

# Principles for an Evolutionary Taxonomy of the Romanian Novel

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ANDREI TERIAN

**T**HE PRESENT article aims to formulate and discuss a series of principles regarding a possible classification of the forms of the Romanian novel. It will not conclude with a comprehensive and definitive taxonomy of these forms, simply on account of the subject's complexity. This complexity does not necessarily stem from the size of the corpus, which would render it impossible to investigate, but rather from a double incongruity, whose relevance is minimized by even the most recent approaches to the phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, we encounter an incongruity between the denomination of a narrative form and its more or less technical meaning. Even if labels such as “social novel,” “psychological novel,” or “historical novel” are, in theory, among the concepts enjoying the greatest authority in literary studies, being understood and employed by most readers, it is precisely their inflated meaning that make these concepts difficult to define. Additionally, they were conceived differently across different literary spaces, especially following their interaction with various local literary forms. For instance, this is what happened to the historical novel in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian culture: the emergence of this subgenre took place as a result of a complex junction with the hajduk novel, a narrative form that had no Western counterpart. It is precisely this kind of processes that turn the present study into a reflection on the taxonomy of the *Romanian* novel rather than on novelistic structure as a “universal”—or at least transnational—cultural form. In any case, the point is that the frequent use of labels such as “social” or “psychological” does not vouch for their transparency: in order for them to become fully operational, it is mandatory that the works in which they feature also attempt to define them.

On the other hand, there is also a clear incongruity between the aforementioned concepts and the actual traits displayed by the novels. Naturally, for a technical term to prove its efficiency, it is not necessary that its definition be substantiated by an extensive analysis of its reach, i.e., of the entire novelistic corpus it is supposed to cover. The very nature of these concepts implies that they could possibly be used in classifying hitherto unexplored areas, otherwise their existence would be meaningless. However, in most cases, not even the allotment of a concept to a list of works is sufficient in revealing the

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concept's appropriateness. It is necessary that the formulation of theory on narrative form be substantiated by an analysis of several case studies that would help us understand not only what titles fall under a certain category, but also list some of the traits justifying this classification. In fact, the existence of both these incongruities should not come as a surprise: if the labels would, indeed, be self-defining and the definitions self-explanatory, the classification of novelistic forms would not have become one of the most burdensome tasks in the study of the Romanian novel.

## Genre Theory As “Literary Grid”

**A**ND STILL, is the classification of Romanian novelistic subgenres actually an issue? If the answer is yes, since when has it been so? Drawing on the previous arguments, a first logical step in this study would be conducting a critical inquiry of existing taxonomies. The problem is that in the history of Romanian novel theory, there have been very few attempts at systematically classifying its forms. Of course, this does not mean that Romanian literary criticism never made use of these subgenres altogether. Its defining paradigms, such as the historical novel, were widely known and used as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and since then became a fundamental component of any debates concerning the novel. However, these debates hardly succeeded in outlining a conceptual system. A notable leap is owed to Ion Heliade-Rădulescu who, in an 1860 text, made a distinction between the “wondrous romance” of the Easterners and the “historical romance” of the Europeans, in which he thought he saw proof of civilizational superiority.<sup>2</sup> Another important milestone for this debate is an 1894 article authored by Ovid Densusianu, in which he tried to apply evolutionary theory to the study of literary genres. The text also contains a draft on the evolution of the French novel, wherein he starts—drawing on Ferdinand Brunetière’s considerations—from the epic and *chansons de geste*, then discusses the adventure novels and the novels of manners of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and concludes by discussing contemporary novelistic production where, he claims, “we encounter the emergence of the historical novel, the psychological novel, and the sociological novel, with all their distinct and various forms.”<sup>3</sup>

However, this fertile theoretical debate soon came to an end in Romanian literary criticism—during the interwar period, to be exact, when the reflection on the multitude of novelistic forms was reduced to a debate on the superiority of one’s own poetics to the detriment of rival poetics. The skirmish between opposing concepts of “creation” and “analysis,” involving G. Ibrăileanu and E. Lovinescu during the mid-1920s,<sup>4</sup> as well as the philosophical battles waged between “Balzacianism” and “Proustianism” in the following decade, culminating in the heated debate between Camil Petrescu and G. Călinescu,<sup>5</sup> are some of the most important landmarks of this theoretical debate in the Romanian literary criticism of that time. But there seems to be a more general reason behind the reluctance displayed towards novelistic classification, namely the aversion of Romanian authors to any—real or presumed—attempt at hindering their individuality. During that time, there probably was no clearer instance of this tendency than Mihail

Dragomirescu's "science of literature," whose obsession for taxonomy was ridiculed by Tudor Arghezi, who coined the phrase "the literary grid," which he ascribed to Rector Mya Lak in his 1934 *Tablete din Țara de Kutu* (Tablets from Kutu Country):

