classes sociales, la misogynie et le racisme structurels se relèvent à peine dans la production littéraire de ce type après la crise économique de 2007–2008.

Il y a trois livres sur lesquels j'aimerais me pencher pour saisir les changements que l'autofiction suppose : *Soldații. Poveste din Ferentari* d'Adrian Schiop, *Interior zero* de Lavinia Braniște et *Dezrădăcinare* de Sașa Zare.

Avant de m'attarder plus en détail sur les deux derniers romans mentionnés, écrits par des autrices, je reviendrais sur l'autofiction de Schiop. Bref, l'auteur, qui était déjà consacré depuis son roman paru en 2004 et intitulé *pe bune/pe invers*, suivi par *Zero grade Kelvin* [Zéro degré Kelvin] (2009), les deux publiés aux éditions Polirom, et considéré comme un auteur emblématique pour la génération insurgée des années 2000 qui font entrer la réalité atroce dans la fiction, publie en 2013 *Soldații*⁵⁶ – une autofiction par excellence, mais qui déplace la focalisation de l'homonymie auteur-narrateur-personnage (Adi, l'abréviation d'Adrian) vers l'individu multiple marginalisé et, en fin de compte, vers une communauté et un espace surtout racialisés et discriminés. Ce personnage s'appelle Alberto, étant un homme rom et homosexuel avec qui Adi arrive à nouer une relation amoureuse.

Le roman arrive rapidement à représenter un succès éditorial, même une écriture antisystème étant donné tous les ingrédients dont la narration dispose : c'est une autofiction assumée et déclarée, à dimension documentaire, de sorte que l'auteur a fait une recherche sur les « *manele* » en vivant dans ce ghetto de Bucarest appelé *Ferentari* pendant une certaine période de temps. Alors, tout conduit vers une véritable autofiction, qui entreprend une enquête passionnante et réaliste (authentique) sur ce qui n'est pas intégré au système, étant inférieurisé par le centre pour de multiples raisons individuelles et systémiques. Sauf que l'auteur est bien intégré dans le système littéraire roumain, en faisant partie du « canon » contemporain, et discréditer le féminisme et les féministes roumaines n'est pas

⁵⁵ Alexandre Gefen, *Réparer le monde. La littérature française face au XXI^e siècle*, Paris, Éditions Corti, 2017.

⁵⁶ Adrian Schiop, *Soldații. Poveste din Ferentari* [Soldats. Histoire de Ferentari], Iași, Polirom, 2013.

rare chez lui dans l'espace en ligne. Même si la narration attaque des sujets comme l'identité *queer*, l'ethnie rome, la violence contre un homme vulnérabilisé, la ghettoïsation d'une communauté entière, la classe sociale défavorisée, et comporte une certaine critique sociale, le roman est bien situé dans une logique systémique, en lui convenant selon le principe du système hégémonique avalant même les discours qui lui s'opposent du moins apparemment.

En fait, Adrian Schiop s'inscrit dans la tradition de l'autofiction à impératif masculin, employant un discours sexualisant et autoritaire⁵⁷, mais cette fois-ci il s'agit d'hommes, d'où la fonctionnalisation de la domination et, en fin de compte, son usage dans la mise en scène de l'autorité discursive qui n'est pas très loin du discours de Cezar Paul-Bădescu.

Quelques années plus tard, en 2016, l'autrice Lavinia Braniște fait son entrée romanesque avec *Interior zero*⁵⁸ : une histoire contemporaine, reflétant le travail dans une multinationale à Bucarest, dont la protagoniste est Cristina – une jeune femme à 30 ans, timide et vulnérabilisée par des expériences comme la domination de sa directrice, la façon humiliante dont ses collègues de travail la traitent, la perte de la grossesse et les expériences douloureuses avec les hommes. D'un point de vue extratextuel, le roman est publié dans la même collection de Polirom, vendu comme *l'autofiction*, sur les traces de laquelle certains critiques ont labellisé le roman⁵⁹.

Le problème se pose comme suit : est-ce que ce roman est vraiment une autofiction ? Et, si la réponse était négative, comment l'autofiction canonisée est-elle réinventée dans ce cas et, plus important encore, quels en sont les enjeux ? Premièrement, le critère onomastique n'est pas respecté en dépit de la narration à la première personne et aux même indices biographiques qu'on pourrait identifier entre Lavinia – l'autrice – et Cristina – le personnage central. Cette identification biographique ne compte pas, puisque les informations sont justement des repères d'une biographie d'un personnage et également des éléments à représenter une réalité immédiate. Deuxièmement, le titre du roman – *Intérieur zéro* – souligne et signale dès le début l'inexistence d'une identité, ce qui est symptomatique de la façon dont le milieu des entreprises capitalistes affecte négativement le rapport entre l'individu et son propre « moi », d'où l'obsession émergeant du roman pour le vide « existentiel » et les trous identitaires – la perte de la grossesse, l'absence d'affection, la solitude, la féminité que la société impose à une femme comme validation. L'identité de cette femme est déformée et altérée d'où sa perception de soi-même assez faible, sinon complètement défavorable. Il y a une relation peu

⁵⁷ Voir Anastasia Fuiogă, "Gender Performativity and Unstable Identity in Contemporary Queer Romanian Prose", *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 10, 2024, 1, p. 156.

⁵⁸ Lavinia Braniște, *Interior zero* [*Intérieur zéro*], Iași, Polirom, 2016.

⁵⁹ Cosmin Borza, « Realism capitalist » [« Réalisme capitaliste »], *Cultura*, XI, 2016, 7, p. 21 ; Ștefan Baghiu, « Specialistă în introspecție » [« Spécialiste de l'introspection »], *Cultura*, XI, 2016, 13, p. 20.

visible que Braniște établit entre le contexte néolibéral en Roumanie, au cours de se globaliser à travers les grandes compagnies et les investisseurs étrangers, où l'état est décentré, et l'individu jeune, de classe plus ou moins moyenne, qui est accaparé par et soumis aux institutions de plus en plus privatisées et reproduisant la profitabilité, l'efficacité, la concurrence en raison de la domination et du profit. Dans ce contexte, Cristina essaye de s'adapter à sa propre vie. Lavinia Braniște ne s'intéresse pas à créer une autofiction, mais au contraire de se débarrasser de tout pacte ou paradoxe que l'autofiction sous-entend au niveau de l'identité, ce qui laisse de la place aux rapports du pouvoir et aux expériences désagréables et traumatiques qu'une femme, notamment si elle n'est pas engagée dans une relation amoureuse, est très susceptible de traverser dans la société roumaine. L'autrice pratique une écriture de soi personnalisante par rapport à elle-même, en favorisant, tel que Ioana Bradea, la création d'un personnage, qui sert plutôt à mobiliser un contexte entier où la domination n'est pas que masculine, mais aussi féminine. Outre les relations problématiques que Cristina entretient avec des hommes, le féminisme du roman soulève surtout la question de la domination des femmes auprès d'autres femmes et la manière dont les femmes héritent cette attitude à laquelle elles se soumettent aux systèmes et reproduisent les hiérarchies. L'identité n'est que le nœud du roman, et non l'enjeu comme dans le cas de l'autofiction.

Alors, en dépit du fait qu'*Intérieur zéro* peut correspondre au schéma de l'autofiction, c'est plutôt une *fiction identitaire*, basée sur une écriture intimiste et personnelle d'une jeune femme exploitée au travail, vulnérabilisée et en route de se retrouver. Par conséquent, l'autrice met l'accent sur les dissonances et l'impact des mécanismes du contrôle suite à la pluralité des institutions auprès de l'individu, tandis que celui-ci, *volens nolens*, a besoin de ces institutions au sein d'un capitalisme agressif.

Le dernier roman sur lequel je m'appuierai pour clore ma démarche sur l'évolution du sous-genre autofictionnel en Roumanie selon la problématique identitaire est la première narration *queer*-féministe et décolonisatrice récemment parue dans la littérature roumaine : *Dezrădăcinare* de Sașa Zare⁶⁰. Avant tout, il est très important de souligner que le roman est publié à une maison d'édition féministe, marxiste et antifasciste – frACTalia, en dehors du *mainstream* dominant, souvent conservateur et incommode par les engagements militants qui détruisent les hiérarchies esthétiques, patriarcales et exploitatrices. En revenant au roman, la narration fait la preuve de la pratique accompagnée par l'éthique de *l'écriture féministe*, dont l'enjeu, entre autres, est la décentralisation du pouvoir de la forme littéraire et le sous-genre légitimés, conservé d'une certaine manière dans le champ littéraire roumain. La point le plus révélateur de ce récit est la manière dont l'autrice déconstruit de façon polémique, radicale et enrichissante

⁶⁰ Sașa Zare, *Dezrădăcinare* [Déracinement], București, frACTalia, 2022.

l'autofiction comme sous-genre accaparé – y compris colonisé – par la masculinité dominatrice, misogyne et sexiste. Du point de vue structurel, l'autrice, écrivain sous un pseudonyme, met en scène *la mise en abyme de l'autofiction*.

Une des questions majeures que le roman impose c'est la suivante : comment en tant qu'écrivaine ou artiste pourrais-je écrire ou créer dans une forme ou à l'aide d'une forme qui, par sa tradition, m'a indirectement fait souffrir, m'a objectivée et m'a exploitée ? En outre, l'autrice fait appel également à la métafiction à signaler une convention qui ne marche plus alors que son vieil enjeu était de créer une illusion et de s'en servir.

De même, l'autofiction s'était particulièrement consacrée comme étant associée à l'individualité, tandis que Saşa Zare détourne l'impératif egocentrique de l'autofiction, d'où le degré élevé de *réflexivité*, et cela même dans les passages les plus militants, ce qui comprend une *forme de libération créatrice*, en prenant soin de ses lectrices et lecteurs potentiels, en dehors d'un moi individualisé – c'est-à-dire comme un produit strictement social. Cela s'oppose à une stabilité même normative que la protagoniste de Lavinia Branişte cherche afin de se servir de refuge à une femme toute seule, vulnérable et peu confiante en elle-même face au monde des entreprises et du capitalisme, où la plupart des gens cherchent à obtenir du profit selon le principe de la rassurance individuelle. Incorporant, comme Raluca Nagy l'écrit sur la quatrième de couverture, à la fois « Saşa le personnage » et « Saşa l'autrice », Saşa change de perspective, en proposant, au sein d'un milieu hyper-capitaliste et aliénant, un mode d'existence décentré, déraciné, à la fois rassurant, doux, critique et, le plus important, insoumis et libérateur. En fait, le roman propose une autofiction du type « *work in progress* », mélangée avec de la métafiction, mais il est moins important de noter si l'autrice avait comme enjeu d'ouvrir une polémique par rapport à l'autofiction *per se*.

Il est essentiel de souligner l'enjeu polémique et (auto)libérateur de cette narration de soi où la protagoniste est une jeune femme lesbienne, dont la vie est plutôt marquée par des abus, et qui, originaire de la République de Moldavie, déménage en Roumanie, à Cluj-Napoca. Au-delà de toute douleur que cette narration performative explore et explique, la voix de cette femme est à la fois douce, précise, réflexive et rassurante, qui, malgré le côté militant, féministe et socialiste du texte, ne cherche pas à punir ou à blesser, mais à créer un espace flexible, une possibilité de vivre comme « chez toi » à travers la création qui n'a plus de but. Je m'attarde donc sur la dimension de « *work in progress* » du roman, car le public assiste à un travail créatif qui pose quelques problèmes très importants concernant non pas justement le choix de la perspective narrative et les réflexions sur l'écriture personnelle, mais également le rapport entre le moi qui écrit et qui crée une histoire sur ce moi et sur d'autres « moi » aussi et le texte impliquant d'une manière ou d'une autre des relations de pouvoir. Saşa Zare démonte ces relations en réfléchissant à la manière dont le genre modèle la narration et à la façon dont elle crée dans une société basée sur *l'autorité*.

L'autofiction conçue d'une manière si autoritaire dans la tradition littéraire roumaine est aussi remise en question implicitement :

Je pense que j'ai commencé à écrire un roman. Ou une nouvelle. Ou une prose courte. J'écris à la troisième personne. Il est possible que la troisième personne soit la distance adéquate entre moi et la Moldavie maintenant, une distance à embrasser une coupure durant neuf ans, une distance-coagulant⁶¹.

À l'occasion d'une chronique dédiée à ce roman, Alexandru Adam parle en particulier d'une écriture autofictionnelle, pas dans le sens traditionnel, mais dans un sens de l'exploration de création d'une manière *queer*, les deux portant sur un enjeu à la fois politique et intime. Il ne s'agit pas que du *statement* féministe « le personnel est politique », mais le roman suscite un autre type de relation – l'intime transformé à travers un processus thérapeutique en parlant d'une manière engagée d'un moi blessé et en questionnant de toute force les relations de pouvoir dans la famille, à l'école, dans les cercles littéraires, dans la relation d'amour etc. :

Il y a beaucoup de choses dans ce livre sur la façon de s'écrire. S'écrire soi-même attentivement, s'écrire avec amour, avec soin, de manière responsable, être un curateur de toi-même de manière éthique, sans parti pris, s'écrire soi-même de manière *queer*. Écrire les autres de la même façon, aussi *queer* que possible. Ce « mode » traverse si imperceptiblement le livre qu'il n'en est pas vraiment un. *Queer* est la production même. Tout est *queer* ici. Saşa Zare n'écrit pas seulement sur les choses, mais aussi sur un milieu qu'elle construit, qu'elle saisit de partout et qu'elle crée, en rassemblant davantage que des espaces, des époques et des histoires et en produisant un milieu en soi. Combien de finesse, de soin et d'attention dans ce processus de curation *queer* ! Dès que j'ai lu *Déracinement*, j'ai vraiment ressenti ce qu'Iulia Militaru entendait par l'éthique féministe des assemblages⁶².

Conclusion

La liaison entre genre entendu au sens identitaire et genre comme *genre* ou *sous-genre littéraire* que j'ai fonctionnalisée dans ma démarche critique exprime, d'une part, l'urgence d'intégrer cette relation dans les jugements du système littéraire local au sein duquel la production des œuvres littéraires est réalisée, notamment en reproduisant et justement parfois en critiquant la réglementation oppressive qui pèse sur un sous-genre ou sur une formule littéraire, de sorte qu'il ou elle doit être décolonisé(e). D'autre part, mon but est aussi d'illustrer le cas de l'*autofiction* –

⁶¹ Zare, *Dezrădăcinare*, p. 23 : « Cred că am început să scriu un roman. Sau o nuvelă. Sau o proză scurtă. O/îl scriu la persoana a III-a. Poate persoana a III-a e distanța potrivită dintre mine și Moldova acum, o distanță să cuprindă (în brațe) o tăietură de nouă ani, o distanță-coagulant ».

⁶² Alexandru Adam, « *Dezrădăcinare* de Saşa Zare », *Literatură și feminism*, 2022, <https://literatura-sifeminism.wordpress.com/2022/06/28/dezradacinare-de-sasa-zare-minirecenzie-de-alexandru-adam/>.

Consulté le 20 novembre 2024.

son évolution en Roumanie selon le modèle français, ses formes et ses enjeux – puisque c'est le cas le plus frappant de la littérature roumaine post-communiste où la domination et l'autorité du sujet masculin – soit qu'il est auteur, narrateur ou personnage – créent une institution en soi. La plupart des discussions concernant l'autofiction étaient plutôt centrées sur la nature paradoxale ou tautologique de ce sous-genre, ce qui ne fait que suspendre tout jugement politique et éthique, même si cette formule a été évaluée comme étant assez « révolutionnaire » et chargée d'un contenu socio-politique dans la prose roumaine d'après le communisme.

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DANGEROUS LIAISONS BETWEEN THE AUTOFICTIONAL SUBGENRE
AND GENDER IDENTITY IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA: FROM THE
FRENCH ORIGINS OF AUTOFICTION TO *QUEER-FEMINIST* SELF-
NARRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION
(Abstract)

Considering the conventional and supposedly objective perspective that gender's authors do not influence writing or that "literature has no gender", my paper seeks to challenge this preconception. The aim of my study is to explore how the subgenre of autofiction is intricately influenced by gender. Deeply intertwined with themes of identity and individuality, Romanian autofiction, which has been significantly shaped by its French counterpart, has developed within a framework of masculine and patriarchal thought and expression. My primary argument is that the pervasive "masculine dominance" (as Pierre Bourdieu called it) within the Romanian literary landscape has both supported and generated self-fictional narratives that reflect misogyny and sexism from various angles, thereby contributing to the emergence, and establishment of autofiction. Additionally, the ethical implications of self-fiction – which have sparked controversies in both France and Romania – extend beyond the obsolete relationship between facts and fiction; particularly in Romania, it is highlighted how male authors have crafted autofiction while perpetuating dominance and authority, often in regard to women. Beginning with the import of autofiction in post-communist Romania, I critically explore how this subgenre has been received, showing up the paradoxes and limitations of local theoretical discourse on autofiction, which tends to overlook the poststructuralist origins of what seems to be an emancipatory form. Subsequently, I delve into the traditional core of Romanian autofiction by examining its development and the reasons why female authors ultimately dismiss and critique this regulated subgenre, by involving in which could be conceptualised as "self-writing". Finally, I examine the first Romanian queer-feminist self-writing – *Dezrădăcinare* [*Uprooting*] by Sașa Zare.

Keywords: autofiction, post-communist Romania, queer, feminism, misogyny.

LEGĂTURA PERICULOASĂ DINTRE SUBGENUL AUTOFICTIONAL ȘI
IDENTITATEA DE GEN ÎN ROMÂNIA POST-COMUNISTĂ: DE LA
ORIGINILE FRANCEZE ALE AUTOFICTIONII LA AUTO-NARAȚIUNEA
QUEER-FEMINISTĂ ÎN CONTEXTUL GLOBALIZĂRII
(Rezumat)

Având în vedere perspectiva convențională și presupus obiectivă conform căreia genul autorului nu influențează scrisul sau că „literatura nu are gen”, articolul meu își propune să conteste această prejudecată. Scopul major al studiului este de a explora modul în care subgenul autoficțiunii este influențat în mod complex de genul autorului. Având ca teme principale identitatea și individualitatea, autoficțiunea românească, care a fost semnificativ influențată de autoficțiunea franceză, s-a dezvoltat într-un cadru de gândire/expresie masculină și patriarhală. Argumentul meu principal este că „dominanța masculină” (cum a numit-o Pierre Bourdieu) în peisajul literar românesc a susținut și a generat narațiuni auto-ficționale care reflectă misoginia și sexismul din diverse unghiuri, contribuind astfel la instituționalizarea acestui subgen în România. În plus, implicațiile etice ale autoficțiunii – care au stârnit controverse atât în Franța, cât și în România – se extind dincolo de relația dintre faptele concrete și ficțiune; în special în România, modul în care autorii bărbați au produs autoficțiuni este indiscutabil legat de perpetuarea dominației și a autorității simbolice, discursive, adesea în raport cu femeile. Începând cu momentul importului autoficțiunii în România post-comunistă, explorez critic modul în care a fost receptat acest subgen, evidențiind paradoxurile și limitările discursului teoretic local despre autoficțiune, care tinde să treacă cu vederea originile poststructuraliste a ceea ce a fost considerat drept o formă literară emancipatoare. Ulterior, discut canonul autoficțiunii românești, examinând dezvoltarea acestuia și motivele pentru care autoarele resping și critică în cele din urmă acest subgen reglementat. În final, într-o logică evolutivă, discut prima scriere autoficțională *queer*-feministă din România – *Dezrădăcinare* de Sașa Zare.

Cuvinte-cheie: autoficțiune, România post-comunistă, *queer*, feminism, misoginie.

“LENT VOICES”: THE POLITICS OF ROMANIAN MIGRANT LIFE WRITING

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to propose a suitable framework for the systemic positioning and ideological interpretation of several autobiographical novels written by authors who have directly participated in the economic emigration from Romania. The common formal characteristic of these books is that they incorporate biographical elements from the lives of their empirical authors, using various types and degrees of fictionalization in this process. In a certain sense, the extremes of these forms fit within a broad spectrum of autobiographical writings, where the two poles might be, at one end, journals or memoirs, and at the other, autofiction². Controversies surrounding the terminology used to describe these books will be sidestepped by using the more general term “life writing”³.

Thus, the books worth mentioning here are numerous: *Adio, adio, patria mea, cu î din i, cu â din a* [*Farewell, My Homeland, Farewell*] by Radu Pavel Gheo (2003), *Cartea tuturor intențiilor* [*The Book of All Intentions*] by Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari (2006), *Testamentul necitit* [*The Unread Testament*] by Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli (2009), *Zero grade Kelvin* [*Zero Degrees Kelvin*] by Adrian Schiop (2009), *El sueño español. Jurnal de căpșunar* [*El sueño español. A Strawberry-Picker's Diary*] by Albert V. Cătănuș (2010), *Căpșunarii* [*The Strawberry Pickers*] by Dani Rockhoff (2013), *Cireșe amare* [*Sour Cherries*] by Liliana Nechita (2014), *Badante pentru totdeauna* [*Forever Badanti*] by Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan (2015), and *Gastarbeiter* by Mihai Buzea (2017). This list can be expanded. As a preliminary note in any analysis of the representation of the diaspora in Romanian literature, it should be mentioned that no reading of these books can ignore the relationship between the cause of emigration and the neoliberal policies after 1989/1991 that led to privatization, massive layoffs, and

¹ This article was funded through a Doctoral Advanced Fellowship project (CNFIS-FDI-2023-F-0214) by the Babeș-Bolyai University.

