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**Roxana Patraș
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(editors)

**Tools, Methods, and Solutions
for the Exploration of Romanian Corpora**

INSTITUTUL EUROPEAN

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Roxana Patraş, Loredana Cuzmici
(editors)

TOOLS, METHODS, AND SOLUTIONS FOR THE EXPLORATION OF ROMANIAN CORPORA

INSTITUTUL EUROPEAN
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The Recontextualization of a Genre¹

Loredana CUZMICI

The general impression regarding nineteenth-century Romanian literature has been that shorter works, such as short fiction and poetry, dominated it. This was partially due to the famous debate started by Nicolae Iorga in 1890 and titled “*De ce nu avem roman?*” [Why Do We Not Have a Novel?],² in which economic reasons took center-stage (Iorga in Sasu and Vartic 1997, 24–28). The Romanian historian and the public personalities joining the debate claimed that novels were not written in this side of Europe because literature was practiced by non-professional writers as a leisurely activity. The discussion went on by considering the contents of the “great” histories of Romanian literature, or educational and academic curricula. The question persisted for more than three decades, being echoed by both similar and opposite responses. Beside the socio-economic precariousness of the newly-formed state, later explanations for the delayed development of the novel took into account imagological aspects—for instance, the Romanians’ “transactional spirit” and non-conflictual temperament was perceived as a drawback for the novel’s narrative climax—the fragile cultural tradition, including the absence of a traditional epic model (Sasu and Vartic 1997, 74–81), the excessive melodrama, the lack of psychological complexity, or the subpar construction of the protagonists, the latter being considered by novelist and philosopher Camil Petrescu a fundamental element around which the plot coagulates (in Petrescu in Sasu and Vartic 1997, 82–83). Nevertheless, efforts to recover, index, and reproduce nineteenth-century publications for the general public gave cause for surprise: in reality, the novel dominates the Romanian context, as

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2019-0127, within PNCDI III.

² All original quotes are translated by the author of this chapter.

much as it did the rest of Europe. Quantitatively, the majority of publications were novels, whether they were volumes *per se* or instalments/ series/ feuilletons of different journals.

It was Mihail Kogălniceanu's 1840 warning that "*Traducțiile nu fac o literatură*" [Translations do not make a literature], combined with Titu Maiorescu's famous esthetic criticism a few years later, that made it so that, obviously influenced by western models, popular literature from the nineteenth century and from the first two decades of the twentieth century was either nearly disregarded in studies of literary history, or presented with many caveats. Marked by national identity (which was boosted after the Union of the Principalities, the Independence, and the Great Union after World War I), the sociopolitical ideals of the most important cultural figures of the time exerted a great influence over all public manifestations. This trend resulted in the fact that popular literature, because of its cosmopolitan airs, gained nothing but poor critical reviews, despite the fact that the majority of books offered localized plots and protagonists.

When one investigates the important histories of Romanian literature, the main ideas concerning nineteenth century revolve around the influence of the two geo-cultural axes, East-West, with a scale that leans ever more towards the latter. G. Călinescu, whose history remains the fundamental reference for the evolution of Romanian literature up to World War II, starts his analysis of nineteenth-century literature with the suggestive title, "*Descoperirea Occidentului*" [The Discovery of the West] (Călinescu 1986, 61). Up until the interwar period, one of the trademarks of Romanian culture is its permanent benchmarking against the Western model, which becomes a criterion for value. However, a relatively ignored criterion, but one that has been resurfacing over the past few decades, is public reception. What did Romanian literature look like during the Century of Nations, if we consider it from the perspective of amateur readers, rather than from that of critics or writers? One thing is for certain—the public were not only reading the works belonging to Romanian and foreign authors that would later be canonized, but also writings that satisfied the general taste: short fiction, embellished with various illustrations, some initially published in instalments and tackling sensational themes, counting on