*From a careful study of these authors, I have concluded that love poetry, for instance, is reducible to a formula whereby you always have two characters, a boy and a girl. You eliminate the one or the other: it isn't a love poem anymore but autobiography, meditation, prophecy, or philosophy. If you replace the girl with God, you have mysticism. If the boy and the girl have a child, that's a novella. If they marry, you bring in the dowry and the family, you just got yourself a conflict, and the literary ramifications run deeper: you get either a novel or a play. The boy's the jealous type and the girl is beautiful: tragedy or drama. They both have blue blood, they're perhaps important to Church and State: this is tragedy. A child leaves for war: the epic. . . . As soon as I encounter something else entirely, something meant to cause me discomfort, I show no hesitation: it is an abnormality, a trivial thing, something that is not to be found anywhere on the grid. Imagine if we went on and tried to investigate and ponder upon all particular scenarios: where would that lead us?<sup>6</sup>*

During the postwar period, the reflection on novelistic subgenres is stunted by the specter of socialist realism and especially by the worry that any attempt at tracing typologies can, in fact, conceal a new form of dogmatism. This is not to say that this period does not discuss the novelistic form altogether. But the debates take place separately for each particular subgenre, as illustrated, starting with the 1970s, by titles such as *Romanul poetic* (The poetic novel, 1977),<sup>7</sup> *Romanul psihologic românesc* (The Romanian psychological novel, 1978),<sup>8</sup> *Romanul condiției umane* (The novel of the human condition, 1979),<sup>9</sup> *Romanul de mistere în literatura română* (The mystery novel in Romanian literature, 1981),<sup>10</sup> *Romanul de analiză psihologică în literatura română interbelică* (The Romanian interwar psychological novel, 1983),<sup>11</sup> *Romanul politic* (The political novel, 1984)<sup>12</sup> and so on. Although the last communist decade hosted notable attempts at classifying the Romanian novelistic production—such as *Arca lui Noe: Eseu despre romanul românesc* (Noah's ark: An essay on the Romanian novel, 3 vols., 1980–1983) by Nicolae Manolescu,<sup>13</sup> or *Viața și opiniile personajelor* (The lives and opinions of literary characters, 1983) by Radu G. Țeposu<sup>14</sup>—, they displayed a preference for a rather idiosyncratic conceptual vocabulary to the detriment of usual denominations (such as Manolescu's Doric–Ionic–Corinthian three-pronged classification, or Țeposu's shift from the transitive novel to the reflexive one and then to the metanovel), which helps explain why these concepts did not succeed in becoming commonplace in contemporary critical discourse.

A change of paradigm in this regard, albeit a rather inferred one, was brought about by the *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* (Chronological dictionary of the Romanian novel, 2 vols., 2004–2011),<sup>15</sup> whose aim was to classify each and every novel according to its particular subgenre. Admittedly, this ambition was partially hindered, on the one hand, by the fact that the project lacks an in-depth debate on the categories used throughout the dictionary and, on the other hand, by the prejudice that certain masterpieces in the history of Romanian literature eschew any sort of classification. However, one cannot deny the overall utility of the project, which gave birth to a series

of empirical research on the distribution of various subgenres during the evolution of the Romanian novel, especially in its early development stages.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the issue of formal classification is more suitably approached in the article preceding the second edition of the dictionary, whose final section, albeit having a length of no more than five pages, is still the most down-to-earth analysis of the phenomenon in Romanian criticism to date.<sup>17</sup> In the ensuing pages, I will address this taxonomy—accounting for 51 subgenres—from a polemic standpoint, which is not in any case meant as an attempt to diminish its importance, but on the contrary, constitutes an indirect acknowledgement of its relevance. As for the polemic nature of my intervention, it owes primarily to the fact that the principles underlying the different existing labels never seemed outstandingly clear to me. I will consequently suggest five principles for the enhancement of the classification system of the Romanian novelistic production: the contextual principle, the uniqueness principle, the thematic principle, the specificity principle, and the evolutionary principle. I will discuss them all in the following pages.