² For a more detailed theorization of the difference between autobiography and autofiction in Anglophone contemporary literature, see Hywel Dix, *Autofiction in English*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

³ See Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life Writing, Autobiografiction, & The Forms of Modern Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010. See also Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, Laura Cernat, Bavjola Shatro, “Cultural Memory In Eastern European Women’s Life Writing: Agency, Persistence, Legacies”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2023, 10, pp. 5-17, the introductory article of the edited issue “Women’s Life Writing in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe”

poverty in the semi-peripheries of Eastern Europe⁴. Therefore, an ideological analysis of this corpus will prove insightful for understanding and documenting Romanian post-communism, a period in Romania's history that has been marked by massive migrations to the West⁵. However, we will only refer to a subset of this list.

A very simple delimiting criterion divides these books into two categories: those published in the country of emigration and those that were not. We take this criterion as central, as it does not imply a translation motivated by literary success but rather one motivated by an extra-literary, political or even "civic" reason. From this perspective, only three books fit into a hybrid transnational configuration: those written by Bicec-Zanardelli, Nechita, and Coman-Prodan. These will be our focus in the following discussion. Surprisingly, all three books are written either by women working directly as domestic caregivers in Italy (the first two authors), or about the second-hand experience of Romanian *badanti* told by another migrant (Coman-Prodan), serving as significant sociographic documents for both economic migration in Italy and the broader field of reproductive labour today⁶.

Nonetheless, it is notable that the common denominator of these books is arguably their lack of popularity, prestige, or even relevance to an international reader of what has come to be called *World Literature*. What I mean by this is not necessarily that they have been ignored by the larger public. For example, Nechita's work is one of the most popular depictions of Romanian *badanti* writing, especially after she had been the main figure of the documentary series *Exodul mamelor* [*The Exodus of Mothers*] from 2013, which was broadcast on both the Romanian and the Italian national televisions. However, all three authors are more relevant as public figures in their diasporic communities than as world-literary producers.

So, how can we recuperate them from a so-called "world-literary" perspective? Why should such "provincial" literary exercises – bluntly put, stylistically, formally, and even ideologically rudimentary – be discussed from a global, cosmopolitan perspective? Moreover, is this intervention yet another attempt to rehabilitate a peripheral product in the eyes of the geopolitical centre, adding to the long line of disciplinary critiques that note the fact that hierarchies have not

⁴ Swanie Potot, "Transitioning Strategies of Economic Survival: Romanian Migration during the Transition Process", in Richard Black et al. (eds.), *A Continent Moving West? EU Enlargement and Labour Migration from Central and Eastern Europe*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2010, pp. 249-270.

⁵ For a more detailed sociological analysis of the Romanian emigration to Italy, see Cornel Ban, "Economic Transnationalism and its Ambiguities: The Case of Romanian Migration to Italy", *International Migration*, 50, 2012, 6, pp. 129-149.

⁶ Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care", *New Left Review*, July/August 2016, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii100/articles/nancy-fraser-contradictions-of-capital-and-care>. Accessed November 6, 2024.

changed despite of the rise of postcolonial or postmodernist theories?⁷ Aren't we, by opposing the homogenization and commodification of literary objects in the 21st century, instead exoticizing a kind of literature that has the sole merit of being written by working-class agents?

Before answering all these questions, I will briefly outline the structure of my argument. In the first section of this article, I propose a shift in perspective toward the literary object, starting from a critique of Caterina Scarabicchi's positions and identifying the place of migration literature in Romanian within what Sarah Brouillette calls "the global literary marketplace". Here, the goal is to systematize this raw material from a world-literary perspective rather than to offer broader textual or sociographic interpretations. Ideological close readings of some of these books have been carried out in recent years⁸ and will certainly be the subject of future studies. In the second section, I will address the problem of mapping these books' positions in the literary system, reusing and recontextualizing Tötösy de Zepetnek's terminology of "in-between peripherality", from which I will derive some narratological hypotheses which I will briefly exemplify. Instead of using their writing on labour from within a class perspective, these authors prefer to "lend" their narrative voice at a narratological level to legitimize themselves, as foreigners, to an Italian audience. This choice cannot be explained as a personal decision of the authors but rather as a systemic residue that perpetuates an educational preconception about the civic and ethical utility of literature as a global, liberal institution.

Romanian Migration and the Literary Marketplace

Romanian literature about migration has two groups of literary representatives: authors who discuss migration from an autobiographical stance and those who fictionalize it, either as a central narrative focus or as a secondary plot in their novels. A brief look at the second category⁹ confirms that these authors not only

⁷ See David Damrosch, "World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical World," in Haun Saussy (ed.), *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2006, pp. 43-53.

⁸ See, for example, Ioana Pavel, "Literature and Migration: The Re-presentations of Italy in Contemporary Romanian Prose", *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 1, pp. 147-163; Snezana Ung, "Should I Stay or Should I Move Back? Literary Representations of Emigration to the US in Postcommunist Romanian Literature", *Transilvania*, 2023, 9, pp. 1-10; Mihnea Bălici, "The Unhappy Marriage of Care and the Global Market: 'Soft Backsliding' in the Narratives of Two Romanian *Badanti*", *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 10, 2024, 1, pp. 12-34; Adriana Stan, Cosmin Borza, "Labors of Love. Migration and Women's Work in Contemporary Literature from Romania and Republic of Moldova", *Women's Studies*, 53, 2024, 8, pp. 990-1009.

⁹ When it comes to the issue of visibility and success, the data about the Romanian post-Communist migration novel that I have gathered together with Mihai Țăpu is revelatory. The paratextual metadata

receive the most generous reception within the literary field but also enjoy the most translations into other languages. Some examples include *Sunt o babă comunistă!* [*I'm An Old Commie!*] (2007) and *Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu* [*The Little Girl Who Played God*] (2014) by Dan Lungu, *Kinderland* (2013) by Liliana Corobca, *Noapte bună, copii!* [*Good Night, Children!*] (2010) by Radu Pavel Gheo, and *Interior Zero* (2016) by Lavinia Braniște. The success of these fictionalizing stories highlights an issue in the literary representation of these social themes. A relevant framework for viewing this problem could be the one proposed by Caterina Scarabicchi. In her 2019 article, "Borrowed Voices: Narrating the Migrant's Story in Contemporary European Literature Between Advocacy, Silence and Ventriloquism", the Italian researcher questions the legitimacy of the artistic representations of immigration by cultural agents from European host countries. Drawing her argument on the case studies of the Italian poet Erri de Luca and the French novelist Laurent Gaudé, she states that "the major issue connected with these stories is the ventriloquism of their authorial voices, which fictionally borrow the point of view of the migrant, but actually remain framed within a European – and often Eurocentric – perspective"¹⁰. Scarabicchi identifies two tropes in the European texts (or spectacles, exhibitions, and performances) that intend to raise awareness about the situation of immigrants and refugees. One is the portrayal of the character as a victim, and the other is their unrealistic heroization¹¹. The conclusion of her analysis is that individuals directly involved in migration are often deprived of narrative self-representation. The same can be said about the "second-hand" literary representations of migration in Romanian literature. In a context where European states are guilty of their "structural hypocrisy"¹², combining socio-cultural racism with economic exploitation of transnational labour, migrant subjectivities can have emancipatory and progressive or, at least, authentic and documentary value.

concerning the literary reception and the translations of the main migration novels in the Romanian language are to be found here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1d5k9Jcu_VGA1UFQpTW-dyoEIn7J1TwR6Br-4PqIvxISA/edit?gid=0#gid=0. Accessed November 6, 2024]. The data were presented at the International Conference for the Study of the Novel", hosted by The Institute of Linguistics and Literary History "Sextil Pușcariu" in Cluj-Napoca in 21-22 June 2024, under the title "Modelling the Romanian Post-Communist Migration Novel: A Complexifying Approach".

¹⁰ Caterina Scarabicchi, "Borrowed Voices: Narrating the Migrant's Story in Contemporary European Literature between Advocacy, Silence and Ventriloquism", *Journal for Cultural Research*, 23, 2019, 2, p. 180.

¹¹ For a similar conceptual schema about the limits of romantic cosmopolitanism, see Galin Tihanov, "Narratives of Exile: Cosmopolitanism beyond the Liberal Imagination", in Nina Glick Schiller and Andrew Irving (eds.), *Whose Cosmopolitanism: Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents*, New York, Berghahn, 2014, pp. 141-159.

¹² Remus Gavril Anghel, István Horváth (eds.), *Sociologia migrației. Teorii și studii de caz românești* [*Sociology of Migration. Theories and Romanian Case Studies*], Iași, Polirom, 2009, p. 26.

However, the Romanian case discussed in this article seems to stand out from Scarabicchi's ideal scenario. Moreover, Scarabicchi's argument raises certain questions, as it assumes that literary discourse can exist without any institutional, political, or educational mediation. How much of the immigrants' artistic discourse, for instance, would be subtly shaped by the presence of NGOs or other organizational entities¹³ in the public space? Leaving this question open, my article returns to the semi-peripheral cases that I mentioned earlier, attempting to present a broader theory of literary mediation between the empirical author, the narrative voice, and the audience.

I begin by emphasizing that the texts written by the three women authors occupy a liminal position between two national literary fields, corresponding with the demographic spaces of the groups they represent. Bicec-Zanardelli's book was translated with a changed title, *Cari miei figli, vi scrivo* [*Dear Children, I Write to You*], and published by Einaudi in 2013. *Cireșe amare* was published in Italian in 2017 as *Ciliegie amare* by Edizioni Giuseppe Laterza. As for *Badante pentru totdeauna*, it was originally published in a bilingual version as *Badante per sempre* by Rediviva, an Italian-Romanian small publishing house in Milan, in 2015, before being published in Romanian in 2020 by Eikon publishing house. Consequently, from the perspective of the literary system, this type of diasporic literature should create a literary category in itself. Hungarian theorist Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek offers "a theoretical and methodological framework"¹⁴ that can properly describe this semi-autonomy from the host culture in the subsystem of migrant literature. He expands the concept of "in-between peripherality," initially referring to (semi)peripheral national cultures, to include the literature of the diaspora: "the diaspora author and text is 'in-between' the original culture and literature the author and his/her text emanate from, and both are 'peripheral' with regard to the original culture and literature and their location"¹⁵. In this sense, the Romanian *badante* literature most clearly exemplifies this concept.

However, although the Romanian ethnic minority is one of the largest in the Italian peninsula, discussion of the Romanian diaspora literature in Italy is limited. Its relevance in the Italian culture and market has been much lower than in Romania¹⁶. Nevertheless, reading these books reveals an interesting particularity, an element that differentiates them from other autobiographical works listed

¹³ For a telling example of this institutional mediation of literature, see Sarah Brouillette, *UNESCO and the Fate of the Literary*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2019.

¹⁴ Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Migration, Diaspora, and Ethnic Minority Writing", in Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, I-Chun Wang, Hsiao-Yu Sun (eds.), *Perspectives on Identity, Migration, and Displacement*, Taiwan, National Sun Yat-sen University, 2010, p. 86.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

¹⁶ One relevant exception could be Andreea Simionel's *Male a Est*, Roma, Italo Svevo Edizioni, 2022. However, Simionel's novel is not relevant for our study, since it was written directly into Italian and the author is a second-generation migrant.

above: their “born translated” character, in the words of Rebecca L. Walkowitz¹⁷. Unfortunately, the system within which we operate is considerably more restricted than the one of the *world lit* superstars discussed by Walkowitz (i.e., J.M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, Junot Díaz, Mohsin Hamid, etc.). More precisely, we are far removed from the main networks of what Sarah Brouillette calls “the global literary marketplace”¹⁸, i.e., the Anglophone and Western-centric space of *World Literature* that has shaped the careers of the most important writers from the world’s peripheries. This is a context where even postcolonial literature is structurally a product of global capitalism, with all the inherent advantages and disadvantages. The authors discussed here do not compete with these world-authors; they are not even symptomatic of the commodification of hybridity and nomadism in diasporic *World Literature*. Instead, they speak to two highly atomized literary spaces: the Romanian and the Italian one. Therefore, I retrace the question: why are these books important from a global perspective?

One reason could be that they are world-historical by default. We can always read these books as symptoms of how the crisis of global capitalism in Western states is stabilized by and begets the import and commodification of cheap migrant labour force from the Global South. The individual subjects of this process may not necessarily interpret their experience accordingly, but their disembedded narrations are nonetheless open to progressive and theoretically productive interpretation. However, this article has a more systemic, theoretical, and modest scope. Therefore, I believe that their marginal position on the literary market itself is also significant in how they are instrumentalized by non-academic consumers. Their lack of success confirms that “only some relatively privileged individuals are engaged in the production and circulation of literature”, which “positions world literature as an elite, homogenizing, complacent commodity”¹⁹.

Of course, reclaiming and revaluing them as exotic and “raw” literary products *à la* Scarabicchi, or as world-historical documents, would not change the logic of the market system itself. Their lack of market success is also tied to formal and ideological shortcomings that must not be ignored. Discussing these shortcomings in axiological terms prevents us from seeing the systematic picture. These literary products are rudimentary not because they are poorly written but because they are the result of a mechanism of power hierarchies in which “proletarianized” authors from Eastern European semi-peripheries lost the *World Literature* competition,

¹⁷ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017.

¹⁸ Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 15-43.

¹⁹ Sarah Brouillette, “World Literature and Market Dynamics”, in Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*, New York and London, Routledge, 2016, pp. 93-94

which is increasingly politicized in complex, self-reflective ways. While narrators in contemporary world postcolonial autofiction, such as those by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Justin Cartwright, are used as a “singular collective voice”²⁰ that speaks on behalf of a community to create awareness and even contest a transnational educated audience, the narrators in these *badante* authors’ life writings have more conformist stakes in relation to the *status quo*’s immigration policies. Even Coman-Prodan’s work, which seems to embody the scope of writing from a collective (even though ethno-national and religious) perspective when choosing to write from the point of view of a subjectivity different from hers, is doing so in order to “sell” the Romanian diaspora to the foreign public.

This shows us that Tötösy de Zepetnek overlooks the fact that there are different types of “in-between peripherality”. From the perspective of the global *World Literature* market, this intermediate position can offer an advantage for delimitation and promotion, depending on the “technologies of recognition”²¹ activated in a particular historical circumstance. From this perspective, Romanian *badante* literature becomes doubly marginal: both in terms of the national criterion and in terms of international capital. Thus, these voices cease to speak for a vernacular, hybridized, creolized, or migrant population. On the contrary, they prefer to systematically separate from other migrants. The narrative voices in the three selected books here emphasize the social, educational, and intellectual differences between these workers and the stereotypical image of the lumpen migrant, corrupted and bearing the marks of a class- or race-discriminated positionality²². Therefore, how should these books be read?

Lent Voices: Who Are They Writing For?

The three books discussed here follow the life stories of three women who leave Romania during the transition to capitalism, working in Italy as live-in caregivers, often without a work contract and in conditions of physical and emotional exploitation. In a sense, the three works share similar narrative structures. For example, their fables are built around the point of emigration by dividing the story chronologically into a period before leaving the country and one afterwards. The earlier interval is usually marked by late socialism and the first years of economic

²⁰ Hywel Dix, “Autofiction, Post-conflict Narratives, and New Memory Cultures”, in Alexandra Effe, Hannie Lawlor (eds.), *The Autofiction: Approaches, Affordances, Forms*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 185-203.

²¹ See Shu-Mei Shih, “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition”, *PMLA*, 119, 2004, 1, pp. 16-30.

²² See Alex Cistelean, “Cireșe amare și gogoși dulci” [“Bitter Cherries and Sweet Donuts”], *CriticAtac*, 2015, February 9, <https://www.criticatac.ro/ciree-amare-gogoi-dulci/>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

liberalization. The three narrators start from a socially favorable position: Nechita's character as a social service worker in Focșani, that of Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli as a journalist in Chișinău, and Coman-Prodan's narrator as a caretaker in an orphanage in an unnamed urban area of Romania. Soon, this material balance is disrupted by the wave of post-communist layoffs in the Romanian-speaking countries. Left jobless and in precarious domestic situations (we see, for example, how all marriages fail because of adultery or alcoholism), the three women are forced to leave Romania in order to support their children at home. The timing of the departure is important: the narrators of Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan and Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli leave Moldova in the early 2000s, when the visa issue and Italian legislation were still hindering economic migration between the two countries; at this time, communism is still seen as the engine of capitalism's failure in this landscape, where anti-communism seems to be a constant narrative attitude in migration novels. From this point onwards, the life stories of the three narrator-characters resemble each other, as they are all, in fact, all pursuing family reunification in the state to which they have emigrated. The narrative climax is given by the reconstruction of the family in the Italian culture, this time in a single-parent form, which reifies the trope of the independent mother. This image is coupled with an attempt to legitimize Romanian migrants in the local civic sphere. The years in which the books appeared, both locally and in the Italian publishing world, correspond to a period of strong tensions between the Italian population and the Romanian minority, in which the latter is stereotypically seen as precarious, dangerous and violent²³, referring to a very specific social group from which the three authors programmatically differentiate themselves. The image they create is that of a neoliberal, individualistic subject, whose social upward mobility is due to their ability to work without questioning their labour conditions.

To better explain how this differentiation occurs at a narrative level, I will draw on several interpretive tools proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. In addition to traditional narrative instances like narrator and narratee, they introduce other aspects that become significant in the act of storytelling, such as *sites*, *media*, *consumers/audiences*, *strategies of self-inquiry*, *patterns of emplotment*, and *coaxers*²⁴. This landscape illustrates not only the fact that a literary product is not the result of a single authorial voice, but the fact that life-writing can be

²³ Probably the best known and the most intensely mediatized case is that of Romulus Nicolae Mailat, a Romanian Roma migrant that was tried for sexually assaulting and murdering an Italian woman in 2007. This event contributed to the rise of a wave of racist and anti-Romanian feelings in the Italian public sphere in the early 2000s. For more details about the Mailat case and its mediatic portrayal, see Teodora Popescu, "Immigration Discourses: The Case of Romanian Immigrants in Italy", *The Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education*, 2008, 1, pp. 31-43.

²⁴ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, London, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 50.

interpreted as a performative act. Following a similar narratological approach in “Telling Sexual Stories”, Ken Plummer states that “there is much in common here with what is often called postmodern social theory except that this sociological approach offers distinctive advantages because it does not stay at the level of textual analysis”²⁵. In the case of the three books that I am discussing, it is essential to note that each has an explicit, albeit abstract audience, which obliges these authors (as *coaxer*, *coacher* or *coercer*) to narrate positive and dramatic *badanti* stories either to confirm or to combat structural racism in Italian society, as well as an implicit, imagined and textually constructed audience, which the authors seek to persuade. Literature thus serves as a mediator between these two levels. This mediation is rudimentary and, arguably, ineffective. However, this is less important than the fact that it is built on narratological tropes that emphasize the exceptionality of the migrant subject.

One element that contributes to this impression is the form. In the works of Liliana Nechita and Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, the dominant strategy for constructing this textual “audience” is embedded in the epistolary form of these books. *Testamentul necitit* is structured as a series of letters from a mother working abroad to her children. Clearly, this construction is only a textual pretext, and the “you” employed by the narrator has a clear rhetorical function: “Hello, my dear children! Who else could I be so sincere with, if not you? And to avoid talking to myself in vain, I thought it would be good to write to you again”²⁶.

In *Cireșe amare*, the narratee is not identified, and its rhetorical function is maintained throughout. However, occasionally, the second person appears in the textual construction as an “autobiographical you”, implying a doubling of the narrative instance as addresser and addressee: “But I have two children back home, a little grandson like the Little Prince, and I’ve had *you* by my side for a lifetime”²⁷ (e.m., M.B.). This type of storytelling strategy may have had a therapeutic function, but the publication of these books in this letter collection form implies that a persuasive function is at work as well. The empathy generated by such phenomenological identifications is structured according to which side of the border the reader resides. For a Romanian audience, the goal is a direct identification with the biographical and familial trauma. For the Italian audience, the mechanism is almost voyeuristic, aiming to humanize the caregiver character. I won’t discuss the hierarchical relations that this second perspective entails at this point.

²⁵ Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, New York and London, Routledge, 1994, p. 24.

²⁶ Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, *Testamentul necitit [The Unread Testament]*, second edition, Chișinău, Cartier, 2019, p. 141.

²⁷ Liliana Nechita, *Cireșe amare [Bitter Cherries]*, București, Humanitas, 2014, p. 94.

In the case of Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan's novel, the narratological structure is even more tendentious. Constructed as a fast-forward *Bildungsroman*, *Badante pentru totdeauna* begins its transnational plot only halfway through, from the 14th chapter (out of 26) onwards. The first part of the novel prepares the "legitimacy" of the narrator-character by following her journey through the last years of communism (where her father is portrayed as an anti-communist dissident), through her family's sacrifices in Ceaușescu's last years, finally creating an idealized, romanticized profile of the care worker: "Without realizing it, I had become, without notice, a *badante*"²⁸ well before emigrating, as an employee of an orphanage in late socialism.

Another strategic element is the hagiographic construction of the character. The professional and class trajectory of the three narrators follows a descending path of gradual "proletarianization". Coman-Prodan's narrator starts from a state-funded professional position in the late socialist years, after which the post-communist privatizations force her to emigrate²⁹. Moreover, the characters in *Cireșe amare* and *Testamentul necitit* both start from relatively privileged and educated positions, the former as a civil servant in Focșani, Romania, and the latter as a journalist in Chișinău, Moldova. Unfortunately, the migration experience entails the loss of professional security in favour of caregiving jobs in which these narrators often work without a labour contract and face intensified exploitation. This commodification of domestic labour does not lead to a class consciousness or solidarity with the workers' cause; on the contrary, the narrators seem to naturalize their position at work and in relation to their families, explaining it as an issue rooted in gender essentialism: "We are mothers, or daughters, or wives, or grandmothers. We are the heart of a family; everything revolves around a woman"³⁰.