suspense and surprise. Intrigue and character construction followed certain patterns, while dominant themes, indexed with capital letters by writer and professor Andrei Bodiș, were Romance (corresponding to the somewhat undervalued alternative to romantic love), Society, the City, Suffering, Death, the Other, and, naturally, Writing (Bodiș 2002).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Ion Heliade-Rădulescu launched his famous incentive, which boosted the publication of a variety of texts: “*Scriveți, băieți, numai scrieți!*” [Write, boys, just write]. Esthetic value was not a priority just yet, although the poet and publicist Heliade-Rădulescu is counted as one of the great writers of his time and of Romanian culture. The imperative was that empty spaces be filled quickly and rapid modernization be carried out through the so-called “burning stages”, which would have an effect including on the production of popular mass-market fiction. This is a highly specific context: while in the rest of Europe, there was already a discussion about a “second modernism” occurring in the second half of the nineteenth century (Petrescu 1992), within the Romanian cultural context the two initial stages of the novel overlap, with the first taking precedence, and the second formula appearing almost accidentally, particularly in localized translations (Teliban 2024) such as *Catastihul amorului* and *La gura sobei* [“The Catastrophe of Love” and “By the Hearth”]. The advancement of the press, of educational institutions and the theater, alongside the more and more frequent travels and studies abroad, allowed for massive imports, which, illustrating the famous theory of cultural imitation (Lovinescu 1981, 319–326), gradually stimulated the local production of texts.

Prior to research conducted after World War II, “the battle for the novel” (Sasu and Vartic 1997) represents a significant moment in the analysis and evolution of Romanian literature, encompassing multiple decades, starting with late nineteenth century and enhanced during the interwar period. The predominant tenet was that the number of published novels was relatively low up until 1920, the year Liviu Rebreanu’s famous novel *Ion* was first published (the same year thought to mark the end of *the long nineteenth century*, see Hobsbawm 1995 and Burke 2000). Also, the

esthetic quality of these early-stage novels was highly questionable. In truth, we did have a novel, but we also had several preconceptions regarding the concept of literature. Only a handful of novels were subsequently canonized, with the most representative in anthologies being *Manoil* and *Elena* by Dimitrie Bolintineanu, *Ciocoii vechi și noi* [Old and New Arrivists] by Nicolae Filimon, *Mara* by Ioan Slavici, *Viața la țară* [Life in the Countryside], and *Tănase Scatiu* by Duiliu Zamfirescu. Alternatively, countless others belonging to “the genre” of the *popular novel/fiction* were disregarded by critics, themselves in the early stages of their craft. However, these marketable publications were preferred by the bourgeoisie, a new rising social class that was eager for identification and relatable reading. Many novels would thus be forgotten in the pages of various publications and are yet to be rediscovered by researchers. It is noteworthy that the very titles which would later be categorized as top-tier in terms of value had initially come out in serialized format, and only later in volumes. Checking success was a mechanism spread all around Europe: firstly, the novels would be “approved” by the general public, that is, the target audience of magazines and newspapers; secondly, the novels would be published in volumes. The nineteenth century is defined, first and foremost, by the enormous development of the press, which, by stimulating an interest in literacy, would further boost a taste for literature. Along with the growth of press as “the nineteenth-century media matrix” (Thérenty 2007), the novel manifests from the very beginning as a democratic genre. Additionally, “the age of mechanical reproduction” (Benjamin 2015) would also have immediate effects on spreading fictional worlds.

In search of a national tradition and specificity, the beginning of the twentieth century and the first interwar years would thus be marked by epistemological interrogation and cultural revisionism. While Romanians were pondering on the reason why they did not have a novel, the Russian Formalists got to the root of the concepts by asking what literature was and proposing one of the most interesting linguistic and poetic theories, with countless echoes in subsequent literary and cultural currents. The concept of *literariness* advanced by Jakobson as the principal trait of literary texts was no longer a prerogative reserved to masterpieces. The so-called *paraliterature* began to elicit the interest of Russian theorists, for whom the

esthetic criterion, fundamental in the literary criticism of the times, was no longer the only means to legitimize a text. In contrast with the peaks of value, whose expressive functions, both poetic as well as metalinguistic, represented a priority, mass-market novels are oriented by the phatic, conative, and referential functions (Drăgan 2006, 44). If we consider Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea's or G. Ibrăileanu's opinions, in the Romanian context there was also a position who promoted the heteronomy of literature and its release from the (classical) tyranny of the esthetic. However, the two socialist critics paid little attention to popular literature, categorizing it as far too tributary to foreign models. With a totally different grip, Nicolae Iorga and Mihail Sadoveanu mention the formative readings they did, particularly during childhood and adolescence, including novels with wide public reception and circulation (Pillat 1998, 128–144; Sadoveanu 1970, 120–126; Iorga 1936). After all, unlike popular books that had been in circulation even during prior centuries (*e.g. Alexandria, Sindipa, Floarea darurilor* [Flower of Virtue], apocryphal religious writings, etc.), the popular novels of the nineteenth century offered something more: their authors would, to a great extent, follow the will of the public, adapting their themes, bringing them closer to contemporary existence, so as to ensure a reading of identification. What is more, the religious perspective was supplanted by a secular one, and the pronounced didacticism, common to popular books of former centuries, would be diminished.