## The Contextual Principle

ONE OF the questions that inevitably arises when discussing any sort of classification concerns the source of its concepts: should we employ an existing terminology, or should we attempt to put forward new instruments? In our case, should classifying Romanian novelistic subgenres make use of current concepts or, on the contrary, formulate new ones? In the most important contribution to the subject to date, Manolescu expresses his firm resolution in favor of the latter.<sup>18</sup> He rejects the language of traditional criticism, which displays a tendency to reduce the novelistic production to the themes addressed in the novels, and instead promotes a structural classification of its species, i.e. the tripartition between “Doric,” “Ionic,” and “Corinthian.” Undoubtedly, Manolescu’s criticism against traditional typologies is profoundly reasonable; however, his alternative is not necessarily preferable. First, the triad based on the orders of Greek architecture is much too rudimentary in regard to its possibilities when compared to the diversity of possible forms, as illustrated by the evolution of the Romanian novel from its origins until the early 1980s, when the first edition of *Noah’s Ark* was published. Probably all Romanian novels published until that particular timeframe could be (more or less nuancedly) categorized according to one of the three categories; however, the classification would rob the overwhelming majority of the works of their particularities and even of their *genus proximus*, whose role is to justify classification itself—since the specificity of genres such as crime fiction, science fiction, or romance lies not in a certain relationship between narrator and characters, but in the focus of their fictional world on a certain theme (solving a murder, the speculative charting of the future, or the description of passionate love). Secondly, Manolescu’s taxonomy is a closed one. Even if its partial utility until the 1980s cannot be contested, it was inevitably rendered obsolete by later developments of the novel. The overwhelming majority of new narrative forms that emerged in Romanian literature during the past 40 years are almost in their entirety Corinthian, although the label itself now seems insufficient in describing their specific-

ity. But the issue at hand is not the absence of labels. The glossary containing the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian novel might just as well be enriched in literature, as it was in architecture, by adding further labels such as the Tuscan or the Composite order, among others. It is just that, conceptually speaking, the three-pronged relationship between author, narrator, and character underpinning Manolescu's classification does not allow for other possibilities than the ones imagined by the critic.

What is to be done in this case? I believe that the traditional typology of novelistic subgenres should not be dismissed so easily and that it can be reconfigured and put to good use. In fact, this is precisely what the authors of the second edition of the *Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel* seem to have done throughout their classification, as they maintained most of the labels used at the time when the novels were published. But not always: sometimes it seems that it was more important to them to "ensure the convertibility" of a certain term to the jargon of international criticism.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, this also constitutes an important aspect; however, on the one hand, sometimes the (apparent) eccentricity of certain denominations bears witness to the originality of their forms, while on the other hand, the correspondences to Western labels are often deceiving. I will provide a single example that I find telling in this regard, namely the so-called "murder novel (roman criminal)," which the second edition of the dictionary omits, most likely assimilating it to the so-called "'noir' novel." This decision raises a few issues, from the label's anachronism to its inadequacy. For, if we consider the "noir" novel as a type of novel drawing on its French equivalent (*le roman noir*), the term could, in fact, possess two meanings. On the one hand, the French concept is in itself an imprecise—although historically justifiable—reinterpretation of the Gothic novel, the narrative form proliferating in the British literature of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the works of authors such as Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, *le roman noir* can also designate the interwar American thriller novels signed by authors such as James Hadley Chase and James Cain, whose French translations were disseminated after World War II through the famous "Série noire" established by Marcel Duhamel in 1945 at Gallimard.<sup>21</sup> As for the Romanian *roman criminal*, it has nothing to do either with the medieval Gothic, or with the elaborate crime fiction setting of the thriller, but seems rather content with describing horrific crimes with the same carefree attention to detail with which yellow journalism reported *les faits divers* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, precisely this convergence was the main criterion according to which Dominique Kalifa, probably the most important theoretician of this subgenre, distinguished *le roman criminal* both from the mystery novel and from the detective novel.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the name of the subgenre has an equivalent not only in French but in English as well, where John M. Robertson remarked, as early as 1899, that the "murder novel" tends to corrupt all other subgenres of contemporary fiction.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, I believe that the *roman criminal* earns its rightful place as legitimate category in the taxonomy of the Romanian novel around 1900. And if the typological and chronological arguments do not suffice, then perhaps the fact that, between 1884 and 1927, no less than eight Romanian novels authored by Panait Macri, Ilie Ighel, C. Prutianu, or various other anonymous authors adopted *roman criminal* as a subtitle—in addition to other works

containing phrases such as *amor criminal* (“murderous love”) or *mama criminală* (“murderous mother”) in their subtitles—should represent a decisive argument in this regard.

## The Uniqueness Principle

THEFORE, IT is preferable to draw on the glossary of terms already being used in the period under scrutiny instead of inventing new labels, at least in the case of the Romanian novelistic subgenres. But how many such labels can there be and how should they be applied to a particular novel? Ideally, a classification is more precise as it respects the principle of uniqueness, i.e., that each object falls under a single category. Nonetheless, as various past or present theoreticians have remarked, any literary work—and especially the novel, given its more considerable length—contains traits of several (sub)genres: “genre multiplicity lies at the very heart of novelistic narrative.”<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, this trait could be considered the very prerequisite for explaining the “specificity” or “originality” of the work. And, taking this into account, why should we not signal this uniqueness for what it is?