Furthermore, their differentiated profile is created either through culture – Nechita leaves home with volumes of Romanian poetry, a novel by John Steinbeck, and the Bible, while Bicec-Zanardelli often fetishizes the nationalist figure of the poet Mihai Eminescu, "the Great Genius"³¹ of Romantic Romanian literature – or through their inherent maternal nature, which makes them not just caregivers (i.e., actors on the transnational reproductive labour market) but spiritual agents: "Being a *badante* is not a job, it's a way of being in the world."³²

²⁸ Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan, *Badante pentru totdeauna* [*Forever Badanti*], București, Eikon, 2020, p. 17.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 65: "What the hideous and inhuman monster of communism had failed to do, the powerful and destabilizing blow of savage capitalism was about to succeed, forcing us to redefine and reformulate our rules of survival".

³⁰ Nechita, *Cireșe*, p. 118.

³¹ Bicec-Zanardelli, *Testamentul*, p. 68.

³² Coman-Prodan, *Badante*, p. 157.

Their relationship with their employers is “personalistic”³³ or even spiritualized, dematerializing any employee-employer relationship into a “humanist” rapport that is entirely depoliticized. Furthermore, it seems that the entire geopolitical disaster of transition and dependence on the West is sublimated into a religious narrative: “If God placed me there, in the home of an elderly lady in northern Italy, there had to be a reason. A bond was created in a still mysterious and unknown way, one not entirely in our hands”³⁴. This appeal to a pan-Christian sensitivity adds a further persuasive nuance to the discussion by shifting the focus to a shared Italian-Romanian spirit³⁵. It seems to suggest that both the Italian public and the Romanian good migrants shared the same values, as well as the same enemies:

What do you think is the biggest misfortune on the head of a Romanian emigrant? Another Romanian emigrant that has to live with the same host. Most of them are “Bucharest” shysters! Those from the slums, who think that the good man is the best prey, those who are ready to “fool” even their mother. They come, steal, rob shops, with the money they get they rent an apartment and lend it to other Romanians. [...] They sell and buy phones, drugs and girls. [...] A misfortune never comes alone... After being destitute, he has to put up with the bullying of the one who speaks Romanian but is not Romanian. Because Romanians are educated and with common sense, they mind their own business and are thinking of their families left behind. The others, the shysters, are rogues and profiteers without nationality³⁶.

All of these downplays of class consciousness should not be understood as personal failures of the authors in question but as a direct effect of “in-between peripherality” in a marginal position in the “global literary marketplace”. The goal is to construct a civic consciousness aimed at persuading the Italian public to look beyond ethnic differences. Unfortunately, this kindness only applies to a “special” subset of the migrant demographic in the host country: one that is educated, conformist, and with civilizing values.

Conclusions

By analyzing their narratives within frameworks of “the global literary marketplace” and “in-between peripherality”, this study uncovers the way in which Romanian “badante” literature occupies a doubly marginalized space, straddling both Romanian and Italian literary spheres yet largely remaining on the periphery of global literary markets. These works underscore the distinctive tensions faced

³³ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica. Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p. 201.

³⁴ Coman-Prodan, *Badante*, p. 89.

³⁵ For more details about the religious theme in the works of Nechita and Bicec-Zanardelli, see Bălici, “The Unhappy Marriage”, pp. 26-30.

³⁶ Nechita, *Cireșe*, pp. 60-61.

by migrant authors whose narratives are shaped not only by personal experiences but also by systemic hierarchies and market expectations that often prioritize more commercially viable or politically compelling diasporic literature. Through examining the autobiographical novels of Romanian caregivers in Italy – *Testamentul necitit* by Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, *Cireșe amare* by Liliana Nechita, and *Badante pentru totdeauna* by Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan –, the article illustrates how the narratives diverge from conventional World Literature paradigms. Rather than advocating for collective migrant solidarity or a broader class consciousness, these works emphasize conformity with the host country's expectations, and exceptionality regarding other migrants, thus shaping a distinct diasporic narrative that should appeal to the Italian audiences while preserving cultural ties to the Romanian heritage. Ultimately, the article argues that these narratives' marginality in both Romanian and Italian markets speaks of the broader systemic hierarchies that determine the visibility and success of migrant voices, raising questions about the representation and validation of peripheral literary voices in a globalized world.

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“LENT VOICES”: THE POLITICS OF ROMANIAN MIGRANT LIFE WRITING
(Abstract)

This study explores the way Romanian literature written by authors who directly participated in the Romanian emigration to Italy is positioned in the world-literary system, by employing Sarah Brouillette's concept of “global literary marketplace” and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's idea of “in-between peripherality”. My main argument is that these authors' marginal position in the literary market is doubled by a reactionary understanding of the function of the literary institution: not as an emancipatory endeavor, but as a site for self-legitimation to the Italian public. Consequently, (semi)autobiographical novels by Romanian *badanti* in Italy – Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, Liliana Nechita, and Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan – emphasize migrant exceptionality over solidarity. Their strategies aim to persuade Italian readers by presenting a “special” subset of educated, conformist migrants, while downplaying class consciousness and structural racism. However, these ideological and aesthetic choices cannot be properly understood without a systemic view of this type of literature.

Keywords: migration literature, life writing, World Literature, in-between peripherality, class consciousness.

„VOCI DE ÎMPRUMUT”: POLITICA SCRIERILOR AUTOBIOGRAFICE ALE
EMIGRANTELOR DIN ROMÂNIA
(Rezumat)

Acest articol valorifică teoretizările lui Sarah Brouillette despre „piața literară globală”, respectiv ale lui Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek despre „condiția periferică intermediară” pentru a analiza modul în care literatura română scrisă de emigrante economice în Italia se poziționează în sistemul literar mondial. Argumentul central al studiului este că poziția marginală a acestor autoare în cadrul pieței literare este dublată de o înțelegere reacționară a funcției instituției literare: nu ca un demers emancipator, ci ca un mijloc de autolegitimare în fața publicului italian. În consecință, romanele (semi)autobiografice ale scriitoarelor de origine română care lucrează ca *badante* în Italia – Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, Liliana Nechita și Ingrid Beatrice Coman-Prodan – evidențiază excepționalitatea experienței emigrantelor în detrimentul manifestării solidarității între emigrante. Strategiile literare dezvoltate de aceste autoare urmăresc să atragă interesul cititoarelor și cititorilor italieni prin prezentarea unei categorii „speciale” de emigrante educate și conformiste, minimalizând totodată conștiința de clasă și efectele rasismului manifestat structural în societatea în care au emigrat. Totodată, articolul demonstrează că aceste alegeri ideologice și estetice nu pot fi înțelese adecvat în lipsa unei analize sistemice a tipului de literatură elaborat de respectivele autoare.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură a emigrației, autobiografie, literatură mondială, condiție periferică intermediară, conștiință de clasă.

MAGDA WÄCHTER

THE POETICS OF SUBTITLES IN *THE CHRONOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE ROMANIAN NOVEL*

A poetics of the Romanian novels read through their subtitles may appear to be a hazardous or relatively modest undertaking. Are subtitles important enough to warrant an analysis in themselves, or are they able to shape our understanding of the novel as it evolves through time?

As regards titles, the legitimacy of an analytical interpretation is attested by the so-called “titology”¹, which is predicated on a semiotic, syntactical, and pragmatic interpretation of subtitles, and sometimes also involves more complex historical and cultural components. Because of its dual and somewhat ambiguous nature, the subtitle belongs to a grey area, difficult to separate either from the title or from the text itself. This is ultimately also what makes subtitles intriguing.

While a comprehensive definition of titles is yet to be provided², it is very difficult to envision a rigorously defined category of subtitles, particularly considering that their autonomy from the so-called “main titles” is under dispute. Also known as secondary, optional, auxiliary titles, subtitles are, much like titles, in fact, texts, micro-discourses that enjoy a peculiar status, that have their own features as well as a contextual and textual relevance, and that can play the most diverse roles. Functioning as an element of authority and supremacy that orients the act of reading, the title represents “the civil status of the text”: it indicates its name, profession, domicile, date of birth etc.³ and has easily identifiable functions. Leo H. Hoek lists, among these, the informative, appellative, differential, justificatory, contractual, anticipative, structuring, dramatic, challenging, valorising, advertising functions, and so on⁴.

The subtitle, however, is optional and secondary in relation to the title, yet not to the content. It indicates not the official, but the personal, intimate identity of the book, which it can therefore represent even more accurately than the title sometimes. Its tendency is to suggest, rather than to assert, and to promise an

¹ “Titology”, from the French *titrologie*, is the name Claude Duchet assigns to this subdiscipline in “La Fille abandonnée et la Bête humaine, éléments du titrologie romanesque”, *Littérature*, 1973, 12, pp. 49-73. One of the founders of modern “titology” is Leo H. Hoek.

² Leo H. Hoek reaches this conclusion in the history of “titology” he undertakes in the volume entitled *La Marque du Titre. Dispositifs sémiotiques d’une pratique textuelle*, Hague-Paris-New York, Mouton Publishers, 2011.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 274-278.

emancipation from the conventional, compulsory nature of the title. By its very auxiliary status, it has higher freedom of expression and a potential to be directly entangled with the text. The main role of the title is to speak about the book. As a supplement, the subtitle can speak about the book, about the title (sometimes at odds with it), about the author, the epoch, and especially about their unseen parts, providing a surplus of essentialization. As Gérard Genette puts it, “more broadly and flexibly, the subtitle often provides nowadays a more literal indication of the theme than the title, which evokes it symbolically or cryptically”⁵.

While the title is rational, denotative, compulsory, and delimiting, the subtitle is intuitive, allusive, free and broadly open to interpretation. Its roles in relation to the title and the content of the book are twofold: the subtitle confirms or negates the main title, explaining or obliterating its meaning, enhancing or diminishing its value, condensing or augmenting it, steering or confusing the reader, granting univocal or equivocal meaning, adding verisimilitude or fictionality and so on. This duality is, generally speaking, peculiar to paratexts as “thresholds of interpretation”, as G. Genette calls them, where “thresholds” are understood as “the literary and printerly conventions that mediate between the world of publishing and the world of the text”⁶. For Genette, titles, subtitles, intertitles, pseudonyms, prefaces, dedications, epigraphs, notes, epilogues and afterwords represent the paratextual field, an indefinite area situated at the frontier between the interior and the exterior of the text.

In fact, as seen by G. Genette, the object of poetics is not the text in its singularity, but its textual transcendence, its relations to other texts, as literature is inevitably always in the second degree⁷. As a specific type of transtextual relations, the paratext is therefore of utmost importance for poetics, given its capacity to act as a mediator in a frontier space, with all the characteristic attributes of this status. Analysing the prefix “para”, J. Hillis Miller subtly suggests that

“Para” is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, something inside a domestic economy and at the same time outside it, something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold, or margin, and also beyond it, equivalent in status and also secondary or subsidiary, submissive, as a guest to host, slave to master. A thing in “para”, moreover, is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line

⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, foreword by Richard Macksey, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 85.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. XVII.

⁷ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*. Translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, foreword by Gerald Prince, Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. IX.

between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself, the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside⁸.

This paradoxical nature (“paradoxical” is an example of a word formed with the prefix “para”) is perhaps most faithfully reflected in the subtitle as a paratext that can have its own poetics, at the limit between work and interpretation, between author and reader, in an exteriority of the text that para-aesthetically reveals its hidden interiority. Whereas the most social aspects of literary practice can be read in the paratextual field, subtitles reveal also the most intimate aspects of the text and, sometimes, the author’s unfiltered portrait as well⁹.

A secondary literary history or a literary history that runs parallel to the discourse inside the discourse can be seen in between these “thresholds of interpretation”, which play the role of a screen between the phrase itself and the alternative ways to express it. What is more significant is the fact that this situation, both inside and outside the text, represents the optimal position for critical judgment, since the frontier is, after all, the very locus of interpretation.

The evolution of subtitles throughout the history of the Romanian novel confirms, especially in the beginnings, the information that is usually well-known, reinforcing the authorial intention in alignment with the cultural ideology of the times¹⁰. The first subtitles, up until 1900, tend to be self-referential. They are highly informative, justificatory and valorising. The novel or the romance tends to be “original” or “national”, in the sense that it promotes the local literature, in which the novel plays a central role. The reader, far from being “implied” yet, must be guided, forewarned, sometimes through ample explanations where the subtitle plays almost the part of a prologue (e.g. Ioan Slavici, *The Revolution of Pârlești. A Tragodic Novel in Five Parts, extracted from some manuscripts in Ispania and compiled after the latest fashion, dedicated to the honour and praise of all those equal unto themselves*, 1873). At other times, it distinguishes between truth and fiction (“true history”, “fabricated history” etc.), or provides additional explanations through hybrid, non-canonical formulas (“an original, political-tragic-humoristic novel”, 1889, or a “political-geographical-humoristic novel”, 1889). This is the time when emphatic subtitles appear. After 1900, they proliferate: “an original, highly sensational novel” (Panait Macri, *The Most Beautiful Girl in*

⁸ J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host”, in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, London & Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 219.

⁹ See John Barth, *The Friday Book or, Book-Titles Should Be Straightforward and Subtitles Avoided. Essays and Other Nonfiction*, London, The John’s Hopkins University Press, 1997.

¹⁰ 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. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

Bucharest, 1889); “the great epic” (Al. Macedonski, *Thalassa*, 1893), “a great novel of sensational topicality” (Const. Fulger, *A Throne for Love*, 1910) etc. The appeal of the hyperbole, a symptom of the novel’s infancy, indicates a complex, rather than a well-defined, self-consciousness. The “great” or “sensational” novels, with few exceptions, have marginal value, while renowned authors, like Ion Agârbiceanu, subtitle their books “short novels” (*Dolor*, 1928). Once the first signs that the novel is coming of age appear, long subtitles are abandoned, with a few exceptions such as, for instance, the comic or the parabolic novel. So are grandiose attributes (perhaps less so in the case of sensation or adventure novels) and the didactic formula of the subtitle. After 1920, when the great novels are published, the augmentative, opulently enticing function of subtitles is suppressed, oftentimes minimizing the content with ironic potential, especially through a poetics of authenticity that encourages an openness towards frontier areas. The novel becomes the simple “schema of a novel” (Vasile Popa-Botoșani, 1933), a journal fragment (G. Ibrăileanu, *Adela. A Fragment from the Journal of Emil Codrescu*, 1933), a collection of notes, a confession, reportage, story, memoir, “true fairy tale” (Felix Aderca, *The First Journey around the World. A True Fairy Tale*, 1939). With heightened self-awareness, it no longer takes on bombastic attributes, but detracts its importance and value, albeit not without an air of elitism and, at times, whimsical modernism. Its declaration of existence becomes a declaration of independence or, rather, a declaration of nonconformism.

By the second half of the 20th century subtitles appear to have exhausted all their functions: self-referential, generic, ideological, moral, spatial, temporal, commercial, educational, suggestive and so on. The novel also followed a similar path: shortly after it appeared, it tapped into all the western models in vogue at the time.

Things change after the establishment of communism, when subtitles suffer radical transformations. Forced to leave the old frontier between the author and the text or between the text and the public, they migrate towards the invisible limit between the overt authorial intention and the covert meanings of the work. Its locus becomes ethereal and can be deciphered only at the level of the subtext. It is relevant that in the case of ideologically committed literature written in the 1950s, subtitles tend to disappear. Those that survive are, like titles, short and crisp. Allusive duality, paratextual suggestion, nuance, the plurality of interpretation deriving from the free, optative nature of the subtitle are features that are incompatible with the rigors of ideologized literature. Only the historical novel of great writers like M. Sadoveanu, or the anti-West or anti-capitalist satirical novel (Sergiu Fărcășan, *J. B. C. Crosses the Curtain. The novel of the fantastic affairs and adventures and nightmares of the dauntless James B. Clawhead, the great master of Objectivity, the man who crossed the curtain*, 1954) could still afford the “luxury” of subtitles. Subtitles are also sporadically used in SF novels, which make no reference to “current topics”. In the context of the leveling of creation,

subjected to strict ideological norms, subtitles could seem to be too abundant, a mark of untimely originality, a luxury or a whim, so writers no longer dare to assume this risk. The world of “para”, situated simultaneously on both sides of the frontier, with all the dangers inherent in the unforeseen, is incongruous with politically instrumented literature, where no secondary voice can accompany the official identity of the text.

It was only in the late 1960s that the novel re-entered the sphere of the literary and that subtitles reappeared. Significantly, they served not so much to convey meaning as to suggest a refusal, a negation of form which conceals an unsayable protest encapsulated in the content. Apparently, the novel was no longer a novel but the “chronicle of a day” (Constantin Țoiu, *Death in the Forest. The Chronicle of a Day*, 1965), “a suite of interludes” (Al. I. Ștefănescu, *In Pursuit of Isolde. A Suite of Interludes*, 1967), journal or memoir fragments (Henriette Yvonne Stahl, *Don't Step onto my Shadow. Fragments from the memoirs of Onofrei, written by himself, albeit through someone else, out of demureness, in the third person*, 1969), etc.

This formal nonconformism gradually extended to titles, which were sometimes unexpected and confusing, and permeated the structure of discourse when the first experimental, oneiric or metafictional novels were published. The revolt of the novel that denied itself to deny reality, in fact, could be deciphered from the negative or somewhat mocking connotation of some subtitles: “futile novel” (Mircea Cojocaru, *Ramayana*, 1970), “aleatory and detective antinovel in pursuit of the idea” (Toma George Maiorescu, *The Killer and the Flower*, 1970), “pseudo-novel” (Vasile Băran, *The Inquiry*, 1972), “pseudo-notes from the battlefield” (Alexandru Struțeanu, *Leaves Are Falling in the Steppe*, 1973), “false treatise on love” (Fănuș Neagu, *The Beautiful Madmen of the Grand Cities*, 1976), “somewhat fantastical fragments from a much vaster realistic NOVEL” (Nicolae Prelipceanu, *The Norwegian Tunnel*, 1978). By contrast, the subtitle that transposed the aesthetics of authenticity into the language of topical themes bore the difficult, indigestible burden of ideologically committed literature: a “commemorative foray” (Damian Ionescu, *Seals of Dark Gold*, 1980). More than ever before, subtitles in the 1980s revealed an agenda of protest against social contextual norms through the subversion of textual norms. Novels seemed to be anything but novels if read through the filter of their subtitles: a journal, “almost a story” (Oana Cătina, *Child's Play*, 1981), “a novel in prose-verse” (Gabriela Negreanu, *The Adventures of Mototol-Rostogol*, 1981), “a zoonovel” (Pop Simion, *Bestiary*, 1981), “variations on a theme against the light” (Gheorghe Crăciun, *Original Documents / Authenticated Copies*, 1982), a journal, a report, a romance, a dictionary, a discourse, notes, “an epic poem” (Nicolae Breban, *The Road to the Wall*, 1984), “a concert for happiness and suffering” (Dan David, *The Snake Whose Rattles Were Stolen*, 1984), a film, a radiography, a document, a collage, letters, an inquiry, a ballad etc. In their expansive drive, they stepped not just

beyond the limits of the genre and species but they also entered the sphere of other arts (concert, film) or cultural undertakings. On one side of the frontier were the totalitarian world and realist-socialist writings, while on the other lay the world of the author and that of literature that was open to post-modernist renewals. The initially subtle, barely noticeable space of the paratext broadened considerably and became a bridge between inside and outside, while also paradoxically becoming interiorized to the point of turning invisible.

The subtext behind this type of paratext naturally disappeared in the 1990s and the frontier shifted again, while preserving the entire memory of its metamorphoses. Extremely eclectic, the novel now achieved a synthesis of every previous trend, reflected in subtitles that once again went hand in hand with the novel. New subtitles of the most imaginative kind were added to this impure genre ("novel/poems", "an essay-novel", "a theatre novel", "the novel of short fiction"): "a retro(version) novel" (Mircea Nedelciu, Adriana Babeți, Mircea Mihăieș, *The Woman in Red*, 1990), "a cinéroman", "a test-novel", "an editorial novel with four living characters" (Nicolae Cristache, *The Journalists*, 1996), "a forest novel" (Gellu Păltineanu, *The Bear's Agony*, 1996), "a self-mythologic novel" (George Anca, *The Indian Apocalypse*, 1998), "a cinematographic novel", an "underground novel" (Daniel Vighi, *The Summer Island*, 1999), "a minimalist postmodernist novel", "an exotic epic", "a romanced pseudo-biography", "a treatise on mouse psychology" (Alex Freiberg, *The Master and the Mouse*, 1995), "an addenda to a novella by Kafka" (Gabriel Chifu, *The Marathon of the Vanquished*, 1997), "a rock-and-roll fable" (George Cușnarencu, *The Evening Star's Journey*, 1997), "a Monsieurist dialogue" (Grid Modorcea, *The Descendants of the Morometes or, on Self-Praise*, 1998), "a fragment of a snake skin" (Vasile Constantinescu, *The Eighth Day since Genesis*, 1997) etc. The tendency to relativize the species, sometimes at odds with the content ("a pseudo-novel", "a different kind of novel", "a story that is not a novel, a novel that is a story") alternates, at the level of subtitles, with direct negation ("a non-novel", "an impossible novel", "a historical antinovel"), but the protest is now leveled not just against the writing, but also against its topic. The "historical antinovel", for instance, revolves around an antihero from the communist world: Elena Ceaușescu (Vasile Băran, *From the Queen of Work to the Dead Queen*, 1994).

Even though the older, "original romance" is visibly transformed, the commercial appeal of subtitles remains substantial. Bombastic attributes continue their career, sometimes subtly pastiching classical titles, at other times displaying blatant ironical connotations. "A masterpiece novel" is, for instance, the subtitle of a rather tedious rural novel (Alexandru V. Sadovan, *The Olteni with Shoulder Yoke*, 1994). The "short" novel is still produced, with the same somewhat confusing self-referentiality. The astounding, ambiguous or contradictory nature of the title suggests not just the writers' attunement to the postmodernist spirit but also the positioning of the paratextual frontier between the authorial intention and

the text itself rather than between the writer and the public. The frontier appears to shift into a more interiorized space, less open to a dialogue with the exterior, and becomes a world engaged in a dialogue with itself.