It was not until after World War II that critics such as Dinu Pillat (encouraged by G. Călinescu), Paul Cornea, Nicolae Manolescu, Marian Barbu, Cornelia Ștefănescu, Mircea Popa, and others would turn their attention to mass literature. Adrian Marino, in his theoretical syntheses, emphasizes the importance of studying *paraliterature* (Marino 1998, 119). In the context of theoretical developments regarding world literature and the reconsideration of canons, a keen interest in the unseen part of the literary iceberg has been growing in recent years. Marginal genres, such as the detective novel or children's literature, are now carefully studied, particularly since the appetite of the general public is largely shaped by such readings. Literature is analyzed especially through the lens of its social relevance, as

an “epistemological metaphor”, to quote Umberto Eco, while esthetic criteria take second place (Eco 2006, 162–168).

A moment of utmost importance in the study of this phenomenon is the editing of *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* [The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel] (hereafter DCRR), coordinated by Ion Istrate, a volume published in 2004 which follows the evolution of the genre since its inception up to 1989³. We can, therefore, notice that it is only in the twenty first century that a major synthesis of the Romanian novel appears, a piece of longitudinal research conducted by a team of researchers from the Institute of Linguistics and Literary History “Sextil Pușcariu” in Cluj-Napoca. Likewise, following in the footsteps of their mentor Paul Cornea, researchers like Ioana Drăgan and Daniela Zeca study the way in which nineteenth-century literature and *paraliterature* influenced each other, resulting in a dynamic, varied landscape, and reflecting the spectacular economic and social changes undergone by two states (the Romanian Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia) that had recently emerged out of medievalism.

Starting from DCRR and based on its groundbreaking view on the evolution of the Romanian novel, digital archives and corpora of novelistic texts have been constructed within the past decade. They include enough titles so as to alter the way in which we used to look at the history of local novels and to define a critical position opposing the aforementioned perspective of early debaters on the status of the novel. The recovery effort extended over “the great unread” has become a world-wide endeavor over the past few years, with certifications such as Franco Moretti’s “atlas of the European novel”. Moretti’s model relies on expanding the study of the “genre” from its history and biology acceptations, to the geography of the novel. In line with these developments, we notice canon revisions happening within Romanian literature as well, all of them meant to diversify the criteria for literary text analysis and to reevaluate forgotten writings.

³ Meanwhile, a second edition revised and expanded has recently been published (see *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până în 2000*, vol. I–II, ediție revizuită și adăugită, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023).

A deleterious prejudice: the limits of the esthetic

Prior to the avant-garde that took poetry to the streets and proclaimed the emotional and social ends of art, the mass literature of the long nineteenth century was already accessible to a wide range of readers, particularly the ladies of the bourgeoisie, eager for fictional escape. A discreet and progressive revolution was stirred among the population, with novels decidedly contributing to the emancipation of certain social categories, much more so than poetry or short prose. Equally important were theatrical representations, whose effects were just spectacular, thus not catered for reading responses. The mainly emotional function of this type of literature and the emphasis on enjoyment were meant to part with the categorical imperatives of the classical esthetic; reading as a psychological act, not as cultural one, became a common practice among the literate population. While art for art's sake was of no interest outside elite groups, "art with a tendency" dominated, but it was precisely the coexistence of these two directions that offered dynamism and a sense of progression. As such, long before theorists would bid "farewell to aesthetics" (see Jean-Marie Schaeffer 2000) and before the fomenting of worldwide revolutions against the (Western, official) canon or even before the counterculture movements, *run-of-the-mill* novelists dared to stand against the lofty imperatives of expressive writing and to produce a variety of texts that would be relegated after a few decades only to library databases or mentioned only in *varia* chapters. Naturally, this phenomenon is widespread across all cultures, be they major or minor.