Notwithstanding the fact that this would risk making a confusion between a novel’s classification and its interpretation (and thus cancel the very utility of classification as heuristic procedure), it raises a series of technical issues. First, how many categories should be used to describe a novel? Some works will most likely require, on account of their heterogeneity, at least five labels, whereas others—especially those falling under the category of genre fiction—would only require one. However, even if we would not consider this inconsistency an inconvenience, problems are certain to occur when it emerges that the *distribution* of the subgenres included in each work varies greatly from one work to the other. For instance, *Neamul Șoimăreștilor* (The Șoimărești Clan, 1915) by Mihail Sadoveanu and *Manuc* (2006) by Victoria Comnea can be both regarded as “historical romance novels” (perhaps with elements of sensationalist fiction), but the relationship between history and romance is significantly different from one text to the other. Admittedly, the presence of each subgenre in a particular work could nowadays be approximated with the help of computational analysis. But this would only work in theory: we could, of course, imagine that, on the basis of typologically “purer” corpora, we would be able to develop a series of models that we could subsequently employ in a closer analysis of more ambiguous cases. But this would entail falling into the very trap which we so desperately want to avoid, since if we postulate that there are no “pure” works, we cannot claim, for instance, to build a model of the historical novel from a corpus of works which, on the one hand, was arbitrarily selected, and on the other, does not contain only (elements of) historical novels but also (elements of) hajduk, sensational, sentimental novels, etc. Additionally, such a process would sabotage the classification itself: how would we classify a novel whose thematic range consists of 40% history, 10% romance, 20% adventure, and 30% hajduks?

The only way to escape this vicious circle would be, if we were to attempt to build a computational model of the historical novel, to do so on the basis of *all* historical novels,

to which we would then compare each individual book in order to establish their degree of conformity to the norm. Subsequently, by comparing a work to other models as well, we could determine the degree to which various subgenres interfere in its configuration. But this entails transgressing the classification process and launching a process of analysis and interpretation. For the classification ceases altogether when, setting aside all the nuances and reductionist remarks, we classify every work according to its corresponding subgenre (which, because of the aforementioned considerations, can only be one).

## The Thematic Principle

**A**FTER HAVING agreed on the unique classification principle, an important question arises regarding its criterion: should it consist of the form, the content, or rather of a combination of the two? I will attempt to simplify the issue, in the sense that, since the thematic principle is not yet contested (given the popularity of subgenres such as the social novel, historical novel, etc.), the real question concerns whether and to what extent this principle should intersect with a formal criterion. At first glance, this is nearly inevitable, especially if we draw on a rather mundane comparison, that with poetry, whereby subgenres defined as “fixed verse” are prioritized to the detriment of other criteria in the classification process. Because of this, it seems only natural to single out categories such as “epistolary novel”<sup>25</sup> in Romanian literature. Yet, the analogy between poetry and prose is only partially viable. The first major difference lies in the fact that, unlike “fixed verses,” that operate at the level of the entire poetic text, in a novel the epistolary style can alternate with other types of discourse. Therefore, it seems obvious to me that in *Patul lui Procrust* (The bed of Procrustes, 1933), although the sequence of Fred and Emilia alternatively commenting on Ladima’s letters constitutes the book’s most consistent part, it would be outlandish to label Camil Petrescu’s work an “epistolary novel.” Another issue resides in the fact that, given the greater heterogeneity of prose works, the relevance of a certain form in defining them diminishes with time. If, for instance, the writing of sonnets or haikus is still a resounding auctorial statement today, the insertion of correspondence or diary entries seems to have instead become a rather mundane practice in contemporary novels. For this reason, I consider that labels such as “imaginary epistolary novel,”<sup>26</sup> used in DCRR 1.1 to define *Plângerea lui Dracula* (Dracula’s outcry, 1977) by Corneliu Leu, represents a major error, especially given that the actual narrative form is auxiliary to the self-legitimizing narrative of Vlad the Impaler. Moreover, I voice the opinion that the prevalence of theme over form could constitute a general rule not only in regard to the historical novel but also to the entirety of the Romanian novel. Otherwise, how could we hope to achieve a structured and all-inclusive classification if we would allow for the existence of the “epistolary novel,” but not for that of “diary-novel,” “chronicle-novel,” and so on?