Beyond the impression of eclecticism and extreme libertinism, the subtitles of the post 1989 novel outline a poetics of freedom that faithfully reflects the permissiveness of novelistic discourse. In terms of their value, they could be situated between a “masterpiece novel” and “the wrecks and shards of some remaining fragments of the traces left by a novel dreamed of for a long time” (Gheorghe Iova, *How Many People Are Needed for the End of the World*, 1999). In terms of their types – between the traditional novel (rural, social, political, sentimental etc.) and the “impossible novel”, the “pseudonovel”, the “non-novel”, the “antinovel”, the “rock-and-roll novel” or the “underground novel”. Generically, there is almost no genre or species that refuses them. Stylistically, all options are open to them. As markers of intimacy and micro-professions of faith, subtitles state that novels can be and truly are whatever they wish to be, that there is no repression possible, that they can afford to make confessions that are exclusively contextual, and that they can also take stock of their right to their own private space.

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THE POETICS OF SUBTITLES IN *THE CHRONOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF
THE ROMANIAN NOVEL*

(Abstract)

Starting from Gérard Genette's claim that the object of poetics is not the text in its singularity, but its textual transcendence, this study aims to overview the subtitles of Romanian novels, reading them through lens that are as much contextual as they are textual. The contextual approach focuses on the evolution of subtitles throughout the history of the Romanian novel, highlighting their characteristic features in different historical periods, in relation to literary-artistic genres and larger socio-cultural contexts, with a view to shedding light on a possible secondary history of the novel filtered through the history of subtitles. In its turn, the textual approach sees subtitles as "paratexts" that represent, in Genette's terms, "thresholds of interpretation" situated both inside and outside discourse, in a frontier area, with everything that such a position implies. Occupying this middling position, subtitles are revealed to have specific functions and impacts, which are sometimes more significant for the process of interpretation than those of titles themselves, being part of the so-called domain of "titology".

Keywords: subtitles, paratextuality, Romanian novel, poetics, textual transcendence.

O POETICĂ A SUBTITLURILOR DIN *DICȚIONARUL CRONOLOGIC AL
ROMANULUI ROMÂNESC*

(Rezumat)

Pornind de la observația lui Gérard Genette că obiectul poeziei nu este textul literar în singularitatea lui, ci transcendența sa textuală, articolul își propune să schițeze un portret al subtitlurilor romanelor românești, printr-o lectură deopotrivă contextuală și textuală a acestora. Cea dintâi urmărește evoluția subtitlurilor, parcursul lor în timp de-a lungul istoriei romanului românesc, trăsăturile lor în raport cu diferitele epoci, genuri literare și artistice și contexte socio-culturale mai ample, relevând o posibilă istorie secundară a romanului pornind de la cea a subtitlurilor. La rândul său, lectura textuală are în vedere calitatea subtitlurilor de „paratexte” ce reprezintă, după expresia lui Genette, „praguri ale interpretării” aflate atât în interiorul, cât și în exteriorul discursului, într-o zonă de frontieră, cu toate implicațiile acestei localizări. În acest rol intermediar, subtitlurile își deconspiră funcții și resorturi interioare specifice, uneori mai semnificative în ansamblul interpretării decât acelea ale titlurilor propriu-zise.

Cuvinte-cheie: subtitluri, paratextualitate, roman românesc, poetică, transcendență textuală.

MIHAIL SADOVEANU – CORESPONDENȚA TRIMISĂ LUI SEXTIL PUȘCARIU

Texte stabilite, editare și note de Robert Cincu

În arhiva de corespondență primită de Sextil Pușcariu, disponibilă la Institutul de Lingvistică și Istorie Literară „Sextil Pușcariu”, Academia Română, Filiala Cluj-Napoca, există nouă documente semnate de Mihail Sadoveanu, care datează din perioada 1904–1933. Mai exact, e vorba de două cărți poștale și șapte scrisori, pe care le publicăm aici, cu convingerea că ele vor fi de interes pentru filologi și istorici deopotrivă, dar și pentru publicul general, în condițiile în care implică două personalități marcante ale culturii și societății românești din secolul al XX-lea. Am păstrat numerotarea documentelor ca în arhivă, de la 1 la 9, în ordine cronologică.

Primele 8 documente aparțin intervalului 1904–1913. Pentru Sadoveanu, perioada respectivă conturează un traseu literar și editorial extrem de bogat. În 1904, an care marchează, de altfel, și debutul editorial al autorului, acesta publică patru cărți de proză, motiv pentru care N. Iorga avea să vorbească despre 1904 ca fiind „anul lui Sadoveanu”. Sextil Pușcariu se număra atunci printre primii critici care apreciau proza lui Sadoveanu. Același Iorga îi propune lui Sadoveanu să facă parte din redacția revistei *Sămănătorul*. De-a lungul anilor, Sadoveanu colaborează însă cu zeci de reviste, este el însuși fondator sau coordonator al mai multor publicații, deține diverse funcții în instituțiile culturale ale vremii, continuând în tot acest timp să fie unul dintre cei mai productivi prozatori români¹. Într-un proiect major coordonat de Sextil Pușcariu – *Atlasul lingvistic român* – Sadoveanu avea să joace, de asemenea, un rol important, fiind unul din cei trei scriitori consultați pentru elaborarea sa: „Mai mult de 80% din locuitorii români ai României fiind țărani, cele mai multe puncte cercetate au fost la țară. Spre a nu neglija însă limba claselor culte, am urmat o sugestie ce ne-a fost făcută de d-l profesor universitar D. Caracostea și am chestionat și trei din scriitorii noștri consacrați, din cele trei provincii principale ale țării, D-nii: I.A. Brătescu-Voinești (Muntean), M. Sadoveanu (Moldovean) și I. Agârbiceanu (Transilvănean)”².

În cele mai multe din scrisorile adresate lui Sextil Pușcariu, Sadoveanu vorbește tocmai despre noile sale cărți apărute la acea vreme, despre activitatea sa

¹ Vezi Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, „Mihail Sadoveanu”, în Eugen Simion (coord.), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, ediția a II-a revizuită, adăugită și adusă la zi, vol. 7 (S/Ș), București, Editura Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2021, pp. 10–11.

² Sextil Pușcariu, prefată la *Atlasul Lingvistic Român*, partea I, vol. I, Cluj, Muzeul Limbii Române, 1938, p. 10.

de redactor sau despre alte proiecte culturale în care era implicat (vezi, spre exemplu, documentele 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8). Două scrisori, în mod special, sunt extrem de interesate în raport cu practicile editoriale din epoca respectivă. În scrisoarea nr. 3 (din 1907), Sadoveanu se referă la plecarea lui Iorga de la revista *Sămănătorul*, despre felul în care acesta conducea revista, dar și despre anumite nemulțumiri pe care redactorii publicației le aveau. Episodul respectiv fusese comentat și în presa culturală a vremii, iar scrisoarea lui Sadoveanu completează povestea cu o privire din interior. Sadoveanu era redactor la *Sămănătorul* și, mai mult decât atât, după plecarea lui Iorga, el chiar a preluat conducerea revistei alături de Șt. O. Iosif și Ion Scurtu. Celălalt caz interesant vizează scrisoarea nr. 5 (din 1909), unde Sadoveanu descrie condițiile de publicare la editura Minerva, cu care prozatorul a avut o lungă colaborare. Mai mult, relevante sunt și cazurile de scrisori care abordează diferite curiozități lingvistice (scrisorile 7 și 9) sau o carte poștală cu urări de sărbători (documentul 2).

Am corectat tacit greșelile de scriere evidente și am uniformizat numele de orașe (spre exemplu, am păstrat doar varianta Fălticeni în cazul alternanței Folticeni/Fălticeni). Din punct de vedere grafic, am adaptat textul la normele ortografice actuale, păstrând însă anumite particularități lingvistice care țin de epocă, de spațiul geografic sau de un anumit stil pentru care Sadoveanu optează în exprimare. Toate sublinierile din text aparțin autorului.

Robert Cincu

1.

București, 15 Decembre 1904.³
Str. Toamnei, 87.

Iubite domnule Pușcariu,

Scrisoarea d-tale de-abia aseară am primit-o, prin Iosif: o rătăcise prin buzunare, cum i-i obiceiul.

³ Carte poștală, 14×9 cm. Textul, pe verso, este scris de mână, cu cerneală albastră. Pe fața cărții poștale apar următoarele elemente: stema Regatului României (tipărită cu roșu, stânga sus), textul „UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE / ROMÂNIA / CARTĂ POSTALĂ” (tipărit cu roșu, centrat), patru ștampile rotunde de culoare neagră cu textul „BUCURESCI / EXPED. SCRIS / 28 DEC 04 7 S” (dreapta sus), timbru (tipărit pe cartea poștală, cu roșu, dreapta sus), iar în partea de jos este plasat textul „Domnului Dr Sextil Pușcariu / IX Lazarethgasse 29 I / Viena (Austria)” (scris de mână, cu cerneală albastră).

Reproducerea oprită nici nu trebuia să o bagi în seamă; voia, pentru un lucru care mă bucură și pentru care-ți mulțămesc și eu la rândul-mi, trebuia să o dau cu ce mai mare plăcere.

Aud că d. Bogdan-Duică ar voi să-mi facă o învinuire din faptul că *Dureri înăbușite* nu constituie un progres față de *Povestiri*. De ce? Sunt lucruri scrise în aceeași vreme relativ; le-am înmănunchiat după firea lor. Progresul la trei luni se caută? O să rămân la aceste trei volume? (Pe al patrulea îl vei primi, domnule Pușcariu, peste vreo trei-patru zile.) Poate nu-i place nota mai realistă. În sfârșit – D-tale îți mulțămesc pentru atențiune și-ți strâng prietenește mâna!

Mihai Sadoveanu

2.

31 Decembre 1904.⁴

Călduroase felicitări pentru anul nou și sfintele sărbători.

Mihai Sadoveanu
București. Toamnei 87.

3.

Fălticeni, în 5 Ianuarie 1907⁵.

Iubite domnule Pușcariu,

În adevăr, ar fi păcat să nu ne vedem. Suntem așa de aproape: numai hotarul ne desparte. Și eu doresc, ca și dumneata, să petrecem o seară împreună, la un pahar de vin și la discuții literare. Dumneata prin București ai fost mai mult în fugă de vreo două trei ori; eu, pe de altă parte, nu mi-am putut îndeplini planul, ca să vin să

⁴ Carte poștală, 14×9 cm. Textul, pe verso, este scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră. Pe fața cărții poștale apar următoarele elemente: stema Regatului României (tipărită cu roșu, stânga sus), textul „UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE / ROMÂNIA / CARTĂ POSTALĂ” (tipărit cu roșu, centrat), două ștampile rotunde de culoare neagră cu textul „BUCURESCI / EXPED. SCRIS / 13 JAN 05 11” (dreapta sus), timbru (tipărit pe cartea poștală, cu roșu, dreapta sus), o ștampilă de culoare neagră cu text indescifrabil (stânga jos), iar în partea de jos este plasat textul „Domnului Dr Sextil Pușcariu / II Lazarethgasse 29 I / Viena (Austria)” (scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră).

⁵ Scrisoare, trei pagini (11,5×18 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră.

te vizitez la Braşov. Gândul pe care-l ai de a pune la cale câteva şezători îţi închipui deci că l-am aflat cu o îndoită bucurie. Când va fi să vin, voi veni şi te voi vedea şi pe dumneata, voi vedea şi Bucovina.

Iar până atunci aş dori să mai am unele veşti de la dumneata, aşa din când în când, când ai răgaz.

Despre afacerile noastre bucureştene socot că ai idee. Vei fi citit „Dislocările literare” din *Luceafărul*⁶. Aceasta a fost singura informaţie justă cu privire la retragerea lui Iorga de la *Sămănătorul*. Nu se spune însă pricina. O pricină reală n-a fost. După o şedinţă a *redacţiei*, care s-a petrecut prieteneşte ca de multe ori, a doua zi primim scrisoare, prin care ne face cunoscut că se retrage, din pricină că nu mai este între noi legătura de mai înainte („este un mort între noi”), din pricină că a observat că ne apasă autoritatea sa etc. Scrisoarea aceasta a fost pricinuită de faptul *neobişnuit* că se luase de comun acord hotărârea să facem materialul *Sămănătorului* împreună, lucru care nu se făcea de multă vreme, cam de vreun an şi mai bine. Încet, încet, pe nesimţite, Iorga îşi asumase toată munca revistei. Noi nu mai eram redactori decât cu numele. Materialul îl făcea d-sa pe câte două trei numere înainte cu ce avea, – de alt material, poate al nostru, nu era nevoie, de vreme ce numerele erau cu mult înainte de termen gata, aşa încât aici e explicaţia *lenei* *redacţiei*. Când *poporul* a căutat să-şi stabilească vechile drepturi, tiranul a abdicat. – Lucrul era de prevăzut: fuseseră câteva planuri de abdicare încă de vreo două ori, şi Iancu Scurtu (veşnicul împăciuitoare) izbutise de două ori. A treia oară n-a mai fost chip. La scrisoarea noastră, Iorga a răspuns că retragerea sa este revocabilă.

Am avut păreri de rău pe care le înţelegi şi le pricepi bine. – Am mai avut păreri de rău, pentru că Iorga a dat a înţelege că lucrurile au avut cu totul alte pricini decât cele adevărate. Şi era convins că erau altele. Poate să fi fost la mijloc o intrigă, vorbe colportate, din partea unui prieten, Em. Gîrleanu, care era şi prietenul lui Iorga şi al nostru, şi care acum nu mai este nici al nostru, nici al lui Iorga. Sunt convins că Iorga a fost de bună credinţă când a vorbit de nerecunoştinţă, de bani etc., lucruri care pentru noi şi azi sunt o enigmă. Pe urmă acest om cu părţi aşa de scânteietoare şi geniale îl ştii cum este. Chiar dacă s-ar convinge că n-a fost nimic din ce a crezut, părerea şi scrisul de la început rămân neclintite. Şi astfel suntem într-o situaţie tristă. Nu ne simţim cu nimic vinovaţi cătră acest om pe care l-am înţeles bine, l-am întovărăşit cu prietenie adevărată şi pe care încă îl iubim. El pe de altă parte nu se poate să nu aibă îndoieli, dar e de o mândrie sălbatecă. Duşmănie între noi nu este; poate nici răceală. Şi cu toate acestea pare că suntem pentru totdeauna despărţiţi. – Ne pare mai ales rău de adunătura care firesc se face în jurul lui: studenţi mai mult sau mai puţin sinceri,

⁶ G. Bogdan-Duică, „Dislocări literare”, *Luceafărul*, VI, 1907, 1, pp. 15-18.

publiciști ca Ciotori⁷ și ca alții. Nu-mi închipui să se mai găsească oameni cari să stea lângă el cu dragoste, cu credință în scrisul lui, privindu-l așa cum este cu marile calități și cu micile scăderi ale omului.

În sfârșit, mă iartă că am înșirat prea multe; dar nu știu dacă ai noștri ți-au scris ceva, și poate doreai să știi unele lucruri. Și mai sunt și altele, pe care ți le voi spune când ne vom mai vedea.

A rezultat însă și-un bine pentru *Sămănătorul*, pe care l-ai băgat de seamă, în ceea ce privește literatura. Și încă unul, în ceea ce privește strângerea prieteniei între cei cari muncesc alături. Ne cunoaștem de mult, și cred că prietenia de idei și de suflet nu se va rupe niciodată, întărită și pecetluită cum a fost aici la strângerea rândurilor. Când am rămas singuri am avut entuziasmul și emoțiunile pe care le încerci când scoți din nou o revistă. Mai ales Ștefan⁸, – mi-a plăcut și mie cum l-am văzut în împrejurările acelea!

Prietenul dumitale, cu salutări cordiale.
Mihail Sadoveanu

4.

30 Octomvrie 1907.⁹
Fălticeni.

Stimate domnule Pușcariu,

De mult doream să-ți scriu, să-ți spun că la începutul toamnei acestea te-am căutat prin Cernăuți. Nu te-am găsit. Erai încă la Brașov. Venisem acolo întâmplător, cu o mică afacere, de la Rădăuți. Am vizitat și localul „Junimei” unde de-altminteri, ca la începutul unui an școlar, am găsit puțini studenți. Am văzut și orașul, modern-stil, și pe uliți din când în când am auzit și românește. Nu știu de ce, am plecat de-acolo cu o impresie penibilă. Nu-i vorbă, că mi-a părut și foarte rău că nu te-am găsit. Aveam ca un fel de descurajare în orașul acela străin.

⁷ Dimitrie N. Ciotori (1885–1965), diplomat, prozator, publicist și traducător (inclusiv din limbile suedează și norvegiană). De-a lungul timpului, colaborează la mai multe dintre revistele conduse de N. Iorga și beneficiază de sprijinul istoricului pentru a studia în Suedia.

⁸ Ar putea fi vorba de St. O. Iosif care avea un rol important la revistă în perioada respectivă. Vezi Ion Istrate „*Sămănătorul*”, în Simion (coord.), *Dicționarul general*, vol. 7, p. 93: „Din 1903 S[ămănătorul] iese «sub direcția unui comitet», proprietar fiind St. O. Iosif. De la numărul 23/1905 director devine N. Iorga, iar din comitetul de redacție fac parte St. O. Iosif, Mihail Sadoveanu și Ion Scurtu. După demisia lui Iorga din funcția de director, consemnată în numărul 43/1906, la conducerea revistei rămân cei trei redactori”.

⁹ Scrisoare, două pagini (11×17,5 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră.

Mi-am pus în gând să mă mai întorc prin Rădăuți, ca, de-acolo, să trec spre mănăstirea Putnei, pe care încă n-am văzut-o. Cred că, abătându-mă prin Cernăuți, de data aceasta te voi găsi.

În Suceava m-am întâlnit cu d. Grămadă, student la Cernăuți. Mi-a vorbit despre o serbare culturală pe care ar fi s-o dea „Junimea” acolo. Era destul de însuflețit. Mi-a propus să vin și eu. Aceasta e o chestie veche, mi-ai vorbit și dumneata de dânsa, și, natural, dacă se face ceva, ar trebui să știi și dumneata și să-ți spui cuvântul.

Îmi pare bine că ți-a plăcut ultimul volum. Poate nu-ți va dispăcea nici cel ce-i urmează, – lucru exasperant pentru unii (confrați în ale literelor).

Am trimis revistei *Junimea literară* o nuveletă.

Te rog să primești cele mai amicale salutări.

Mihail Sadoveanu

5.

1 Ianuarie 1909. Fălticeni.¹⁰

Prietine Sextile,

Traducerea „rapoartelor” tale anuale din nemțește ar fi de bună seamă foarte interesantă.

„Minerva” primește spre editare broșuri în editura cea mică în următoarele condiții:

Le ia pentru totdeauna;

Dă în mijlociu 300 de lei de număr.

Dă drept autorului să-și retipărească cartea, nu însă într-o editură similară sau de popularizare, efină.

Punctul de la urmă privește lucrările originale, cum e a ta.

Nu știu dacă-ți convin aceste condiții: să-mi răspunzi la asta. Încolo chestia e dezlegată, căci îngrijirea Bibliotecii mici a „Minervii” este în seama mea¹¹.

Îți urez de anul nou spor la muncă și sănătate, împreună cu „boreasa” și cu feții tăi frumoși.

Cu dragoste.

Mihai

¹⁰ Scrisoare, o pagină (10,5×17 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră.

¹¹ În 1909 Sextil Pușcariu publică volumul *Cinci ani de mișcare literară (1902–1906)* la editura Minerva, colecția Biblioteca „Minervei” (nr. 49).

6.

10 Ianuarie 1909. Fălticeni.¹²

Dragă Sextile,

Manuscriptul mi-l trimiți mie. Îi voi face loc în bibliotecă cât de curând.

Traducerea din rusește e prea binevenită. Dacă e din Turgheniev, să nu fie numai din *Memoriile unui boier rus*¹³: din acestea se tipărește în curând o alegere la „Minerva”.

Cu dragoste și cu toate cele bune.

Mihai

7.

4 Aprilie 1912. Fălticeni.¹⁴

Iubite prietino,

Nu știu cum s-a făcut să-ți dătoresc așa de demult un răspuns. Iartă-mă. Mi-ai scris despre „bourii” unei pălării. N-aș putea să-ți spun de unde și de la cine am auzit vorba aceasta. O știu așa „din cele mai vechi vremuri”.

Nădăjduind să te găsească rândurile acestea în plină sănătate și spor la muncă, îți strâng mâna cu prietinie. În vara asta poate ne-om întâlni iară: nu ne-am văzut destul de demult. Nu cumva ai de gând să vii la Iași la serbările lui Cuza¹⁵?

Al tău,

Mihail Sadoveanu

¹² Scrisoare, o pagină (10,5×17 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră.

¹³ Probabil se referă la volumul lui Ivan Turgheniev, *Povestiri vânătorești*, traducere și prefață de Mihail Sadoveanu, București, Minerva, 1909.

¹⁴ Scrisoare, o pagină (11×17 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală albastră.