Why, then, would these forgotten archives be of interest to us nowadays? The answer has been formulated in recent contributions to the field of computational literary studies and can be summarized as follows: because the thickness of archives gauges a social barometer, as esthetic realization does not always equate with a failed act. Therefore, the ontological function of literature can be demonstrated even in this case of quantitative methods like distant reading, which cannot be resumed to instrumentalism or mechanical objectivity (Bode 2023).

The "bitterness of aestheticism" lamented by Camil Petrescu, who accused overly-refined literature of artificiality, of a "deleterious distancing from life and

reality”, may therefore be tested even before the emergence of the imperative of authenticity. The novelists of the nineteenth century did not shy away from the seduction of fantasy (ascertained as one of the human being’s most authentic needs) or from exaggeration and overemphasis. Building fictional worlds, albeit considered implausible from multiple points of view, was perceived as an enjoyable activity nonetheless. The disdain against *phantasia*, against the so-called escapist literature, far too conventional and simplistic, expressed by all followers of “High” Realism (by association with High Romanticism) would give a leeway to reservations or even skepticism regarding these popular novels. Popular success was automatically equated with non-value, and this radical, unilateral perception impoverished the landscape of Romanian literature. Despite their being listed at the top of all canons, it is not only novels of experience, profoundly autobiographical in their nature, that have a right to exist. This plea for the mass novel may be traced in one of the most commented novels of the interwar period, *Adela* by G. Ibrăileanu. The protagonists of the novel, two lovers, have a debate over the value of certain texts, their readings of choice becoming an effective method for cross-portraying instances. The female character wonders why great writers choose to complicate the existence of their protagonists, why an unhappy denouement would be preferable, why the idyllic and idealism are thought of as false. Ultimately, from *Adela*’s discourse, we can extract a subtle criticism against realism (in fact, a demythologizing, deromanticizing formula), which limits imagination and obliterates illusion (Ibrăileanu 2010, 785–786).

What is more, there are no crises of language, unsurmountable ontological dramas, acute perceptions over the absurdity of the world or other elements that generally define high literature to be found in mass novels. The so-called superficiality of their subjects made them all the more accessible. Indeed, from its inception in the European context, the novel was mostly regarded as a plebeian form, if not downright vulgar, a synecdoche for subliterate. Despite quickly taking the very front lines of literature, it maintained consistent collateral values with the so-called *Trivialliteratur*. The convention of identification with the real—by the use of the well-known paratextual formula “a true history”, the motif of the discovered

manuscript, characters drawing from real historical figures, toponyms, etc.—attracted more readership than the technical sophistication spread over hundreds of pages in “great” novels.

The impact literature has on society is much more visible if we take into account popular productions. As a rule, masterpieces (with all the reservations we have regarding these absolute terms) extend beyond their age, whereas serialized writings, endorsed (particularly through purchasing) by a wide audience are a true reflection of the mentality of their age and provide, therefore, a far more generous source for studying a cultural context. Since the rigors of exclusive esthetics are no longer the sole principles of literary analysis, the immense role exerted by mass literature on social emancipation justifies the attention it has garnered over the past decades. A further reason for the importance of studying this macrophenomenon is the propensity of mass literature to metamorphosize into propaganda literature, a phenomenon that occurs in the first decade of Romanian communism, when the socialist-realist formula was the only option for writers.

On a different note, it has been argued that mass literature adopts techniques and even themes from great literature, by simplifying them. However, in an apparently paradoxical turn, *paraliterature* assists high literature. First of all, it forms readers, who refine their taste as they explore various textual offers. Just as writers practice typing with their first texts, preparing for their “great” oeuvres, so do readers practice reading. After all, what would Romanian writers Caragiale or Urmuz have parodied had there not been an inflation of romance novels in their times? Writers such as these two deconstruct fashionable formulas, sanctioning clichés and conventions, which result in a literature-of-the-second-degree whose mechanism cannot be interpreted without the hypotexts that they spoof or parody. Therefore, as demonstrated by Ioana Drăgan, there is an interdependence of the two literary fields: the novel is a literary genre situated at the frontier between the two circuits, that is, *the literary* and *the paraliterary* (Drăgan 2006, 9). Even with all the derogatory names it was bestowed over time — “industrial literature”, “*littérature de bas-étage*”, “dime novels”, “throw-away literature”, “pulp fiction” (Drăgan 2016, 19 49)—not only is

this type of literature surviving, but it is expanding and diversifying its forms. Nowadays, public success means that many of these *dime* texts are adapted for the screens, and their impact on mentalities becomes even more visible. After all, these aspects demonstrate the inherently democratic spirit of the novel: “it is what ethnologists have confirmed by observing that novelistic literature is unknown in caste societies or primitive peoples whose social structures are immovably fixed in tradition” (Robert 1983, 68).