The situation is somewhat similar in the case of novelistic subgenres that were classified according to literary or cultural movements. In the new edition of DCRR, these account for the “existentialist,” “naturalist,” “socialist realist,” “postmodern,” and “tex-

tualist” novel.<sup>27</sup> As previously mentioned, a first discernible issue is the blatant inconsistency: how could we comprehend and, more importantly, why would we devise denominations such as “socialist realist novel” and “postmodern novel” so long as the categories do not include the “realist” and the “modernist” novels? It is furthermore clear that the classifications made according to literary genres do not cancel but solely complement the previous classifications, built on the principle of the novels’ themes. For example, if we refer only to how certain novels were labelled as “naturalist” throughout DCCR 1.1 (given that I do not yet have access to the new classification), we can readily observe that this label is usually added to pre-existing thematic categories: *Timerețea Casandrei* (Cassandra’s youth, 1914) by V. Demetrius is described as “a social novel of the naturalist type,”<sup>28</sup> *Reîntoarcearea* (The return, 1931) by Suzana Bulfinski is a “sensationalist novel with a melodramatic plot and naturalist impetus,”<sup>29</sup> whereas *Turbă* (Peat, 1936) by Octav Dessila is an “erotic novel with naturalist elements and a melodramatic conclusion.”<sup>30</sup>

Admittedly, one could argue that there are at least two literary movements which, because of two completely different reasons, seem to be exempted from this rule. The first one is socialist realism, whereby it could be claimed that the pressure exerted by ideology forced the homogeneity of all the subgenres and perhaps even of whole genres active under this concept. Undoubtedly, this is at least partially true, since this is what literary movements actually do: they represent overarching patterns with a tendency to standardize genres and subgenres alike. However, this standardization is never fully complete—not even in the case of socialist realism, where we can still identify traditional novelistic subgenres. The clearest demonstration for this was provided by Ștefan Baghiu, who identified six distinct subgenres within a corpus of socialist realist novels: the industrial novel, the rural novel, the children’s and young adult novel, the historical and adventure novel, and the science fiction and fantasy novel.<sup>31</sup> Of course, Baghiu’s taxonomy is up for debate—if, for instance, “the novel of the [peasant] uprising” can be regarded as a subdivision of the rural novel or if, conversely, the adventure novel is to be equated with the historical novel—, but the persistence of traditional subgenres during the socialist realist period is undisputed. What about the postmodern period, i.e., the other literary movement calling for expunging the lines between literary genres and species? At an international level, Ralph Cohen observed as early as 1987 that “postmodern theorists, critics, authors, and readers inevitably use the language of genre theory even as they seek to deny its usefulness.”<sup>32</sup> In the case of Romanian literature, however, such reflections never found fertile ground for the simple reason that novelistic subgenres were never regarded as important even before the emergence of postmodernism. In this regard, even if it does not provide a definitive solution to this issue, the most useful assessment is the section dedicated to the study of postmodern prose in Mihai Iovănel’s *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (History of contemporary Romanian literature). At a first glance, by labelling the entire postmodern Romanian prose as “metarealist,”<sup>33</sup> without following its evolution according to possible subgenres, Iovănel’s approach seems to indicate a homogeneity in postmodern literary discourse. However, this first impression is deceiving. On the one hand, the simple fact that Iovănel prefers to employ the concept of “postmodern historical novel”<sup>34</sup> instead of the established one, “historiographic metafiction” (the one preferred by DCCR 2.0 as well) betrays the fact that he does



not consider Romanian postmodernism a total abrogation of the system of novelistic subgenres. On the other hand, his observation that Romanian sci-fi authors “are closer to the Western understanding of postmodern prose . . . than the [highbrow] writers of short realist pieces of the 1980s,”<sup>35</sup> illustrates that postmodernism assimilates the subgenres of popular fiction without dissolving them into an indistinguishable mass. Consequently, as in the case of socialist realism, the glossary of Romanian novelistic forms can adopt the thematic principle in the case of postmodern prose as well.

## The Specificity Principle

**I**F WE acknowledge that the thematic principle is primordial in the classification of novels, we also notice that rather than solving our problems, it actually gives birth to others. This takes place, first and foremost, due to the fact that “theme” is one of the most elusive concepts of literary history. Themes are not only difficult to discern, but are also defined in accordance to different scales, thus ranging from highly localized ones such as “hajduk life,” the “slums,” or the “police” to quite extensive and abstract notions such as “society,” “history,” and “the psyche.” Considering the themes’ vague contours and the novel’s variety of possible forms, I contend that a taxonomy based on the thematic factor should pursue *the maximum specificity* of the concepts. Therefore, between a more precise (“rural novel,” “ghetto novel,” etc.) and a more generic denomination (“social novel”), the former is always preferable, as it has the merit of particularizing the novels’ theme the most. Under this aspect, it is worth mentioning that generally, the taxonomy employed by DCRR 2.0 encouraged the assertion of new concepts such as the “novel of ‘the obsessive decade’” or the “novel of the [postcommunist] transition” which, without possessing a strong theoretical foundation, or equivalent concepts in international scholarship, paint a much clearer picture of the postwar Romanian novel.