¹⁵ Probabil Sadoveanu face referire aici la serbările care urmau să aibă loc în Iași, cu ocazia dezvelirii statuii lui Alexandru Ioan Cuza, eveniment ce a avut loc la 27 mai 1912, cu participarea regelui Carol I și a multor personalități culturale și politice din epocă. Într-un articol nesemnat din 1912, „Gazeta Transilvaniei” scria despre eveniment: „în mijlocul unei însuflețiri de nedescris s-a făcut astăzi dezvelirea solemnă a statuii lui Cuza-Vodă. De mult timp nu s-a mai pomenit în vechea capitală a Moldovei atâta lume și atâta norod ca tocmai în această zi – dovadă elocventă despre sentimentele profunde de recunoștință și vecinică amintire, pe cari le păstrează în sufletele lor cetățenii României și cu deosebire țărănimea română, reprezentată într-un număr deosebit de mare la această festivitate națională [...] a domnit toată ziua o animație extraordinară [...] În piață în sunetul muzicilor militare, s-a încins o horă” („Gazeta Transilvaniei”, LXXV, 1912, 117, pp. 1-2).

8.

15/28 Mai 1913. Fălticeni.¹⁶

Iubite prietino,

Ai făcut bine că ai cerut informațiuni asupra domnului Chibziu. Cred că nu trebuie să vie în Bucovina, deoarece e numai un elev al conservatorului din Iași, și încă nu dintre aceia cari se ridică deasupra mediocrului. În Bucovina, ca și aiurea la Români, e bine pe cât cu putință este, să răzbată artiști de valoare.

Mă bucur că te-ai gândit la o publicație pentru popor și cu plăcere voi căuta și-ți voi trimite o colecție din *Răvașul Poporului*¹⁷. De la mine ce fel de articol ai dori? Lămurește-mă prin câteva cuvinte.

Poate nu știi că la „Casa Școalelor”¹⁸, supt îngrijirea mea, a apărut o bibliotecă pentru țărani alcătuită din vreo 12–13 numere, care n-ar fi rău să se răspândească și-n Bucovina. Am urmărit mai ales dezvoltarea gustului cititului; am amestecat și utilul, însă cu măsură. Numerele acestei biblioteci, ieșite până acum, sunt: *Alexandria*, *Esopia*, *Genoveva* (revăzute de mine), *Povestiri de petrecere și de folos* (a mea: combaterea alcoolismului), trei broșuri de sfaturi medicale intitulate *Răvașele unui doctor*, de d-nul Andrei Iliescu, colaborator la *Răvașul Poporului*, *Războiul pentru neatârnaire* și colecție din *Halima* de Badea Gheorghe, *Arghir și Elena* și alte câteva între care explicația legilor țării (*Gorovei*) și chestia întovăririlor țărănești (de mine), – speciale pentru stările de lucruri de la noi. Broșurile acestea, admirabil tipărite, cu slovă mare, se vând cât costă.

Poate n-ar fi rău să vă gândiți la răspândirea lor și să vă puneți în legătură cu „Casa Școalelor”.

Cu dragoste, îți strânge mâna,
Mihail Sadoveanu

¹⁶ Scrisoare, o pagină (11×17,5 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală albastră.

¹⁷ Revistă bilunară, apărută la Fălticeni între 15 noiembrie 1907 și 1 octombrie 1909, sub conducerea lui Mihail Sadoveanu și a folcloristului Artur Gorovei (1864–1951). Scopul declarat al revistei este „luminarea” locuitorilor satelor.

¹⁸ Instituție înființată în 1896 sub egida Ministerului Instrucțiunii și Cultelor pentru a sprijini construirea și repararea școlilor, precum și înființarea de biblioteci în zona rurală. Mihail Sadoveanu a fost solicitat constant să realizeze referate pentru selecția cărților care intrau în gestiunea respectivelor biblioteci.

9.

17.10.[1]933¹⁹

Copou-Iași.

Stimate Prietino,

Astăzi, în cancelaria Creditului, aflu de la un avocat al nostru, d. Ștefănescu, o chestie pe care te rog să mi-o explici. Până la primirea răspunsului d-tale voi fi neliniștit.

D. Ștefănescu se afla la Cluj, în interesul Creditului, având o afacere cu o proprietate a d-nei Vicol. Reprezentatul nostru acolo e un domn avocat Barta, doctor în drept de la București, vorbind perfect românește. De față fiind d-na Vicol și d-nul avocat Barta și încă două sau trei persoane care interveneau în discuția de afaceri, – d. Ștefănescu a întrebat pe d. Barta cine e domnul (un ungur) care se amestecă în discuție. – A! nu vă cunoașteți? zice d. Barta. Domnul e cutare... *futalăul* d-nei Vicol.

Asta s-ar fi spus față de părțile interesate și a fost auzit de toată lumea. D. Ștefănescu mi l-a raportat cu rușine și consternare. Eu mă întreb dacă a auzit bine. Să zicem că vorba asta ar însemna concubin. Între oameni binecrescuți se poate întrebuința acest termen altfel decât șoptit la ureche?

Te rog, lămurește-mă.

Cu o strângere amicală de mână,
Al d-tale Mihail Sadoveanu

¹⁹ Scrisoare, o pagină (12,5×18,5 cm). Textul este scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră. Pe pagină apare tipărit (cu negru) un antet: „Creditul Fonciar din Iași/Cabinetul Directorului General”. Scrisoarea se află într-un plic de hârtie, culoare verde deschis, 15,5×12,5 cm. Pe fața plicului apar următoarele elemente: trei timbre poștale (dreapta sus), două ștampile negre (dreapta sus, peste timbre) cu textul descifrabil parțial „Iași / 17 OCT 933 / RECOMANDATE”, textul „Domniei Sale / Domnului profesor universitar Sextil Pușcariu / Cluj” (centru-dreapta, scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră) și textul „M. Sadoveanu / Copou-Iași” (stânga-jos, scris de mână, cu cerneală neagră). Pe verso, plicul păstrează urma unei ștampile negre cu text indescifrabil.

MIHAIL SADOVEANU – THE CORRESPONDENCE
SENT TO SEXTIL PUȘCARIU
(*Abstract*)

Mihail Sadoveanu (1880–1961) and Sextil Pușcariu (1877–1948) are two major figures in the Romanian culture and society of the 20th century. Not only were they both prolific authors, with fundamental contributions to Romanian culture, but they also held, for decades, multiple key-positions in Romania's cultural (and sometimes political) institutions. The correspondence published here, 9 documents (letters or postcards, dating from 1904–1933), written by Sadoveanu and addressed to Sextil Pușcariu, provides a valuable perspective on the Romanian society of the early 20th century in terms of editorial practices (for both periodical publications as well as book publishers), education in rural communities, or Romanian culture in general. The documents are part of the Sextil Pușcariu correspondence archive, available at the “Sextil Pușcariu” Institute of Linguistics and Literary History, Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca branch. Apart from their philological or literary value, the documents may be of great interest to historians or sociologists interested in early-modern Romania, as Sadoveanu's comments are often focused on important figures or events from that time – for example, in one of his letters, Sadoveanu extensively discusses about Nicolae Iorga (one of the most important Romanian historians from that time), more specifically about his departure from the famous *Sămănătorul* magazine and about his editorial practices as director of the magazine.

Keywords: Mihail Sadoveanu, Sextil Pușcariu, correspondence, N. Iorga, Romanian literature.

BIBLIOGRAFIA ROMANELOR MEMORIEI DIN SPAȚIUL ROMÂNESC (1990–2022)

Bibliografia pe care o propunem conține referințe complete pentru 230 de romane publicate în intervalul 1990–2022 în România (și, incidental, în Republica Moldova), aparținând unui (sub)gen pe care l-am teoretizat și definit ca „roman al memoriei”². Pentru alcătuirea acestui instrument, care – excluzând deceniul 1990–2000, cartografiat în *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* (DCRR)³ – reprezintă o premieră în sistematizarea bibliografică a romanului din postcomunism, am urmat un proces în trei pași: (1) consultarea unor instrumente lexicografice, cataloage și motoare de căutare on-line pentru identificarea romanelor etichetate de critica literară, de prezentările realizate de edituri sau prin *tag*-urile specifice catalogării pe baza subiectului ca „roman al memoriei”, „roman mărturie”, „roman autobiografic”, „Bildungsroman” și alte formule similare; (2) selectarea și validarea titlurilor pe baza unui set de criterii; (3) adnotarea fiecărui item din lista romanelor memoriei cu o etichetă de subgen.

În cadrul primei etape au fost consultate, cumulativ: instrumente lexicografice (*Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc*, *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, panorame ale literaturii române din postcomunism); cataloagele on-line ale principalelor biblioteci universitare și județene din România (București, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara); cataloagele on-line ale principalelor edituri din România și din Republica Moldova care au publicat literatură română în ultimele trei decenii; presa culturală a anilor 2000–2022, prin accesarea arhivelor digitalizate ale unora dintre cele mai importante reviste culturale din postcomunism. O primă filtrare a rezultatelor a avut loc în această fază, dat fiind că nu toate operele indexate în categoriile antementionate sunt romane ale memoriei, așa cum înțelegem noi acest subgen⁴. A doua și cea mai importantă etapă a constă în

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² Vezi Andreea Mironescu, Cosmin Borza, Mihai Iovănel, Adriana Stan, „Romanele memoriei: noi subgenuri pentru literatura română contemporană”, *Transilvania*, 2024, 8, pp. 1-19; Andreea Mironescu, Doris Mironescu, „The Novel of Memory as World Genre. Exploring the Romanian Case”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2020, 7, pp. 97-115.

³ Adrian Tudurachi (ed.), *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până în 2000*, vol. I–II, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023.

⁴ Pentru o definiție comprehensivă și criteriile care au stat la baza delimitării corpusului de romane ale memoriei din spațiul românesc, vezi Mironescu et al., *Romanele memoriei*, pp. 7-16.

revizuirea listei de romane pe baza unor criterii tematice și formale, urmărind atât preeminența temei memoriei la nivelul conținutului și ca *pattern* narativ, cât și prezența unor elemente de paratext auctorial sau editorial care să dirijeze lectura în cheia unui roman al memoriei. Am inclus în listă opere publicate în România și, în câteva cazuri, în Republica Moldova, în perioada 1990–2022, luând în considerare și așa-numitele „romane de sertar” publicate după 1990 și pe cele publicate anterior într-o limbă străină, în traducere (cazul lui Paul Goma sau al Ioanei Ionescu Joly) sau traduse de autorii înșiși în română (Felicia Mihali, *Dina*). Anul și editura sunt cele ale primei publicări.

Un al treilea pas a constat în adnotarea fiecărui roman cu o etichetă de subgen. Am propus cinci subgenuri ale romanului memoriei, stabilite pe baza corpusului și gândite ca etichete care să trimită atât către formula literară/*pattern*-ul narativ tipic, cât și către regimul amintirii predominant (mărturie directă, mărturie mediată transgenerațional, post-mărturie). Etichetele de subgen utilizate sunt: *roman testimonial*, *roman post-testimonial*, *roman al maturizării*, *roman transgenerațional* și *metaficțiune istoriografică*. Acestea au funcționat și ca un filtru suplimentar în rafinarea listei de romane.

A rezultat o bibliografie de 230 de romane ale memoriei, inventar care, desigur, rămâne deschis completărilor și chiar unor viitoare revizui. În același timp, chiar incompletă, ca orice încercare de cartografiere a unui fenomen în continuă mișcare, precum literatura prezentului, bibliografia pe care o propunem este cu siguranță una reprezentativă: atât prin eșantionul cantitativ pe care îl oferă, cât și prin autorii pe care îi include, provenind din toate generațiile active în postcomunism, de la șaizeciști până la douămiiști, mulți dintre ei fiind scriitori de prim-plan. Romanul memoriei apare, astfel, ca unul dintre cele mai importante genuri ale literaturii române contemporane, aflat pe un trend ascendent și beneficiind de o circulație largă (prezențe în topurile anuale de vânzări, reeditări, traduceri și premii naționale/internaționale). Nu în ultimul rând, dinamica subgenurilor romanului memoriei funcționează și ca un indicator al modului în care amintirea trecutului este încifrată literar și marketizată editorial în postcomunismul românesc, indicând o continuitate între romanele testimoniale apărute în decada 1990–2000 și cele post-testimoniale publicate de scriitorii douămiiști în ultimele două decenii. În contextul ascendenței tot mai vizibile a memoriei național(ist)e în spațiul public și a instrumentalizării lor populiste, *Bibliografia romanelor memoriei din spațiul românesc* oferă un punct de pornire pentru viitoare analize socio-culturale ale relaționării cu trecutul, cu ideologiile și narațiunile sale, și a canonizării acestora prin literatură.

Bibliografia romanelor memoriei din spațiul românesc (1990–2022)

Nr. crt.	Titlul romanului	Autor	Anul apariției	Editura	Subgen
1.	<i>Destine</i>	Mihai Giugariu	1990	Cartea Românească	Roman transgenerațional
2.	<i>Din calidor. O copilărie basarabeană</i>	Paul Goma	1990	Albatros	Roman testimonial
3.	<i>Gherla</i>	Paul Goma	1990	Humanitas	Roman testimonial
4.	<i>Patimile după Pitești</i>	Paul Goma	1990	Cartea Românească	Roman testimonial
5.	<i>Pe muntele Ebal</i>	Teohar Mihadaș	1990	Clusium	Roman testimonial
6.	<i>În pasaj</i>	Viorel Marineasa	1990	Editura Militară	Metaficțiune istoriografică
7.	<i>Femeia în roșu. Roman (retro)versiune</i>	Mircea Nedelciu, Adriana Babeți, Mircea Mihăieș	1990	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică
8.	<i>Siberia dus-întors: șaptezeci și trei de ruble</i>	Elena Siupur	1991	Anima	Roman transgenerațional
9.	<i>S.O.S.</i>	Ion Gheție	1991	Dacia	Metaficțiune istoriografică
10.	<i>Mâneca vântului</i>	Iosif Naghiu	1991	Eminescu	Metaficțiune istoriografică
11.	<i>Un an fără echinoxuri</i>	Irina Eliade	1991	Eminescu	Roman transgenerațional
12.	<i>Tată, suntem lunateci</i>	Monica Săvulescu Voudouris	1991	Cartea Românească	Roman transgenerațional
13.	<i>Arta refugii</i>	Paul Goma	1991	Dacia	Roman testimonial
14.	<i>Ostinato</i>	Paul Goma	1991	Univers	Roman testimonial
15.	<i>Steaua câinelui</i>	Teohar Mihadaș	1991	Dacia	Roman testimonial
16.	<i>Dincolo de Lisabona (reed. Ultimul tren spre România. Romanul Basarabiei)</i>	Anatolie Paniș	1992/ 1996	Porto Franco/ Snagov	Metaficțiune istoriografică
17.	<i>Zile sălbatice</i>	Dorin Spineanu	1992	Institutul European	Roman testimonial
18.	<i>Acasă</i>	Mihai Zamfir	1992	Cartea Românească	Roman transgenerațional
19.	<i>Sperietoarea</i>	Ovidiu Genaru	1992	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică
20.	<i>Ușa noastră cea de toate zilele</i>	Paul Goma	1992	Cartea Românească	Roman testimonial
21.	<i>Drumul crucii</i>	Aurel State	1993	Litera	Roman testimonial
22.	<i>Tărâmul gheenei</i>	Costin Merișca	1993	Porto Franco	Roman testimonial
23.	<i>Diminețile Evei</i>	Lică Rugină	1993	Porto Franco	Roman testimonial
24.	<i>Săpunul lui Leopold Bloom</i>	Nora Iuga	1993	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică
25.	<i>Alvis și destinul</i>	Virgil Duda	1993	Editura Fundației Culturale Române	Roman testimonial

26.	<i>Bariera. Romanul exilului</i>	Emil Rațiu	1994	Clusium	Roman testimonial
27.	<i>Toamna Medei</i>	Florentina Florescu	1994	Eastern Press Service	Metaficțiune istoriografică
28.	<i>Pactul cu diavolul</i>	Haralambie Grănescu	1994	Plenița	Roman al maturizării
29.	<i>Fata care n-a știut să moară. Roman trăit</i>	Ioana Ionescu-Joly	1994	Du Style	Roman testimonial
30.	<i>Remember</i>	Ioana Postelnicu	1994	Albatros	Roman transgenerațional
31.	<i>Cine rămâne treaz</i>	Ion Jurca Rovina	1994	Excelsior	Metaficțiune istoriografică
32.	<i>Pânda</i>	Lucreția Lustig	1994	Dacia	Roman transgenerațional
33.	<i>Lidia</i>	Mihai Ghițescu	1994	Zodia Fecioarei	Roman transgenerațional
34.	<i>Travesti</i>	Mircea Cărtărescu	1994	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică
35.	<i>Sub zero grade</i>	Radu Tudoran	1994	Arta Grafică	Roman transgenerațional
36.	<i>Caii de la bicicletă</i>	Adrian Munțiu	1995	Eminescu	Roman al maturizării
37.	<i>Croaziera</i>	Dan Florița-Seracin	1995	Eubeea	Roman testimonial
38.	<i>Camera de gardă</i>	George Timcu	1995	Porto Franco	Metaficțiune istoriografică
39.	<i>Universitatea care ucide</i>	Magda Ursache	1995	Timpul	Metaficțiune istoriografică
40.	<i>Favorizare de infractor</i>	Mihai Ghivirigă	1995	Eminescu	Roman testimonial
41.	<i>În cerc</i>	Paul Goma	1995	Eminescu	Roman testimonial
42.	<i>Justa</i>	Paul Goma	1995	Nemira	Roman testimonial
43.	<i>Zăpada mieilor</i>	Bedros Horasangian	1996	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică
44.	<i>Casa lui David</i>	Dumitru Nicodim	1996	Humanitas	Roman transgenerațional
45.	<i>Carnetul din port-hart</i>	Ileana Vulpescu	1996	Eminescu	Roman transgenerațional
46.	<i>Astă vară n-a fost vară...</i>	Magda Ursache	1996	Institutul European	Roman al maturizării
47.	<i>Orbitor. Aripa stângă</i>	Mircea Cărtărescu	1996	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică
48.	<i>Pecinginea</i>	Tudor Luchian-Tudora	1996	Cronica	Roman testimonial
49.	<i>Jocul de-a himerele</i>	Alfred Iacobitz-Friduș	1997	Cariatide	Roman testimonial
50.	<i>Casa cu storuri galbene</i>	Mariana Codruț	1997	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
51.	<i>Strigătul</i>	Pan Solcan	1997	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică
52.	<i>Exuvii</i>	Simona Popescu	1997	Nemira	Roman al maturizării
53.	<i>Fă-ți patul și dormi!</i>	Stelian Țurlea	1997	Editura Pro	Roman al maturizării

54.	<i>Orașul Stalin</i>	Adrian Socaciu	1998	Mașina de Scris	Roman al maturizării
55.	<i>Din adâncul irespirabilului</i>	Ioan Dumitru Denciu	1998	Salonul Literar	Roman testimonial
56.	<i>Alexandru</i>	Ion Manolescu	1998	Univers	Metaficțiune istoriografică
57.	<i>Arta supraviețuirii</i>	Lelia Trocan	1998	Omniscop	Roman transgenerațional
58.	<i>Trec rânduri, rânduri muritorii</i>	Luminița Varlam	1998	Viitorul Românesc	Roman testimonial
59.	<i>Inventarul iernilor. Dincolo de pădurea de oțetari</i>	Petru Maier Bianu	1998	Cartea Românească	Roman testimonial
60.	<i>Rezervația de zebre</i>	Petru Păcurariu	1998	Eurostampa	Roman testimonial
61.	<i>Un copil în vechiul București</i>	Tatiana Slama-Cazacu	1998	Du Style	Roman testimonial
62.	<i>Barbarius</i>	Constantin Țoiu	1999	Allfa	Metaficțiune istoriografică
63.	<i>Insula de vară. Roman underground</i>	Daniel Vighi	1999	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
64.	<i>Țara Brânzei</i>	Felicia Mihali	1999	Image	Roman transgenerațional
65.	<i>Grijania</i>	Liviu Ioan Stoiciu	1999	Paralela 45	Roman testimonial
66.	<i>Perfect distractiv</i>	Victoria Comnea	1999	Eminescu	Metaficțiune istoriografică
67.	<i>Viață cu efect întârziat</i>	Virgil Duda	1999	Hasefer	Roman testimonial
68.	<i>Jocul cu umbre. Roman (oarecum) parodic</i>	Corneliu Rădulescu	2000	Matinal	Roman al maturizării
69.	<i>Dosarul cu bârfe</i>	Gabriel Pleșea	2000	Vestala	Roman al maturizării
70.	<i>Igrasia</i>	George Silviu	2000	Meridiane	Roman testimonial
71.	<i>Dispăruții</i>	Maria Lucia Hațegan	2000	Casa Cărții de Știință	Roman transgenerațional
72.	<i>Zodia Scafandruului</i>	Mircea Nedelciu	2000	Compania	Metaficțiune istoriografică
73.	<i>Exercițiu de suferință</i>	Valeria Căliman	2000	Cartea Românească	Roman testimonial
74.	<i>Orbitor. Corpul</i>	Mircea Cărtărescu	2002	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică
75.	<i>Iepurii nu mor</i>	Ștefan Baștovoi	2002	Aula	Roman al maturizării
76.	<i>Întoarcerea huliganului</i>	Norman Manea	2003	Polirom	Roman testimonial
77.	<i>Oameni și umbre, glasuri, tăceri</i>	Alexandru George	2004	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
78.	<i>Agata murind</i>	Dora Pavel	2004	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
79.	<i>Visul copilului care pășește pe zăpadă fără să lase urme</i>	Gabriel Chifu	2004	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
80.	<i>Pupa russa</i>	Gheorghe Crăciun	2004	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică

81.	<i>Caietele lui Ozias</i>	Ion Vianu	2004	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
82.	<i>Să nu-mi luați temnița</i>	Cela Varlam	2005	Albatros	Roman testimonial
83.	<i>Degete mici</i>	Filip Florian	2005	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
84.	<i>Lindenfeld</i>	Ioan T. Morar	2005	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
85.	<i>Potârniche lovite de vijelie</i>	Livia Isidor	2005	Compania	Roman testimonial
86.	<i>Trunchiul și așchia I–II</i>	Marius Robescu	2005– 2006	Muzeul Literaturii Române	Roman transgenerațional
87.	<i>Despărțirea de Ierusalim</i>	Virgil Duda	2005	Albatros	Roman testimonial
88.	<i>Fata din casa vagon</i>	Ana Maria Sandu	2006	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
89.	<i>Marta sau etiologia inconvertibilului eșec</i>	Cora Flavian	2006	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
90.	<i>Băiușii</i>	Filip Florian, Matei Florian	2006	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
91.	<i>Derapaj</i>	Ion Manolescu	2006	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
92.	<i>Vasilie, foi volante</i>	Ion Vianu	2006	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
93.	<i>Ecluza</i>	Radu Mareș	2006	Aula	Metaficțiune istoriografică
94.	<i>Darul Ioanei</i>	Stelian Țurlea	2006	Integral	Metaficțiune istoriografică
95.	<i>Destinul familiei Meissner</i>	Bogdan Eduard	2007	Dacia	Roman transgenerațional
96.	<i>Șșș! Generalul visează</i>	Călin Ciobotari	2007	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
97.	<i>Sînt o babă comunistă!</i>	Dan Lungu	2007	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
98.	<i>Întâlnirea</i>	Gabriela Adameșteanu	2007	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
99.	<i>Orbitor. Aripa dreaptă</i>	Mircea Cărtărescu	2007	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică
100.	<i>Curcubeul dublu</i>	Alexandru Vlad	2008	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
101.	<i>Fantoma din moară</i>	Doina Ruști	2008	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
102.	<i>Ada Kaleh. Roman de dragoste</i>	Ilie Sălceanu	2008	Dacia	Roman post-testimonial
103.	<i>Destinul familiei Botta. Romanul burgheziei românești transilvane</i>	Justin Ceuca	2008	Casa Cărții de Știință	Roman transgenerațional
104.	<i>Lizoanca la 11 ani</i>	Doina Ruști	2009	Trei	Roman post-testimonial
105.	<i>Vizuina</i>	Norman Manea	2009	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
106.	<i>Cartea șoaptelor</i>	Varujan Vosganian	2009	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional

107.	<i>Veșnic prizonier? Viața în Gulagul sovietic</i>	Tibor Ostermann, Oana Manolescu	2009	Privirea	Roman post-testimonial
108.	<i>Noaptea în care cineva a murit pentru tine</i>	Bogdan Suceavă	2010	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
109.	<i>Captiv în epoca de aur</i>	Călin Ciobotari	2010	Ideea Europeană	Roman al maturizării
110.	<i>Cartea vremelniceii I–II</i>	Eugen Giurgiu	2010	Casa Cărții de Știință	Roman testimonial
111.	<i>Provizorat</i>	Gabriela Adameșteanu	2010	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
112.	<i>Gelin. Mireasa din Ada Kaleh</i>	Ilie Sălceanu	2010	Dacia	Roman post-testimonial
113.	<i>Noapte bună, copii!</i>	Radu Pavel Gheo	2010	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
114.	<i>Învinșii</i>	Viorel Cacoveanu	2010	Casa Cărții de Știință	Roman post-testimonial
115.	<i>Minoic</i>	Caius Dobrescu	2011	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
116.	<i>Îngerii din Moscopole</i>	Catia Maxim	2011	Tracus Arte	Roman transgenerațional
117.	<i>Țesut viu 10X10</i>	Emilian Galaicu-Păun	2011	Cartier	Metaficțiune istoriografică
118.	<i>Matei Brunul</i>	Lucian Dan Teodorovici	2011	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
119.	<i>Acasă, pe câmpia Armaghedonului</i>	Marta Petreu	2011	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
120.	<i>Tovarăși de cameră. Student la Chișinău</i>	Mihail Vakulovski	2011	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
121.	<i>Două lumi x 2</i>	Mircea Ionescu	2011	Casa Cărții de Știință	Roman transgenerațional
122.	<i>Fetele Nikas în lumina zilei, mare și albă</i>	Monica Săvulescu Voudouri	2011	Tracus Arte	Roman transgenerațional
123.	<i>Cântecul mării</i>	Oleg Serebrian	2011	Cartier	Roman post-testimonial
124.	<i>Un cetățean al lumii</i>	Virgil Duda	2011	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
125.	<i>Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății</i>	Claudiu M. Florian	2012	Cartea Românească	Roman al maturizării
126.	<i>Toate bufnițele</i>	Filip Florian	2012	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
127.	<i>O fereastră întunecată</i>	Florin Irimia	2012	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
128.	<i>Hotel Universal</i>	Simona Sora	2012	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
129.	<i>Planuri de viață</i>	Vasile Baghiu	2012	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
130.	<i>Îngerii din Moscopole. Exilul</i>	Catia Maxim	2013	Tracus Arte	Roman transgenerațional
131.	<i>O telenovelă socialistă</i>	Doru Pop	2013	Polirom	Roman al maturizării

132.	<i>Negru și roșu</i>	Ioan T. Morar	2013	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
133.	<i>Un singur cer deasupra lor</i>	Ruxandra Cesereanu	2013	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
134.	<i>Dumnezeu a murit în Bărăgan</i>	Victor Acioacărlănoaiei	2013	Junimea	Roman testimonial
135.	<i>1989</i>	Adrian Buz	2014	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
136.	<i>America de peste pogrom</i>	Cătălin Mihuleac	2014	Cartea Românească	Roman post-testimonial
137.	<i>Punct și de la capăt</i>	Gabriel Chifu	2014	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
138.	<i>Apocalipsa după Mahomed</i>	Ilie Sălceanu	2014	Eikon	Roman post-testimonial
139.	<i>D.O. (Domiciliu obligatoriu)</i>	Victor Acioacărlănoaiei	2014	Charmides	Roman testimonial
140.	<i>Marea petrecere</i>	Petre Barbu		Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
141.	<i>Cozonac. Transilvania. O călătorie</i>	Adina Kenereș	2015	Compania	Roman post-testimonial
142.	<i>Îngerii din Moscopole. Istorii îngemănate</i>	Catia Maxim	2015	Tracus Arte	Roman transgenerațional
143.	<i>Ghetsimani '51</i>	Dan Stanca	2015	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică
144.	<i>Villa Margareta</i>	Doina Jela	2015	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
145.	<i>În labirintul roșu</i>	Lăcrămioara Stoenescu	2015	Tracus Arte	Roman testimonial
146.	<i>Dedublarea</i>	Lăcrămioara Stoenescu	2015	Tracus Arte	Metaficțiune istoriografică
147.	<i>Timp răătăcit</i>	Mariana Vartic	2015	eLiteratura	Roman al maturizării
148.	<i>Doctorand la București</i>	Mihail Vakulovski	2015	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
149.	<i>Muscând din moarte ca din ciocolată</i>	Cela Varlam	2015	Cartea Românească	Roman post-testimonial
150.	<i>Luna Zadar</i>	Adrian Alui Gheorghe	2016	Cartea Românească	Roman post-testimonial
151.	<i>Periculoasa blândețe a vieții</i>	Claudiu Soare	2016	frACTalia	Roman al maturizării
152.	<i>Mamé</i>	Nicolae Avram	2016	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
153.	<i>Viața ficțiunii după o revoluție</i>	Radu Cosașu	2016	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
154.	<i>Disco Titanic</i>	Radu Pavel Gheo	2016	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
155.	<i>Copiii războiului</i>	Varujan Vosganian	2016	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
156.	<i>Ora închiderii</i>	Vasile Igna	2016	Cartea Românească	Metaficțiune istoriografică

157.	<i>Aleea Zorilor</i>	Andrei Crăciun	2017	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
158.	<i>Copilăria lui Kaspar Hauser</i>	Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu	2017	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
159.	<i>Moarte în ținutul secuilor</i>	Caius Dobrescu	2017	Crime Scene Press	Metaficțiune istoriografică
160.	<i>Praf în ochi</i>	Caius Dobrescu	2017	Crime Scene Press	Metaficțiune istoriografică
161.	<i>Altarul din Carcera Oarbă</i>	Catia Maxim	2017	Tracus Arte	Roman post-testimonial
162.	<i>Adio, Margot</i>	Diana Adamek	2017	Univers	Metaficțiune istoriografică
163.	<i>Misterul mașinuțelor chinezești</i>	Florin Irimia	2017	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
164.	<i>Caiet de cenzor</i>	Liliana Corobca	2017	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
165.	<i>Transfer</i>	Liviu Ioan Stoiciu	2017	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
166.	<i>În spatele blocului</i>	Mara Wagner	2017	Nemira	Roman al maturizării
167.	<i>Extraconjugal</i>	Mihai Radu	2017	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
168.	<i>Orașul închis</i>	Viorica Răduță	2017	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
169.	<i>O voce patetică și feroce</i>	Dumitru Popescu	2017	Rao	Metaficțiune istoriografică
170.	<i>Bumbăcari – ghetou comunist 15 km2</i>	Victor Acioacălănoaiei	2017	Tracus Arte	Roman testimonial
171.	<i>Casa Inglezi</i>	Alexandru Bordian	2018	Paralela 45	Roman post-testimonial
172.	<i>O formă de viață necunoscută</i>	Andreea Răuceanu	2018	Humanitas	Roman transgenerațional
173.	<i>Recviem pentru nimeni</i>	Caius Dobrescu	2018	Crime Scene Press	Metaficțiune istoriografică
174.	<i>Galben electric</i>	Dan Matei	2018	Paralela 45	Roman post-testimonial
175.	<i>Trilogia Corso</i>	Daniel Vighi	2018	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
176.	<i>Efectul fluturelui</i>	Doina Jela	2018	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
177.	<i>Cartea numerilor</i>	Florina Ilis	2018	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
178.	<i>Fontana di Trevi</i>	Gabriela Adameșteanu	2018	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
179.	<i>Capătul drumului</i>	Liliana Corobca	2018	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
180.	<i>Convoiul mieilor</i>	Lucia Dărămuș	2018	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
181.	<i>Cenușă rece</i>	Mihaela Perciun	2018	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional

182.	<i>Woldemar</i>	Oleg Serebrian	2018	Cartier	Roman al maturizării
183.	<i>Grădina de sticlă</i>	Tatiana Țibuleac	2018	Cartier	Roman al maturizării
184.	<i>Cătând în urmă, istovit, spre omul poliedric</i>	Dumitru Popescu	2018	Rao	Roman al maturizării
185.	<i>Viața și întoarcerea unui Halle</i>	Alexandru Potcoavă	2019	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
186.	<i>Ca și cum nimic nu s-ar fi întâmplat</i>	Alina Nelega	2019	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
187.	<i>Sindromul Stavroghin</i>	Alina Pavelescu	2019	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică
188.	<i>Și fericirea era obligatorie</i>	Andrei Crăciun	2019	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
189.	<i>Cu inima-n dinți</i>	Caius Dobrescu	2019	Crime Scene Press	Metaficțiune istoriografică
190.	<i>Deborah</i>	Cătălin Mihuleac	2019	Humanitas	Roman post-testimonial
191.	<i>Trilogia sexului rătăcitor</i>	Cristina Vremeș	2019	Humanitas	Roman transgenerațional
192.	<i>Părinți</i>	Diana Bădica	2019	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
193.	<i>Ziua de naștere a lui Mihai Mihailovici</i>	Dumitru Crudu	2019	Humanitas	Metaficțiune istoriografică
194.	<i>Aproape totul e ok</i>	Francisc Baja	2019	Paralela 45	Roman al maturizării
195.	<i>Constantin</i>	Iulian Bocai	2019	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
196.	<i>Sonia ridică mâna</i>	Lavinia Braniște	2019	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
197.	<i>Lagărul 33</i>	Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli	2019	Cartier	Roman post-testimonial
198.	<i>Buburuza</i>	Liliana Corobca	2019	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
199.	<i>Dincoace și dincolo de tunel. 1945</i>	Mariana Gorczyca	2019	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
200.	<i>Recrutorii</i>	Mihai Buzea	2019	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
201.	<i>Undeva în Transilvania</i>	Taloș Mirel	2019	Rao	Roman post-testimonial
202.	<i>Hipodrom</i>	Nora Iuga	2019	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
203.	<i>Vântul, duhul, suflarea</i>	Andreea Răuceanu	2020	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
204.	<i>Lumea de dincolo</i>	Caius Dobrescu	2020	Crime Scene Press	Metaficțiune istoriografică
205.	<i>Și se auzeau greierii</i>	Corina Sabău	2020	Humanitas	Roman post-testimonial
206.	<i>Dependența</i>	Constantin Cheianu	2020	Cartier	Roman al maturizării

207.	<i>Tata mă citește și după moarte</i>	Mihail Vakulovski	2020	Humanitas	Roman al maturizării
208.	<i>Complezență. Înălțarea la ortopedie. Musafir pe viață</i>	Simona Sora	2020	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
209.	<i>Toți copiii librăresei</i>	Veronica D. Niculescu	2020	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
210.	<i>Prietenul vizitorilor și al învinșilor</i>	Andrei Crăciun	2021	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
211.	<i>Jurnal de pustă</i>	Borco Ilin	2021	Humanitas	Roman al maturizării
212.	<i>Tatăl meu la izolare</i>	Cristian Teodorescu	2021	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
213.	<i>Dina</i>	Felicia Mihali	2021	Vremea	Roman al maturizării
214.	<i>Noaptea plec, noaptea măntorc</i>	Florin Lăzărescu	2021	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
215.	<i>Tot înainte!</i>	Ioana Nicolaie	2021	Humanitas	Roman al maturizării
216.	<i>Drumul</i>	Luminița Cioabă	2021	Neo Drom	Roman transgenerațional
217.	<i>Un secol de ceață</i>	Matei Vișniec	2021	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
218.	<i>Bureți de fag</i>	Mihai Duțescu	2021	Trei	Roman transgenerațional
219.	<i>Umbra exilată</i>	Norman Manea	2021	Polirom	Metaficțiune istoriografică
220.	<i>Pe contrasens</i>	Oleg Serebrian	2021	Cartier	Roman post-testimonial
221.	<i>În umbra ei</i>	Simona Antonescu	2021	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional
222.	<i>Semnătura indiană</i>	Radu Sergiu Ruba	2021	Trei	Roman al maturizării
223.	<i>Montana</i>	Alexandru Popescu	2022	Arc	Roman al maturizării
224.	<i>Abraxas</i>	Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu	2022	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
225.	<i>Ultimul an cu Ceaușescu</i>	Daniela Rațiu	2022	Litera	Roman al maturizării
226.	<i>Banchetul cerșetorilor</i>	Irina Anghel	2022	Polirom	Roman al maturizării
227.	<i>Sunt oare un călău?</i>	Lilia Calancea	2022	Polirom	Roman post-testimonial
228.	<i>Dezrădăcinare</i>	Sașa Zare	2022	frACTalia	Roman al maturizării
229.	<i>Rubla, locul fără umbră</i>	Mariana Gorczyca	2022	Școala Ardeleană	Roman post-testimonial
230.	<i>Voci la distanță</i>	Gabriela Adameșteanu	2022	Polirom	Roman transgenerațional

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE MEMORY NOVELS
PUBLISHED IN THE ROMANIAN SPACE (1990–2022)
(*Abstract*)

This article offers the first bibliography of the memory novels published in the Romanian literary space between 1990–2022. The novel of memory is a literary genre with a global spread, and at the same time a prominent national (sub)genre, spanning from postcolonial societies to post-dictatorial and post-communist cultures. Using lexicographical sources, as well as catalogues and search engines developed by the most important libraries and publishing houses, we identified 230 memory novels released in Romania (and, incidentally, in the Republic of Moldova) during the last three decades. For each item we provide the full bibliographical reference. Additionally, we propose five labels covering the subgenres of the novel of memory: testimonial novel, post-testimonial novel, coming of age novel, transgenerational novel and historiographic metafiction. We use one of these five labels to annotate each item in our list, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the formal, thematic, and mnemonic diversity of the memory novels.

Keywords: novel of memory, bibliography, post-communism, genre, subgenres.

COMPTEs RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

ANCA PARVULESCU, MANUELA BOATCĂ,
Creolizing the Modern. Transylvania across Empires, New
York, Cornell University Press, 2022, 270 p.

Bridging theories of political economy with literary criticism through the framework provided by the literary world-system has sparked interest in reassessing the literary production of cultural peripheries and semi-peripheries alike. Centring their attention on the semi-peripheral status of Transylvania, Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă return in *Creolizing the Modern* to Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion*, the first modern Romanian novel, and, thus, a pivotal part of the country's national canon, to examine how literature can reflect broader global, historical tensions. With this aim, the authors construct a complex dialogue between the concepts of inter-imperiality, creolization, and modernity to highlight how the novel's textual elements (narrative perspective, word choice, character portrayals), as well as Rebreanu's own background, has given rise to a text that engages with these ideas. Consequently, Rebreanu's work acquires a double status, analysed both as "a product of inter-imperiality and as its chronicle" (p. 11).

Taking Transylvania as a starting point implies viewing its local history as world history, and, as a result, reading *Ion* itself as world literature; an effort that the authors themselves place in line with previous studies, namely "in conversation with *Romanian Literature as World Literature*" (p. 12). A further consequence of understanding Transylvania through the viewpoint of world history is that of rethinking the timeline commonly associated with colonialism, extending its origins to encompass a time before Columbus's era (1492). The importance of a long-historical (*longue durée*) approach when writing about Eastern Europe cannot be understated. Researchers such as Laura Doyle term it necessary when examining the history of places shaped by multiple imperial and colonial interests. As such, Doyle's writing on inter-imperiality, which Parvulescu and Boatcă work with, tackles what the author of *Inter-imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance* (2020), paraphrasing Wai Chee Dimock, refers to as "deep inter-imperial time". This is reflected in Parvulescu and Boatcă's volume in their efforts to give a holistic overview of the successive waves of migration, and imperial influence that Transylvania experienced. While choosing to focus on the modern period, a long-historical frame provides insight into earlier waves of colonisation, going as back as the mediaeval period to shed light on Transylvania's status as "terra nullius" in premodern chronicles (p. 17). Moreover, by anchoring Transylvania in a complex network of global relationships, the authors of this volume manage to avoid "methodological nationalism" (p. 17) in lieu of a comparative approach that favours the intersection of different strands of theory: decolonial-, postcolonial-, and feminist ideas, as well as world-systems analysis.

As the *nexus* of this project, Transylvania itself becomes a "method", as Christian Moraru points out on back cover of the book, one that allows for a tripartite process of creolization to ensue. On the one hand, the creolization that Parvulescu and Boatcă argue for is rooted in the urgency to rethink the disciplinary categories underlying comparative studies, as well as broader research focused on modernity that associates this period with the idea of a linear narrative. On the other hand, the perspective afforded by creolizing Transylvania also implies the need to reimagine the region's history and cultural production outside the scope of national interpretations.

Lastly, Parvulescu and Boatcă's volume stresses the significance of creolizing theory (along the lines put forth by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih) through intersectional studies that enmesh the lived experiences of subaltern subjects in critical discourse. While the authors of *The Creolization of Theory* remark on the potential dangers of expanding the usage of "creolization" to spaces outside the Caribbean and Indian Ocean (pp. 1, 24), Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih motivate the need for a creolized theoretical perspective through the argument of pushing back against a so-called "post-

theoretical” climate. Lionnet and Shih’s broadened use of “creolization”, as well as Doyle’s concept of “inter-imperiality” (and, in turn, Parvulescu and Boatcă’s work) emphasised relationality as a guiding principle, resisting both the allegations against theory’s excessive abstractions and its irrelevance (“the death of theory”).

The structure of *Creolizing the Modern* is shaped by the thematic approach that the authors opt for. The chapters build upon one another, starting with the question of space and land in *Ion* and ending with an examination of the role of religion in Rebreanu’s novel. Each of the chapters provides a blend of macro and micro forms of analyses of the topics in question. Thus, sociological, historical, economic, political, and legal data is supplemented by passages focused on close reading; a comparative method that reflects the authors’ preoccupations with literature (Parvulescu) and sociology (Boatcă).

Following the introduction centred on Transylvania’s inter-imperial status and on outlining both the methodology behind the book, as well as the benefits that are to be gained from a project rooted in two disciplinary fields (the social sciences and the humanities), chapter one, “The Face of Land: Peasants, Property, and the Land Question”, grapples with the central issue in *Ion*: land ownership. As such, the first chapter already makes the aim of the volume, that of “creolizing the modern”, explicit. By addressing the question from a rural perspective, Parvulescu and Boatcă place their study in a wider conversation concerning the inherent tensions underlying the notion of modernity (usually associated with urban environments). Following Immanuel Wallerstein, Farshad Araghi and Marina Karides, the authors argue that the modern notion of land ownership forms an important puzzle piece in the development of capitalism.

One of the central arguments of this section, that “the inter-imperial and trans-imperial modernism of *Ion* is unmistakable spatial and geographical” (p. 26) is advanced on the idea that the novelistic significance awarded to land, as well as the literary place names that were used by Rebreanu, reflect larger historical disputes around ownership in Transylvania, conflicts tied to the subaltern status of certain ethnicities (amongst which Romanians). Therefore, *Ion*’s obsession over land is read as carrying “collective and historical weight” (p. 29), as recounting “the memory of his [Ion’s] ancestors’ living in the shadow of serfdom” (p. 31). The issue of land possession in the novel is further discussed through the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia that renders the land both “anthropomorphized” and “feminine” (p. 33). Analysing *Ion*’s wish for land through a gendered lens is pivotal in establishing the mutually generative relationship between land-woman that the novel puts forth.