For the wealth of nineteenth-century texts (corpora of Romanian novels *y compris*), quantitative methods, energized by the omnibus concept *distant reading*, are the most effective study method, allowing for the extraction of metadata, observing invariants, as the enormous quantity of texts becomes nearly impossible to cover through classical qualitative methods.

Novel subgenres from the nineteenth century to 1920

In Romanian novel theory, among the most operational and well-known classifications are those belonging to G. Ibrăileanu (1930), N. Manolescu (1980), and Radu G. Țeposu (1983). They have the advantage of simplifying a terminology which might otherwise risk a tentacular spread, as well as espousing aspects of narrative technique rather than merely thematic or chronological ones as classification criteria. The “creative”, the “Doric” or the “transitive” novel would be specific to the emerging phase of the genre, easily defined using the metaphorical formulas given by famous titles, such as “the human comedy” and “vanity fair”, entirely unbeknownst to the characters. Instead, the author’s vision is largely projected on the narrator, who might be either critical, or, less commonly, impersonal. Thus, society as a whole becomes the protagonist of this type of novel. Made up of representative figures, it often acts as an oppressive force on the individual, or in other cases as a savior, as meticulously demonstrated by Nicolae Manolescu in one of the most encompassing studies on the evolution of the novel. The omniscient narrator remains the chief narrative instance, whose point of view dominates (Manolescu 1998). The “creative” novel for which G. Ibrăileanu advocates in his study *Creație și analiză*

[Creation and Analysis] (Ibrăileanu 2010, 605–637), consubstantial to a great extent with the Doric novel, is represented by Tolstoy's formula in *War and Peace*: extensive scenes, multiple planes of narration, strong conflicts, without excluding analysis, but rather subordinating it to action. An organic parallel becomes unavoidable, as this first form of the novel aligns with a masculine representation of the world, in competition with a feminine one, particularly in the first part of the twentieth century (the view is based on Thibaudet terminology, adopted by N. Manolescu), in which one's external existence loses its importance and one's focus turns inward. The force and solid architecture of the Doric novel are replaced by vulnerability and the epic dilution specific to the Ionic novel. Here the inner conflict of/in the self no longer offers the same clarity as the character's opposition against with the world does. Therefore, meanings multiply, more often than not reaching contradictions and paradoxes, because one's inner, invisible world is far more difficult to explore than the outer one (Manolescu 1998). What is more, if up until the end of the nineteenth century biographical forms were deemed as *paraliterature*, from the interwar period onwards, the insertion of biographical and autobiographical elements consistently enriches epic matter, enhancing its veracity. The Doric or the transitive, on the one hand, and the Ionic or the reflexive, on the other, illustrate the growth forces of the novel, opposing forces respectively; according to the already classical terminology proposed by R.-M. Albérès, they also manifest as complementary forces, much like the two worlds, the visible and the invisible, that make up existence itself (Albérès 1968).

The third form, and perhaps the most complicated one, the Corinthian novel or the meta-novel summarizes previous formulas, while simultaneously distancing itself from them. It attests to a unique form of emancipation, which means that the novel is no longer tributary to mimesis, defying and surpassing the facts of reality and recognizable possibility. Furthermore, the meta-novel exhibits its functioning mechanisms, the writing itself becoming one of its fundamental themes, while the previous interrogation of the world and of the self is doubled or oftentimes supplanted by an interrogation of fiction itself. This is the final metamorphosis of the novel and,

naturally, the most spectacular one, as demonstrated by N. Manolescu in *Arca lui Noe* [Noah's Ark] (Manolescu 1998) or Radu G. Țeposu in *Viața și opiniile personajelor* [The Life and Opinions of Characters] (1983), as it represents the prerogative of great writers.