Nevertheless, the postwar Romanian novel still has a rather vague representation within DCRR 2.0, which shows a certain conservatism in its classification. More exactly, among the 51 categories listed, a mere 15 (i.e., under 30%) designate novelistic forms that took shape after World War II, even if from a quantitative standpoint the works published after the war amount to over 80% of the total Romanian novelistic output. How can we explain this disproportion? Is the Romanian novel a more traditionalist genre by nature or are the instruments we make use of in describing it not always the most suitable? For instance, in what subgenre should we place *Dimineața pierdută* (Wasted morning), Gabriela Adameșteanu’s 1983 novel, one of the best Romanian literary works published during communism? The obvious answer seems to be the “historical novel”—especially since the majority of scholars have labelled it as such, among whom Valeriu Cristea, who considered it “a wide-reaching and very ambitious historical novel, accounting for no less than a century of Romanian history.”<sup>36</sup> More recently, Andreea Mironescu and Doris Mironescu discussed it under the label of “novel of memory,” a category that has emerged in international scholarship during the past four decades.<sup>37</sup> Both these descriptions, however, seem insufficient: the former because

Adameșteanu's novel does not address history in a general manner but rather a certain way of reviving and preserving recent history; the latter because the book does not merely contain "memory," but also diary entries and other ways of conserving the past.

The truth is that *Dimineață pierdută*, as well as *Căderea în lume* (The fall into the world, 1988) by Constantin Țoiu and other late communist novels, constitute a class of their own, emerging in Romanian literature starting with the 1970s and finding inspiration in the "novel of the 'obsessive decade.'" Intensifying and at the same time turning its subversive stance on its head, the new novelistic form delved deeper into the past, in the pre-communist period, attempting to rehabilitate certain noncanonical or even anticanonical political figures and thus rekindle an otherwise "natural" way of life, but which could seem almost exotic during communism. The first step in this direction was made by Marin Preda, who "humanized" marshal Ion Antonescu in his 1975 *Delirul* (Delirium), a tendency that was shortly after mimicked by other authors by evoking other bourgeois or fascist characters. Considering that these novels were set in the not-so-distant past, as well as the presence of a certain nostalgia in regard to the "lost world" that they evoked, a suitable denomination for this narrative form could be that of "retro novel," promoted insistently in the late 1980s by critics such as Anton Cosma,<sup>38</sup> even if insufficiently theorized. In any case, the phrase was adopted by the writers themselves, considering that Mircea Nedelciu, Adriana Babeți, and Mircea Mihăieș selected "retro novel" as subtitle for their 1990 collective work, *Femeia în roșu* (The woman in red), one of the most prominent Romanian postmodern novels. The novel represents, in fact, the epitome of this formula which, after exhausting the possibilities of metafiction, suddenly loses its popularity in the postcommunist period, when it was either demoted to the status of pale copy of previous works—such as Constantin Țoiu's 2006 *Istorisirile Signorei Sissi* (The stories of Signora Sissi)—or became the "novel of communism" as a retro equivalent that was much more suited to the new, postcommunist context.

## The Evolutionary Principle

THE APPLICATION of the specificity principle is not always clear, due to the fact that what could be considered specific for a certain subgenre during a particular period is not necessarily specific for another. Let us consider a very common example in this regard: *romanul pentru copii și tineret* ("the children's and young adult novel"), which DCRR 2.0 promotes as the sole denomination for this theme.<sup>39</sup> The phrase is reasonable in accounting for the majority of novels published until the 1960s and 1970s, in which the widespread eschewal of issues such as resisting (parental) authority or discovering one's own sexuality, coupled with the narrative focus on "adventure" ensured the equal representation of all minor readerships, regardless of age. But this starts to change during late communism, when novels such as George Șovu's 1986 *Liceenii* (The highschool students) lost their preadolescent readership because it depicted age-related issues and given the excessively pseudo-essayistic style. This gap will deepen significantly during postcommunism, once the young adult genre is accommodated in Romanian

literature, in which hardcore and horror scenes from novels such as those authored by Cristina Nemerovschi are definitely unsuitable for “children.” In any case, the takeaway is that any taxonomy of the subgenres of Romanian novelistic production should pay heed to their evolution.