If the first chapter argued for a better understanding of the interrelated development of the “rural” and the “modern”, chapter two, “Transylvania in the World System”, stresses the region’s full absorption into the capitalist world economy. Highlighting the asymmetrical nature of this process, perceived as “backwardness” (p. 49), Parvulescu and Boatcă view it as the result of Transylvania’s “inter- and trans-imperial” economic integration (p. 49). In this sense, this section further counteracts the narrative of modernity as progress by postulating peripheralization as an inherent component of the modern world economy. The four ways of Transylvania’s economic integration as semi-periphery that Parvulescu and Boatcă examine are “trade [Transylvania as an exporter of agricultural products], finance [the importance of Romanian banks in counteracting economic imperialism], bureaucracy [the colonial and imperial significance of conducting a census], and mobility [migration]” (p. 56). Moreover, this chapter delves into antisemitic discourse in Transylvania as being interconnected with Jewish discrimination in Romania. When looking at *Ion*, the authors of this volume discuss how antisemitic sentiments contribute to the construction of Avrum’s character, while also inquiring into how the spatial imagination of the novel further reinforces Jewish marginalisation.

The discussion around Jewish marginalisation provides a segway into examining Romani exclusion in chapter three, “The *Longue Durée* of Enslavement”. In this part of the volume, Parvulescu and Boatcă look into the concept of “labour” and how Western and Romantic interpretations of it have either led to the vilification of Romani nomadism or to an idealisation of Romani artistic work (viewed as *art*, not *labour*). Rebreanu’s novel engages with- and adds onto the

history of exclusion through its depiction of Romani fiddlers and the priest's servant. The literary spatial segregation of the Romani community, as well as the blend between comedy and abjection employed in the novel, amplify Rebreanu's tactics of novelistic othering.

In the fourth chapter, "Counting and Discounting Languages", the authors introduce *interglottism*, a concept central to their project of creolization. Defined as "a mode of connecting the linguistic with the political, social, and economic imperial order and its contestation" (p. 93), *interglottism* sheds light on the inter-imperial strata in language, aligning with Doyle's view of inter-imperial regions as palimpsestic. Parvulescu and Boatcă also trace the comparative method's origins to *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, an international Transylvanian journal led by Hugo von Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai, while critiquing his "Dekaglottismus" – a focus on ten key languages, including Hungarian – as politically driven. The chapter further explores Rebreanu's decision to write *Ion* in Romanian, despite his fluency in Hungarian and German – languages essential for his "aspirational social mobility" (p. 104). This choice, framed as an "inter-imperial invention" (p. 112), is reflected in the novel through Titu Herdelea, a character modelled on the author.

Chapters five and six offer a feminist critique of *Ion* by analysing the character of Ana (the "dowry problem") and the question pertaining to the education of women in Austro-Hungary and the novel. The fifth chapter underscores instances where the text suppresses feminine discourse through the patriarchal textual violence exerted on women, including the superimposition of Ana's character on animal figures, and the juxtaposition of the urbanised New Woman against that of the virtuous peasant girl. The most interesting of Parvulescu and Boatcă's arguments in this section refers to the conflict between different liberation movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. If anti-imperialism posited itself as a "universal" form of emancipation, then feminism was relegated to the particularities of women, and, thus, considered "secondary or even irrelevant" (p. 123). Studies on Romanian feminism by Maria Bucur and Ștefania Mihăilescu also point to an implicit hierarchisation of anti-oppression movements within public discourse, with nationalism occupying the first place. As such, feminists tried to use the nationalist cause to further their own liberating projects, something that Parvulescu and Boatcă point to in chapter 6 (p. 144).

The final section of the volume delves into the theme of religion in *Ion*, beginning with historical data on Transylvania's religious orientations and then turning to Rebreanu's spatial imagination to reveal the symbolism of the village cross and church. Although the village appears religiously homogeneous, a historically inaccurate portrayal (p. 171), the cross symbolises a particular mode of religious mapping. Drawing on Max Weber's theory of modernity, the authors argue that Pripas, despite being a modern village, cannot be seen as disenchanted.

To sum up, Parvulescu and Boatcă's volume manages to articulate a seamless dialogue between two approaches: one rooted in politics and sociology, and one in the close-reading practices of Rebreanu's novel. It is through a complex transdisciplinary approach that the authors of this book showcase the tensions extant within modernity, a concept that encompasses both progress and peripheralisation, emancipation and (patriarchal/racial/ethnic/religious) exclusion. Finally, through the theoretical backbone afforded by the notions of inter-imperiality and creolization, Parvulescu and Boatcă contribute to the process of reframing Eastern Europe's history and cultural production, moving beyond whitewashed perspectives, or closed-off, nationalist interpretations.

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C. 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, 480 p.

Naratorul cel rău [*The Ruthless Narrator*] stands out as an “exotic plant” in today’s Romanian academic field, primarily because its aim is to revisit some of the pinnacles of Romanian realism through a combined lens of narratology and class analysis. This approach yields a rewarding paradox: despite using “old-fashioned” methods (p. 45), the author delivers an unparalleled study that provides fresh perspectives on literary analysis. The introduction sets out the central aims of the volume, the most pivotal one being to address the question “Who speaks in a text?”. This inquiry leads to several related questions: “How does it speak?”; “How does this mode of speaking evolve across different historical periods?”; and “What can these narratological and ideological coordinates reveal about the transformations in realism?”. To explore these questions, Costi Rogozanu conducts a detailed analysis of the works of three “modern classics” of Romanian realism: Liviu Rebreanu (1885–1944), Marin Preda (1922–1980), and Petru Dumitriu (1924–2002). He posits that every piece of writing is supported by a narrator who is shaped by two authors: one individual, and another that is collective – and represented by “the dominant classes or the classes in ascension at certain historical moments, which significantly influence the author’s formation” (p. 15). From this foundation, Rogozanu analyzes the “political unconscious” of Romanian realism, seeking to understand how classes that have traditionally been silent in the Western bourgeois realism gain a voice.

To substantiate his inquiry beyond mere speculation, Rogozanu develops a rigorous methodological framework, extensively detailed in “Part One” of his study. He begins by addressing the historical silencing of oppressed classes, drawing on insights from Ellen Meiksins Wood, an American-Canadian scholar specializing in political theory and philosophy. Wood notes that “peasants, who formed the majority of the population throughout almost all of history [...] are mainly silent” (p. 31). Building on this premise, Rogozanu references Erich Auerbach’s observation: “For the first great realists of the century, in Stendhal, Balzac, and even Flaubert, the lowest sections of the people [...] do not appear at all; and even where they do, they are not viewed in their own lives, but from on high” (p. 77). Thus, employing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s terminology, Rogozanu argues that a crucial aspect of class analysis within realism involves the silences of the subaltern (as depicted by Rebreanu) and the emergent voice of the subaltern (as explored in the works of Preda and Dumitriu). The author’s main tool is the “ideologeme”, first theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin (“mimesis is always ideologically mediated” – p. 64) and taken over by critical theorists such as Fredric Jameson. Nonetheless, in *Naratorul cel rău*, the concept is employed especially in a Jamesonian manner, as “the smallest intelligible unit part of the collective, essentially antagonistic collective discourses” (and, for Rogozanu, of narratology and structure) “essentially antagonistic, of the social classes” (p. 76). Ideologemes, then, are narrative codifications of class tensions: their significance is pronounced because they endure even amid a potential decline in the narratological paradigm – a phenomenon the author terms “ideological radioactivity” (p. 73). In his examination of the ideologeme, the author utilizes Pierre Bourdieu’s term “agent”, but shifts its application from an extraliterary sociological context to an intraliterary one. For Rogozanu, the agent becomes a crucial conduit for ideologies, especially within the framework of “peripheral cultural capitalism” (p. 63), acting as an intermediary in the tensions between social classes during modernization. Additionally, Rogozanu finds value in what Franco Moretti theorizes as narrative fillers – materials “with which the novelist fills the spaces between two intense points in the novel” (p. 73). He views these fillers as pivotal for exploring “the mutations of the realist novel” (p. 73), particularly enhancing his analysis of Rebreanu. Rogozanu describes how “the filling [...] is the naturalistic type of analysis, encompassing the physical description of feelings, sweating, chills” – rudimentary affections

attributed to the peasantry and representing an early form of expression for this social class (p. 74). The final sub-chapter of the theoretical discussions centres on the defetishizing role of art, as conceptualized by Georg Lukács, the theorist of realism under whose intellectual guidance Rogozanu structures his discourse. In this chapter, various theoretical strands introduced earlier converge. Initially, using Lukács's concept of social command, Rogozanu elucidates the "common impulses of the epochs" that constitute the collective author. Furthermore, he employs the process of defetishization to outline his method of critical analysis: Romanian realism is examined through its tangible achievements within the socio-historical context of its emergence, as any "transcendence is transformed into human immanence" (p. 108). Additionally, he addresses the interaction between materialist critique and aesthetics, dismissing the latter "only when it propagates various fetishizing forms" (p. 108). In the three analytical chapters that follow, the author critiques traditional criticism for its tendency to eternalize rather than historicize its inquiries. He discusses how interpretative efforts are often grounded in mystical, mythical, or religious frameworks, leading to the misidentification of supposed spiritual profundities where none exist, and the manipulation of artistic works to align with the prevailing ideologies of various historical periods.

The first case study, entitled "The Petite Bourgeoisie Tells Us", zeroes in on Rebreanu's *Ion*. Rogozanu straightforwardly unveils his central thesis: *Ion* is a landmark novel primarily because it narrates the peasantry – characterized by "a silence full of meaning" – from the perspective of the petite bourgeoisie. He asserts that this narrative angle marks a pioneering shift in Romanian literature. Initially, Rogozanu revisits the critical reception of *Ion*, highlighting the insights of critics such as Octav Botez, Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, and Ion Negoitescu, who explored the often-overlooked dimensions of the petite bourgeoisie and class tensions. Looking further into the historical reception of the novel, Rogozanu conducts a rigorous examination of the aestheticizing interpretations by prominent figures in Romanian literary criticism, including Matei Călinescu, Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Simion, Lucian Raicu, and Nicolae Balotă. He juxtaposes this with an analysis of the legacy and characteristics of realism and its naturalistic offshoots in Western culture, particularly through Balzac and Zola, arguing that a realist novel with a self-narrating peasant would have been inconceivable in early 20th century Romanian literature. In *Ion*, while the peasants remain silent, their stories are conveyed through the voices of petite bourgeois characters, such as the Herdelea family or the priest Belciug, who serve as small imperial officials. Rather than directly seeking out the voices of the popular masses, Rogozanu suggests that the novel seeks credible witnesses. He presents numerous arguments to demonstrate that *Ion* is fundamentally a middle-class novel that narrates the peasants' experiences. For instance, he points to narrative elements that reveal the perspective's owner, like Herdelea's observant house, which Rogozanu interprets as an almost explicit metaphor for "the identity of the main point of view in the novel" (p. 143). Thus, petite bourgeois figures like Herdelea or Belciug essentially form the narrator's voice. Once these aspects are elucidated, Rogozanu "clarifies" the "mystery of objectivity" in Rebreanu's novel. He explains that the "supreme indifference" creating the novelist's objectivity stems from the petite bourgeois observer's detachment from the world around him. Rebreanu, viewing his own class somewhat externally, thus finds the means to compellingly weave the rural theme into the semi-peripheral literature of imperial capitalism. *Naratorul cel rău* concludes that Rebreanu's strategic approach has indeed paid off, as *Ion* continues to be celebrated as "the first great modern novel of Romanian literature". Such a contextual analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which the novel achieved prominence.

In his comprehensive analysis, Rogozanu considers the entire corpus of the writer's work. However, through his ideologically informed lens, he determines that only *Ion*, *Răscoala* [*The Revolt*], *Amândoi* [*Both*], and *Gorila* [*The Gorilla*] qualify as complete novels. These works are distinguished by their ability to "isolate a narrator or perspective from a well-configured class" (p. 182). In contrast, he finds that *Pădurea Spânzuraților* [*Forest of the Hanged*] lacks a psychological depth that is supported by a collective voice, rendering it redundant; while *Adam și Eva* [*Adam and Eve*] suffers from being a pale imitation (p. 182), with Rogozanu speculating on the material

conditions that may have influenced Rebreanu to write it. Applying contextualist narratology and focusing on the ideologeme allows Rogozanu to unearth unprecedented details in Rebreanu's often-criticized novels. While the general consensus among critics is that Rebreanu's works falter when he strays from rural themes, Rogozanu argues that the true shortcoming occurs when Rebreanu deviates from middle-class perspectives – the only narratives that can authentically encode a class voice. Rogozanu also proposes other striking hypotheses: in *Amândoi*, he notes how the maid Solomia is portrayed through her mistress's perspective (p. 194), and suggests that Rebreanu casts her as a murderer because he understands her double marginalization – by gender and class – which, within the logic of the detective novel, makes her a less likely suspect due to her near invisibility. In *Gorila*, a novel criticized for its alleged collusion with the extreme right, Rogozanu offers a contrary view, arguing that "Rebreanu positions the only opposition to the 'trăirism' [a far-right Romanian literary movement] of the time" (p. 204). Through these analyses, Rogozanu not only challenges prevailing interpretations but also highlights the nuanced ways in which Rebreanu's narratives engage with and represent class dynamics.

The third part of the volume, entitled "Marin Preda – Ugly People", initiates with a discussion of two modernities, underscoring Rogozanu's belief that the historical context of realism's emergence is crucial. In his analysis of Preda and Dumitriu, Rogozanu engages in a contest with a prevailing tradition of anti-communist interpretation. Contrary to the views of most critics, who perceive compromises, Rogozanu identifies the first instances where the peasant achieves self-narration. Rogozanu proposes a novel categorization of Marin Preda's works, distinguishing from the typical classifications. He identifies an initial phase where the voice of the peasantry is liberated through "the crisis of the accelerated modernization of the rural countryside" (p. 233). In *Moromeții* [*The Morometes*], Rogozanu argues, Preda empowers the rural classes; with the establishment of the communist regime in 1948 and the accelerated modernization that ensued, the peasant narrative no longer requires an intermediary (p. 239). Rogozanu notes a fundamental shift in the use of free indirect speech from the first to the second volume of *Moromeții*. In the first volume, the voice of the main character, Ilie Moromete, allows "classical omniscience to be infused with language, humour, and peasant thought" (p. 239). By the second volume, the narrative focus shifts to Niculae Moromete, a proletarianized peasant and party activist, whose voice represents "part of a multitude of new voices brought to light by historical change" (p. 261). Additionally, Rogozanu provides an insightful explanation to a lingering question: why does the first volume lack a conventional plot? He suggests that the narrative's tempo in both volumes is influenced by the dynamics of private property. The "stillness" of the first volume mirrors the static nature of "owning a few acres above the average" (p. 255), whereas in the second volume, the emergence of a plot is driven by class tensions arising from the crisis in "private property, inherited from ancestors" (p. 254). This analysis not only deepens the understanding of Preda's narrative techniques but also highlights how material conditions shape literary forms. In his analysis of Marin Preda's later works, Rogozanu explores Preda's narrative evolution in the second volume of *Moromeții*, and more markedly in *Intrusul* [*The Intruder*] and *Risipitorii* [*The Wastrels*]. Rogozanu discusses Preda's "new bet" – the creation of a new, credible voice that resonates with the popular masses, now represented by the proletarian or technocratic classes of the new regime. For Rogozanu, the theme of disillusionment among communist revolutionaries serves as a significant ideologeme. This theme culminates in *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* [*The Most Beloved of Earthlings*], where Rogozanu notes the rise of a neo-petite bourgeois, characterized by a distinctly individualistic narrative voice.

The fourth part, titled "Inquisition of The People", is dedicated to the prose writer Petru Dumitriu, marking him as the second pivotal example of finding a credible voice within socialist realism, following Marin Preda's portrayal of the peasant and peasant-proletarian. For Rogozanu, *Cronică de familie* [*Family Chronicle*] presents a cynical, judgmental voice – that of a ruthless narrator who scrutinizes from the vantage point of the dispossessed to the upper classes (p. 332), performing what Rogozanu calls the "inquisition" of the people. This is an indictment of the classes exploited in the pre-communist era by the aristocratic order of inter-war capitalism, a dynamic

enabled by the political shifts of 1948, in which the formerly dispossessed become dominant. Rogozanu notes a distinct influence of Balzac, though he argues that Dumitriu constructs this influence inversely: Balzac's fear of a conspiracy from the lower classes to overthrow the bourgeoisie is realized, and the aristocracy and bourgeoisie are satirized (p. 378). He posits, "[t]he naturalistic caricature of the peasant had to be counterbalanced by something on the scale for the upper classes" (p. 335), with the ruthless narrator adding a proletarian-moralist perspective to the Balzacian narrative style (p. 335). *Cronică de familie* and the first part of *Scrinul negru* [*The Black Commode*] by G. Călinescu are thus seen as a celebration of the old world's collapse (p. 343). Another significant work for Rogozanu is *Colecție de biografii, autobiografii și memorii contemporane* [*The Collection of Contemporary Biographies, Autobiographies, and Memoirs*], particularly for its narrative technique. Starting with the premise that documentation drives the narrative actions, a new narrator, referred to as the Editor, appears to merely "paste together biographies collected from contemporaries" (p. 352), adopting a "collective and collectivist" first-person perspective (p. 353). This highlights the documentary function, crucial in Dumitriu's work. Rogozanu observes that *Colecție de biografii* aims to "destroy the convention of realistic omniscience, and through the testimonies collected to make the judgment of the narrator and the readers no longer rudimentarily implicit as in *Cronică de familie*" (p. 354). The final part of the study on Dumitriu concerns his novel *Incognito*, published during his exile, which Rogozanu considers in the context of other works of intellectual dissidence. In *Incognito*, he writes that it is an "indictment of the abusive communist world" (p. 397), recognizing its high expressive value akin to that of *Cronică de familie*. Rogozanu is interested not in opportunism but in the force with which Dumitriu uses the techniques of socialist realism, which had gained him renown in Romania, and turns them against communism. Comparing Dumitriu with other "fugitives from the communist bloc", such as Solzhenitsyn or Czesław Miłosz, Rogozanu finds him more akin to Miłosz due to his non-acclimatization to the Capitalist West, noting that neither achieved the fame or material status they had in their native regimes. He also points out that unlike Solzhenitsyn, who adopted an "ultraconservative pattern", Dumitriu remained hostile to extreme right-wing ideas until the end (p. 412).

Rogozanu's study offers a series of critically important observations for reassessing three major authors of Romanian historical realism. He celebrates Rebreanu for innovations not previously discussed, notably the creation of class tensions facilitated by the middle-class narrative voice, the only credible form of representation amid the precarious modernization of interwar peripheral capitalism. For Preda and Dumitriu, who wrote under communism, Rogozanu highlights the efforts of socialist realism to forge credible class voices, achieving a remarkable feat given the genre's relegation to the margins by aestheticist criticism. Preda is praised for giving voice to the peasantry and later for rendering credible urban voices of a new communist middle class comprised of intellectuals and highly qualified wage-earners (p. 293). In Dumitriu, the use of a ruthless narrator effectively conveys historical judgments against both the pre-communist capitalist bourgeoisie and, from exile, the brutality of communism. Rogozanu's results stem from a thorough materialist, ideological, and narratological analysis, which he terms "contextualist narratology", firmly rooted in theoretical grounding. While this volume seems to categorize the cases of the three great prose writers, it actually opens new horizons for Romanian research and beyond.

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ANDREI DOBOȘ, *Bacovia: modernismul periferic*
[*Bacovia: The Peripheral Modernism*], Cluj-Napoca,
OMG/Casa Cărții de Știință, 2024, 125 p.

G. Bacovia (1881–1957), a key figure in the Romanian literature of the early 20th century, generally associated with the symbolist-decadent movement, is regarded today as one of the most important Romanian poets of all time. However, this was not always the case with Bacovia: for several decades after his debut in 1916, critics' responses seemed to develop in most divergent ways. It can be quite challenging to try sorting out these multiple and diverse reactions, yet this is one of the main topics in Andrei Doboș' new study, *Bacovia: modernismul periferic* [*Bacovia: The Peripheral Modernism*]. In fact, the author proposes two focus points: a historical exposition that puts into perspective the critics' opinions on Bacovia's poetry throughout time, and an in-depth analysis of Bacovia's works in relation to the concept of the *flâneur* (the wanderer), a concept that, according to Andrei Doboș, can be essential for a more elaborate understanding of Bacovia's poetry.

In the first chapter of his book, Andrei Doboș suggests three stages for the development of critical responses to Bacovia's poetry. Apart from chronological criteria, the author discovers similarities between the critics of a certain period that go beyond their approval or disapproval of Bacovia's works, and so manages to create a convincing distinction between the three stages. The first one is associated with a timeframe between 1916 (the year of Bacovia's book debut) and 1941 (the year when G. Călinescu – a leading figure in the Romanian criticism of the 20th century – publishes his *History of Romanian Literature*). This stage, mainly referred to as “the modernist stage” by the author, includes, as expected, the first critical reactions to Bacovia's poetry. Considering opinions from critics such as E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, Vladimir Streinu, Tudor Vianu, etc., Andrei Doboș concludes that most critical voices from this era acknowledged a certain originality or authenticity in Bacovia's poetry, although the overall value of his works was still being questioned. Another common approach for most critics in this timeframe (with some notable exceptions, of course) is the fact that they saw Bacovia's poetry as a “spontaneous and unconscious manifestation of existence” (p. 23), in opposition to a calculated poetic endeavor.