Admittedly, it is easier to formulate such a principle than to actually put it into practice. This becomes even more difficult in the case of wider-reaching genres such as the “social novel,” to which I will turn my attention in the following. A first observation concerning this subgenre is that the phrase used to designate it features relatively late and only for a limited time in the subtitles of Romanian novels. In fact, there are only 14 novels that self-describe as “social novel” published between 1903 and 1931. This interval only partially overlaps with that corresponding to the enlargement of the “novel of manners,” a process marked by the presence of this phrase in the subtitles of 23 novels published between 1869 and 1926. Consequently, it becomes pretty clear that, at least from a chronological standpoint, the “novel of manners” distinguishes itself from “the social novel,” even if DCRR 2.0 considers the two interchangeable.<sup>40</sup> The crucial question raised by this is whether or not the two present typological differences as well. Naturally, they both refer to “social life” in the general meaning of the term. However, this concept is particularized by each subgenre in a different manner altogether, coinciding almost entirely with Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the novel of manners is not focused on a particular social class, but on a series of social practices revolving around relationships between individuals or on relationships established between individuals and society; consequently, the defining themes of the novel of manners are marriage, parenthood, inheritance, “honor” and “etiquette,” etc. Conversely, in the social novel, whose emergence is undeniably linked to the rise of sociology and socialism, the individuals and their relations are most importantly mirrors of their classes and class relations; as a result, by focusing on class inequality and the limits each class imposes on individual agency, the social novel ultimately acquires vindicative and revolutionary undertones which the novel of manners lack, as its conflicts are conceived in moral terms and come to an ethical solution. And this is not all. We can contend that, considering the chronology of the Romanian novel, the novel of manners is a subgenre that has been most active between 1870 and 1910, whereas the ensuing social novel becomes the norm between 1900 and 1925. After the war, however, an interesting process takes place: the social novel does not entirely cancel out the novel of manners, but rather the two novelistic forms seem to merge under what I would coin *romanul mediilor* (the “milieu novel”). Generally distinguishable through (sub)titles such as (*roman*) *din viața*... (“[novel] from the life of...”)—occurring 4 times prior to World War I and 22 times between 1924 and 1940—, this subgenre borrows the compartmentalized description of society from the social novel, insisting on several ethnic communities (Transylvanians, Macedonians, Jews, etc.), territorial and administrative subdivisions (the village, the city, the slums, etc.), or professional environments (the theatre, the monastery, etc.), but exceedingly “aestheticizes” the social engagement and limits itself to depicting the “manners” of various milieus in a critical (but not socially militant) way. In other words, the *subgenre* of the social novel is now subdivided into a series of *microgenres* (the novel of the Macedonian Romanians, the ghetto novel, and

others) whose diversity becomes increasingly difficult to keep track of and analyze. It is precisely the microgenres' heterogeneity, nearly impossible to fully oversee, that constituted the precondition for the emergence of one of the first—and in any case, the most consistent—*metagenres* of Romanian literature: the social novel as common denominator for this whole generic ecosystem.

Of course, I am fully aware that the aforementioned arguments give rise to several questions: how do we differentiate between a subgenre and a microgenre? To what extent does the emergence of the social novel constitute a pattern for other similar meta-genres? How do we solve the underlying contradiction that the same novelistic category (the “social novel”) can simultaneously be subordinate *and* superordinate? What are the changes the social novel undergoes during the next evolutionary phase of the Romanian novel (post-1948)? All these are reasonable, if not unavoidable questions. But to answer them would require not only to fully extend the classification I already vouched not to present here, but also engage into a series of analyses and interpretations that exceed the scope of a mere article.

□

## Notes

1. The most significant in this regard is the study authored by Cosmin Borza, Alex Goldiș, and Adrian Tudurachi, “Subgenurile romanului românesc: Laboratorul unei tipologii,” *Dacoromania litteraria* 7 (2020): 205–220.
2. Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, “Fabula,” in *Critică literară*, edited, foreword, notes, glossary and index by Aurel Sasu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1979), 158–159.
3. Ovid Densusianu, “Evoluționismul în studiul genurilor literare,” in *Opere*, critical edition by B. Cazacu, Ioan Șerb, and Florica Șerb, vol. 4, *Teorie, estetică, istorie și critică literară. Publicistică*, text selected and established by B. Cazacu, Ioan Șerb, and Florica Șerb, notes and commentaries by Ioan Șerb and Florica Șerb (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981), 76.
4. See E. Lovinescu, “Mihail Sadoveanu,” in *Critice*, vol. 1, *Istoria mișcării “Sămănătorului”* (Bucharest: Ancora, 1925), 9–54; G. Ibrăileanu, “Creație și analiză: Note pe marginea unor cărți,” in *Opere*, vol. 3, critical edition by Rodica Rotaru and Al. Piru (Bucharest: Minerva, 1976), 199–245.
5. See Camil Petrescu, “Noua Structură și opera lui Marcel Proust,” in *Teze și antiteze: Eseuri alese*, edited, foreword and chronological table by Aurel Petrescu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1971), 3–37; G. Călinescu, “Camil Petrescu teoretician al romanului,” in *Opere: Publicistică*, vol. 4 (1939), edition coordinated by Nicolae Mecu, text edited, notes and commentaries by Alexandra Ciocârlie, Magdalena Dragu, Nicolae Mecu, Oana Soare, and Pavel Țugui, foreword by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2007), 83–97.
6. Tudor Arghezi, “Tablete din Țara de Kutu,” in *Opere*, vol. 11, *Proză*, edited and bibliographical notes by Mitzura Arghezi and Traian Radu, foreword by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2017), 916.
7. Irina Mavrodin, *Romanul poetic* (Bucharest: Univers, 1977).