Things seem to take a drastic turn with the second stage of critics addressing the works of Bacovia, a time of so-called “socialist aesthetics” that spreads all the way to the late 1970s in communist Romania (with a few significant contributions, similar in their approach, up to the late 1980s). We find here, for example, that between 1949–1953 Bacovia was marginalized both institutionally and in the cultural press, a clear sign that his work was not appreciated by the communist authorities. However, this era is not characterized only by negative reactions to Bacovia, since a massive re-valuation of the poet's early works is also taking place due to several contributions from the major Romanian critics of that time. There are very many names here that Andrei Doboș takes into account, since we are dealing with probably the most active period of critical inquiries on Bacovia: Nicolae Manolescu, Marian Papahagi, Gheorghe Grigurcu, Mihail Petroveanu, Ion Caraion, etc. are just some of the authors that participated in this socialist re-evaluation of Bacovia, often building their arguments as a sort of response to their predecessors (mainly in response to Lovinescu or Calinescu's approaches).

Finally, Andrei Doboș suggests a third stage of critical reactions, a “postmodern” stage that can be traced back to the early 1980s. We find here an attempt to re-consider and re-value Bacovia's late works (which were generally ignored by most previous critics, if not condemned directly). Romanian culture witnessed the emergence of a new generation of writers (in fiction or poetry, as well as in literary criticism) in the early 1980s, a group generally associated with postmodernism that focused, among other things, on concepts such as everyday aesthetics, minimalism, or the so-called transitive poetry. In this framework, it is not surprising that critics from the 1980s generation (such as Gheorghe Crăciun or Ion Bogdan Lefter) take an interest in Bacovia's late poems, as they find here a

poetic approach quite relevant for the theoretical perspectives that they were trying to promote. An interest for Bacovia's late poems remains visible to this day, the most relevant example here being Paul Cernat with his monograph published in 2022, one of the most complex studies on Bacovia, according to Doboș.

The three ages of critique presented by the author, together with the supporting arguments for such a classification, manage to give the reader a sense of order in the vast chain of critical reactions to Bacovia. However, Andrei Doboș is fully aware that these categories (modernist era, socialist era, postmodern era) are highly unstable, relative, and they imply multiple exceptions, subtleties, or intersections. In his attempt to accurately describe the specifics of a certain stage of critical reception, Doboș is doubling his efforts by pointing out all sorts of deviations from an otherwise clear panoramic perspective of this literary history. While the proposed periods are both convincing and helpful to the reader, the complexity of this network of ideas will always escape conventional frames, and, fortunately, Andrei Doboș is constantly pointing out grey areas and potential inconsistencies in this setting.

The last part of the book is dedicated to the *flâneur*, a common figure in 19th century French modernism. Usually depicted as a wanderer in an urban setting (most often 19th century Paris), the *flâneur* has a long history of interpretations and depictions, with important contributions from Charles Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin (the two are the main references for Andrei Doboș' analysis as well). Doboș proposes a reading of Bacovia starting from the image of the wanderer, a reading that brings to light new perspectives on Bacovia in relation to his critical reception to date, but also in relation to the concept of the *flâneur* in general.

The author points out on several occasions that "there is a lot of walking" in Bacovia's poems. Of course, walking itself is not enough to determine a wanderer, but Bacovia's poems provide multiple other relevant features as well, and, as the author notes at some point, "for Bacovia, walking is an artistic practice" (p. 96). While providing very solid arguments for a reading of Bacovia in this *flâneur*-driven perspective, the author also points out major differences between the conventional *flâneur* and Bacovia's protagonist. Most authors see the wanderer as a figure strolling through some great city (usually Paris), so the conventional *flâneur* is actually a metropolitan one. However, this is not the case with Bacovia. As Doboș observes, Bacovia's wanderer is usually strolling along the streets of a small, almost empty, town. In other words, there is a metropolitan *flâneur* and a peripheral one, the latter being an emblematic mark for Bacovia's poetry.

Although Andrei Doboș' book is not very long, just over 120 pages, it manages to provide a very clear panoramic perspective on Bacovia's critical reception throughout the years. Within this framework, the author introduces the concept of the *flâneur* adding a new layer to Bacovia readings and a perspective that seems to have been almost completely ignored by previous authors. Himself an influential poet in today's Romanian literary scene, Andrei Doboș also advances elegant interpretations of Bacovia's poems, both famous ones, as well as lesser-known texts, and opens paths for future investigations on Bacovia, *flânerie*, symbolism, or peripheral modernism in general.

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CLAUDIU T. ARIEȘAN, *Istoria comicului românesc*, ediția a 2-a revizuită și adăugită [*Histoire du comique roumain*, 2e édition révisée et augmentée], Timișoara, Editura DATAGROUP, 2022, 569 p.

Indépendamment de la diffraction et de la dynamique interne de l'esthétique, le comique a connu une série d'expressions artistiques que le célèbre classiciste Claudiu T. Arieșan analyse dans la deuxième édition de son ouvrage *Istoria comicului românesc* [*Histoire du comique roumain*], une véritable épistémologie du rire valorisé culturellement sous toutes ses formes – « distingué et grossier, fin ou lourd, simple ou élevé, social et intime, général [...] ou particulier » (p. 17). Cristallisant des attitudes ou sanctionnant des défauts et des vices, le rire devient une réalité gnoséologique détectable dans la phrase sentencieuse ou clairement parodique et critique, dans l'allégorie ou dans l'expression humoristique. L'humour représente le catalyseur des capacités créatives humaines, relevant à la fois de l'éthique et de l'esthétique.

Le préambule de cette herméneutique du rire, comme l'avoue l'auteur lui-même (p. 8), a été la participation au Colloque national étudiant « Mihai Eminescu » de Iași avec la présentation « ' Le sourire amer ' – les vertus compensatoires de l'humour dans le journalisme éminesque », réalisée à une époque où l'humour prenait une forme cathartique et subtile de salut spirituel face à l'idéologie étatisée du communisme, d'autant plus que le rire était tabou. Partant ainsi d'une rigueur intellectuelle, Claudiu T. Arieșan devient un véritable historien et exégète non seulement du comique roumain, mais aussi du comique universel. La précision de son esprit analytique est à la base d'autres œuvres thématiques apparentées : *Herméneutique de l'humour sympathique. Repères pour une comicologie roumaine* (1999), *Entre sourire et prière. Modèles culturels de la comicologie classique et patristique* (2004), *Genèse du comique dans la culture roumaine* (2010), volumes qui ont été appréciés et récompensés par l'Union des Écrivains Roumains.

Structuré en huit chapitres, le texte débute avec « Le sourire guérisseur chez les Roumains » (pp. 5-15), où l'auteur met en avant les vertus curatives du rire, surtout en période de grandes épreuves – la pandémie et la guerre –, l'esprit satirique et épigrammatique représentant une coordonnée spirituelle des Roumains, la ligne de force de la matrice ethnique nationale. Cette vocation montre sa vigueur dans les cris populaires immémoriaux, dans les récits facétieux des contes, mais aussi dans les grandes créations littéraires. Cependant, le domaine de la comicologie ne bénéficie pas d'études herméneutiques suffisantes et pertinentes, les histoires de l'humour étant dans l'espace autochtone une *terra incognita* (p. 9), un fait qui soit remédié par le philologue Arieșan.

Le deuxième chapitre, intitulé « Critères et repères comicologiques » (pp. 16-175), part de la nécessité de constituer une science consacrée au phénomène comique qui ne peut être vulgarisé ou inclus dans le trivial, l'universalité du rire imposant une approche holistique et interdisciplinaire du point de vue de l'esthétique littéraire, de la philosophie, de la psychologie et de la sociologie. Dans le sous-chapitre « Terminologie du rire » (pp. 16-18), Claudiu T. Arieșan estime que l'échec d'une vision scientifique minimale consensuelle concernant la comicologie est dû à sa complexité, étant donné les relations inextricables du rire avec les manifestations de la vie quotidienne et la durée intime de chacun de nous, déterminant ainsi son caractère protéique et polymorphe. Dans le sous-chapitre « Approches analytiques du rire » (pp. 19-22), on précise que le rire n'est pas exclusivement conditionné par le comique, la preuve en étant la variété des manifestations du rire, du rire expansif et vif de la redécouverte de soi dans la mentalité romaine classique au rire hellénique avec des accents religieux reflétant la joie intérieure. Mais en partant des observations de Marian Popa, l'auteur considère que l'équivalence implicite de celles-ci relève d'un certain confort théorique. En parcourant les théories d'Armando Plebe, Paolo Santarcangeli, Valentin Silvestru, Teodor Baconschi, l'auteur aborde le contenu sémantique et notionnel de la terminologie de la comicologie (rire, comique, modes du comique, etc.) et propose d'analyser dans les sous-chapitres suivants les similitudes et les

différences des diverses sous-catégories esthétiques du rire, le sourire dans le discours littéraire érudit ou l'existence de valeurs sympathiques de l'humour.

L'étiologie du rire suppose une série de composantes – psychophysiologique, psychanalytique, sociologique, philosophique, esthétique, anthropologique et religieuse – examinées dans un périple culturel et informationnel qui part de l'Antiquité gréco-latine (où la différence entre le rire et le comique était insignifiante, les rires étant considérés comme une modalité de sanctionner l'ignorance et l'infatuation, et de taxer le manque de modération et le ridicule). Cependant, les subtilités du rire sont soulignées par Platon, le philosophe faisant une distinction entre les aspects publics et privés de celui-ci, rapportables tant à soi-même qu'à l'altérité. On apprend qu'Aristote met en évidence la philanthropie associée au rire, tandis que Cicéron cristallise cette conception dans *De oratore*, « filtrée par *interpretatio Romana* de la charité » (p. 53). L'ensemble de la mesure philosophique de l'équation rire-pleurs sera mise en évidence par Juvénal. Citant ensuite Ernst Robert Curtius, l'auteur admet que la suppression des frontières entre plaisanterie et sérieux est en grande partie due aux influences de la rhétorique. L'éloquence comique et le risible reflété dans l'art du portrait ou dans les mots spirituels seront substitués à la Renaissance par les idéologies des conditionnements psychophysiologiques du corpus hippocratique, amalgamées avec le philosophique et parfois avec l'esthétique. Le rire en tant que supériorité recherchée apparaît chez Hobbes, le critique de la métaphysique cartésienne, mais aussi chez Marcel Pagnol ou André Maurois, qui associent le rire à la peur collective, le considérant une forme cathartique subconsciente de manifestation de l'homme face à l'objectivation de la peur. Immanuel Kant fonde la théorie du contraste risible, ses conceptions comicologiques n'étant pas des analyses du particulier, mais des mécanismes générant l'esthétique du rire, le risible provoquant des manifestations ébranlantes ayant en son essence des formes d'absurde selon l'opinion du philosophe. Claudiu T. Arieșan estime que l'illuminisme français imprégné d'encyclopédisme transfère la méditation philosophique liée au rire sur un terrain naturaliste avec de profondes inflexions sociales. Si la doctrine classique n'admettait pas de catégories esthétiques équivoques, séparant clairement le tragique du comique, les romantiques réaliseront un syncrétisme des catégories esthétiques et philosophiques. Le comicologue de l'époque romantique est Jean Paul, qui se montrait préoccupé par la définition scientifique du comique, avec toutes les distinctions de ses réalisations (la manifestation physique du rire est une conséquence de la délectation mentale). L'incertitude du plaisir attribué exclusivement à la manifestation du physiologique est analysée également par le Suisse J.G. Sulzer.

L'auteur expose de manière diachronique la diffraction des concepts esthétiques liés au comique et au rire et présente les conceptions de Hegel, Schopenhauer, A. Bain, Vischer, Kuno Fischer, H. Bergson, Solger, Nietzsche, en s'arrêtant sur les théories du XX^e siècle (Ch. Lalo, J. Sully, Fr. Jeanson, N. Hartmann ou Croce). Celles-ci sont considérées apporter une résurrection des théories classiques et imposer de nouvelles directions, fondées à la fois sur le ludique commun à l'esthétique et au risible. Elles offrent à ce dernier une grille de perception esthétique et intellectuelle : bizarreries, insolites, difformités et aberrations, malformations éthiques et vices, dérogations aux rigueurs disciplinaires et morales, catastrophes quotidiennes, vulgarité, trivialité, etc. Claudiu T. Arieșan analyse la dimension religieuse du rire et constate une certaine uniformité stylistique et conceptuelle des sociétés modernes qui se rapportent de manière parodique à la composante sacrée. Dans ce contexte, l'homme se libère des angoisses métaphysiques, le numineux est humanisé et le dérisoire prend une double valeur : l'une est dirigée vers le céleste, l'autre vers le démoniaque. La dynamique du rire fonctionne dans les croyances religieuses sous différentes manifestations qui y sont mises en évidence : du rire rituel des dieux du panthéon gréco-romain, avec des accents profanes profonds, – au rire aux fonctions apotropaïques du folklore, ou du sourire et de l'enthousiasme vitaliste oriental détectable dans l'Ancien Testament à travers de nombreux calembours et jeux de mots – au rire théophanique écho de la colère divine ou « réflexe de la prédestination insondable pour les esprits trop humains » (p. 133). Partant de la perspective néo-testamentaire selon laquelle Jésus-Christ n'aurait jamais ri durant sa vie terrestre, ce qui a suscité beaucoup de polémiques parmi les esprits scolastiques, deux courants dichotomiques s'étaient créés. D'une part, ceux qui soutenaient que

le Sauveur, par sa nature humaine, avait vécu la gaieté faisant partie de la nature intrinsèque de l'homme. D'autre part, ceux qui croyaient que, par l'affirmation de sa divinité, l'homme avait été substitué par Dieu qui ne pouvait plus rire, idée également débattue par T. Baconschi.

Le troisième chapitre du livre (pp. 176-214), comme le titre l'anticipe, est consacré aux deux modalités fondamentales de manifestation du comique – l'humour et l'ironie. Elles sont présentées conceptuellement, esthétiquement et historiquement. Les chapitres suivants se concentrent sur le polymorphisme de l'humour universel et roumain, et capturent le filon humoristique et les paradigmes mentaux détectables chez différentes nations : l'humour anglais, la gaieté française « entre humour et esprit » (p. 241), le rire allemand, l'humour hispanique, l'humour des steppes et celui juif, ou encore l'humour américain. Quant à l'humour roumain, on considère qu'il émerge à la fois de la littérature populaire et de la littérature savante, l'esprit autochtone possédant la faculté de surprendre et de critiquer les habitudes et les vices humains dans des contes édifiants ou des énoncés paremiologiques, mais aussi dans des œuvres savantes telles que celles des chroniqueurs, de B.P. Hasdeu, Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă ou I.L. Caragiale. Le comique est également illustré dans le journalisme national, auquel l'auteur consacre le sixième et dernier chapitre (pp. 362-381). Il propose une analyse de la presse humoristique et satirique, en ensuite une analyse de la presse culturelle et littéraire-artistique.

Possédant une vaste culture, Claudiu T. Arieșan conduit le lecteur dans un fascinant périple de l'histoire du comique, démontrant que *homo ridens* connaît toute une série d'expressions artistiques, dérivées du sens même de l'existence vécue, le comique n'étant en effet pas d'autre chose qu'une modalité d'approche esthétique, philosophique et religieuse du réel.

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Founded in 1988 by Luisa Valmarin, the academic journal *România Orientale* is now in its 35th issue (2022), and publishes, on this occasion, a volume of impressive breadth and quality research in linguistics, culture, and literature.

The journal includes four sections and opens with a folder dedicated to Marco Cugno (1939–2012), professor of Romanian language and literature at the University of Torino and an important translator of Romanian literature. Titled “Marco Cugno, il maestro e l'amico” [“Marco Cugno, the Teacher and the Friend”], the portfolio contains nine articles evoking the life and academic work of the scholar commemorated, authored by Roberto Merlo, Filippo Spallino, Veronica Pesce, Cristiana Francone, Barbara Pavetto, Gian Franco Gianotti, Roberto Scagno, Bruno Mazzoni, and Marta Petreu. From a researcher's point of view, these texts serve at least two purposes. On one hand, they became a space of memory, a tribute to a person who made his mark in the field of Romanian studies in Italy. On the other hand, this section may serve very well as a “behind the curtains” view of the grand literary history because it shows the dynamic influence that Marco Cugno had in his teaching years – the unquestionable truth being supported by the authors of the texts themselves, who were connected to the professor in one way or another and continued to pursue the scientific research of Romanian literature and linguistics.

The second section is the largest, mainly dedicated to scientific articles, and is interesting primarily for the variety of studies, covering centuries of literature, from the *Divina Comedia* to *Luceafărul*, in very different thematic and methodological areas: comparative studies, biographical studies (“‘Tată dragă... A D-Tale fiică respectuoasă și iubitoare, Lilica’. Per una biografia di Iulia Hasdeu nel dialogo epistolare col padre” [“‘Dear Father... Your Respectful and Loving Daughter, Lilica’. For a Biography of Iulia Hasdeu in Epistolary Dialogue with Her Father”], by Alessandro Zuliani), translation studies (“Quasimodo e Arghezi: traduzione anti-filologica” [“Quasimodo and Arghezi: Anti-philological Translation”], by Federico Donatiello, “Traducere și predare” [“Translation and Teaching”], by Nicoleta Neșu, or “La traduzione litteraria e le sue sfide: il caso di *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* di Carlo Emilio Gadda in romeno” [“Literary Translation and its Challenges: The Case of Romanian Rendition of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* by Carlo Emilio Gadda”], by Harieta Topoliceanu), close-reading (“Il lessico delle emozioni nelle memorie di Lena Constante e Ana Blandiana” [“The Vocabulary of Affects in the Memoirs of Lena Constante and Ana Blandiana”], by Angela Tarantino and Luisa Valmarin), and, last but not least, etymological studies (“Rectificări și contribuții etimologice, II” [“Etymological Corrections and Contributions, II”], by Dumitru Loșonfi). Due to space constraints, I limit myself to highlighting the Giovanni Magliocco’s article “Teatrul excentric al identității: masculinitatea decadentă în poezia lui Alexandru Macedonski” [“The Eccentric Theatre of Identity: Decadent Masculinity in Alexandru Macedonski’s Poetry”], in which the author employs a transnational reading of the Romanian writer’s work, given that he is a bilingual author whose “work in French has the same value as that in Romanian” (p. 259). Starting from the reception of Macedonski’s poetry, the author reveals the decadent construction of identity, articulated by the poet’s recourse to eroticism, which asserts itself not as an act of knowledge but as an act of dominance: “Macedonski sees in love the affirmation of vital energies, of the desire to dominate” (p. 261). Identifying two types of masculinity – the “hyper-viril” and the “hypo-viril”, Giovanni Magliocco concludes that all these articulations of identity denote a “homoeroticism in crisis”, because “only a masculinity in crisis always feels the need to assert itself through exhibition” (pp. 273-274). The author therefore proposes a well-articulated analytical approach, focusing on the writer’s construction of identity, which finally results in a new, fresh way of seeing and interpreting Alexandru Macedonski’s work.

The “Proposte di lettura” [“Reading Proposals”] section, a regular feature of the journal, contains annotated translations from 19th century Romanian writers (I. L. Caragiale’s *Tempora, Triumphul talentului* [Triumph of the Talent], *Bacalaureat* [Baccalaureate], proposed by Cristiana Francone), interwar and postwar writers (Vasile Voiculescu’s three sonnets from *Ultimele sonete închipuite ale lui Shakespeare în traducere imaginară de V. Voiculescu* [Shakespeare’s Last Fancied Sonnets in V. Voiculescu’s Imaginary Translation], proposed by Veronica Pesce, and Nicolae Labiș’s *Moartea câprioarei* [The Death of the Deer], proposed by Marinella Lőrinczi), but also from contemporary writers (Radu Paraschivescu’s *Fluturele negru* [Black Butterfly], translated by Jessica Andreoli, and Doina Ruști’s *Fantoma* [The Phantom], from *Ciudățenii amoroase din Bucureștiul fanariot* [The Weird Love Stories from Phanariot Bucharest], translated by Barbara Pavetto). This section’s relevance is almost self-explanatory. Although it’s not composed of scientific papers, it provides the reader somewhat of a first-hand contact with Romanian literature, which is a great deal for promoting Romanian studies and serving, through translation, as a connecting bridge from one language to another. Moreover, some of the translations have an auxiliary text, in which the translator explains the choices that were made for translating the text or even describes the text in a contextualizing and analytic way.

The reviews are commenting on recent publications, both literary translations (Mircea Cărtărescu’s *Solenoide* and Matei Călinescu’s *Vita e opinioni di Zacharias Lichter*, both translated by Bruno Mazzoni), as well as specialised studies devoted to Romanian literature. The selection of books reviewed is equally varied; it covers areas and subjects such as postmodernism (Robert Cincu, *Postmodernismul în teoria literară românească* [Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory]), folklore studies (Ion Taloș, *Împăratul Traian și conștiința romanității românilor. Cultura orală și*

scrisă din secolele XV-XX [*Emperor Trajan and Romanians' Roman Consciousness. Oral and Written Culture in the 15th–20th Centuries*]), contemporary Romanian literary history (Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* [*History of Romanian Contemporary Literature: 1990–2020*]), and the history of literary ideas (Ioana Bot, Adrian Tudurachi, eds., *Dumitru Popovici*). This section is just as important for advancing Romanian literary and linguistic studies as the previous one. In this sense, the final two sections serve as a gateway that allows the reader to indirectly engage with Romanian literature and scientific research, making them easily accessible and assisting individuals who are interested in staying current with this area of study.

Why pick *România Orientale* above other scholarly publications devoted to Romance culture, one might wonder? The answer is quite predictable: this publication is nearly entirely devoted to Romanian studies, and its wide range of topics and themes greatly aids in this regard. Issue 35 continues the tradition of *România Orientale* and confirms, once again, the high standards set by the project initiated by Luisa Valmarin. It is not only a Romanian language journal in the Italian university scene but an international academic publication that enjoys a well-deserved prestige and continues to make significant contributions both in the field of philological research and in the wider sphere of culture by translating and promoting new publications from abroad.

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