8. Al. Protopopescu, *Romanul psihologic românesc* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1978).
9. Liviu Petrescu, *Romanul condiției umane: Studiu critic* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1979).
10. Marian Barbu, *Romanul de mistere în literatura română* (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, 1981).
11. Gheorghe Lăzărescu, *Romanul de analiză psihologică în literatura română interbelică* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1983).
12. Marian Odangiu, *Romanul politic* (Timișoara: Facla, 1984).
13. Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe: Eseu despre romanul românesc* (Bucharest: 100+1 Grammar, 1999).
14. Radu G. Țeposu, *Viața și opiniile personajelor* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1983).
15. *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2004) [= DCRR 1.1]; *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc 1990–2000* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2011) [= DCRR 1.2].
16. See Andrei Terian, Daiana Gârdan, Cosmin Borza, David Morariu, and Dragoș Varga, “Genurile romanului românesc în secolul al XIX-lea: O analiză cantitativă,” *Transilvania* 10 (2019): 17–28; Andrei Terian, Daiana Gârdan, Emanuel Modoc, Cosmin Borza, Dragoș Varga, Ovio Olaru, and David Morariu, “Genurile romanului românesc (1901–1932): O analiză cantitativă,” *Transilvania* 10 (2020): 53–64; Andrei Terian, Teona Farmatu, Cosmin Borza, Dragoș Varga, Alex Văsieș, and David Morariu, “Genurile romanului românesc (1933–1947): O analiză cantitativă,” *Transilvania* 9 (2021): 43–54.
17. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 212–216.
18. Manolescu, 7–54.
19. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 214.
20. See Alice M. Killen, *Le roman terrifiant ou roman noir: De Walpole à Anne Radcliffe et son influence sur la littérature française jusqu'en 1884* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 2000).
21. See Claire Gorrara, *The Roman Noir in Post-War French Culture: Dark Fictions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
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23. John M. Robertson, “The Murder Novel,” *New Century Review* 5, 27 (1899): 175–181.
24. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 210.
25. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 217.
26. DCRR 1.1, 847.
27. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 218–219.
28. DCRR 1.1, 131.
29. DCRR 1.1, 246.
30. DCRR 1.1, 380.
31. Ștefan Baghiu, “The Socialist Realist Novel in Romania between 1948 and 1955: Novelistic Genres and Subgenres,” *Dacoromania litteraria* 7 (2020): 56–71. See also Daiana Gârdan, “What Makes a Socialist-Realist Novel? Style, Topics, and Development in Romania (1948–1964),” in *Beyond the Iron Curtain: Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania*, eds. Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, and Andrei Terian (Berlin etc.: Peter Lang, 2021), 45–60.
32. *Genre Theory and Historical Change: Theoretical Essays of Ralph Cohen*, edited by John L. Rowlett (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 109.

33. Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane 1990–2020* (Iași: Polirom, 2021), 351–402.
34. Iovănel, 399–402.
35. Iovănel, 461.
36. Valeriu Cristea, “O dimineață de o sută de ani,” *România literară* (Bucharest) 17, 36 (1984): 4.
37. Andreea Mironescu and Doris Mironescu, “The Novel of Memory As World Genre: Exploring the Romanian Case,” *Dacoromania literaria* 7 (2020): 97–115.
38. See Anton Cosma, “Un roman retro,” *Vătra* (Târgu-Mureș) 18, 3 (1988): 4; Anton Cosma, “‘Ultimul’ Camil și romanul retro,” *Transilvania* 18, 5 (1989): 39–41.
39. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 217.
40. Borza, Goldiș, and Tudurachi, 219.
41. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, edited by Jose Harris, translated by Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22–91.

### **Abstract**

#### Principles for an Evolutionary Taxonomy of the Romanian Novel

Drawing on the concepts and analyses put forward by the two existing editions of *Dictionarul cronologic al romanului românesc* (Chronological dictionary of the Romanian novel), the present article pleads for five principles that could help establish a better classification of Romanian novelistic subgenres: the contextual principle (the subgenres’ denominations should be borrowed from the tradition of Romanian literary criticism and not coined by contemporary scholars), the uniqueness principle (each novel should fall into a single category), the thematic principle (the classification should pursue the novels’ theme, not their form), the specificity principle (a more specific category is preferable to a more general one), and the evolutionary principle (novelistic subgenres change in time and their denominations should always adapt to this shift).

### **Keywords**

Romanian novel, genre theory, taxonomy, subgenres, evolution