To what extent are these classifications valid for popular novels or for mass novels? Undoubtedly, the most frequent formula is the Doric one, even when dealing with romance novels, as the authors of mass literature do not seem to be prone to experiment with writing possibilities and are seldom concerned with the dynamic of narrative instances. Genre fiction thus includes novels of specific worlds and of certain social milieus; even when narration is done in the first person, they are not the novels of complicated individualities looking to understand the obscure mechanisms underlying existence. Knowledge in the abstract sense is of no concern to the protagonists of these fictional worlds and, we dare say, to the readers of these novels. The action in the popular novel is carried out *hic et nunc*, as it is a work of immanence, devoid of the feverish grand searches specific to the Ionic or Corinthian novels. Causality functions beyond reproach, the experienced reader suffers no bewilderment, while the evolution of the plot and the characters follows a predictable line. Of course, rudimentary psychological analysis and timid experimentation might appear, but technical awareness, the relationship between reality and fiction, the issue of veracity or authenticity do not bear the same weight as in the case of canonical works. The Ionic or the reflexive novel, and particularly the meta-novel require a specialized reader, able to conduct layered decoding, given their complicated referential function. The so-called triviality of events in the mass novel, the simplistic plot, and the sensationalism of such texts are incompatible with the narrative intricacies or with the character complexities. Their purpose is to cause enjoyment and to instruct, as their finality is an extraliterary one; accordingly, literariness is the result of plot and character construction, and less so of narrative or stylistic aspects.

The relevance and diversity of mass novels are self-evident, as we can still see in the bookstores' show windows, in supermarkets, airports, and train stations "detective novels, pop novels, Sci-Fi, 'pink' sentimental novels belonging to the wider category of the melodrama, erotica, sexy or pornographic novels, thrillers, and

horror novels from specialized collections such as *serie noire*, the lives of the famous, romanticized biographies of historical figures or, nowadays, of movie stars, pop stars or celebrities” (Drăgan 2006, 25).

Other classifications operate with thematic or main narrative technique antinomies: sentimental novels—cerebral novels (naturally, mass novels are sentimental, whereas modern, innovative novels are cerebral), family novels—single/bachelor novels, monophonic/monologic novels—polyphonic/dialogic novels, subjective—objective, personal—impersonal, social—psychological, rural—urban, historical—mythical, realistic—sci-fi, novels—anti-novels, etc. If we consider the taxonomy proposed by novelist Anton Holban, mass novels are dynamic, constructed first and foremost on alert action, unlike the static novel, defined by analytical immovability (Holban 2005, 463–475). According to Jean Ricardou, on the one hand we have “the story of an adventure” (the definition of the classical novel as well as the mass novel), while on the other, “the adventure of the story” (the definition of the modern autotelic novel) (Ricardou 1988). The mass novel would thus correspond to the formula coined by René Girard: it is a romantic lie, unlike the romanesque truth of rare, canonical volumes, but, of course, genre purity is only possible on a theoretical level (Girard 1972). The novel of experience might seem as the modern descendant of the classical adventure novel; although the focus is mainly on inner adventures, much more dire than social ones, it otherwise contains the same ingredients: crises, the confrontation with death, betrayal, disappointment, etc. All these taxonomic doublets can be accompanied by more or less metaphorical definitions, particularly as we advance into the twentieth century: the black novel/ noir fiction, the “oceanographic” novel, Mircea Eliade’s formula for the psychological novel (Eliade in Sasu and Vartic 1997, 175–176), “the novel of human condition” (Petrescu 1979), “the novel of the obsessive decade”, “the nautical/ sea novel”, etc. The novel of historical and/or personal trauma or the novel of memory (Holocaust novel, Gulag novel) is turning into one of the most widespread and validated current formulas, proving once again the strong connection between the genre and factuality. Obviously, the hosts of

possible classifications prove that we are indeed dealing with “a protean and genophage genre, meant to gloriously absorb other genres” (Drăgan 2006, 8).

Even if innovation is much more limited in the case of mass novels, here too an evolution that runs along with the evolution of human civilization is noticeable: from hajduks (outlaws) to superheroes, from adventure in the woods to outer space, the fictional universe of the common reader is molded alongside the lines of reality, and the varying combination of romanticism and realistic background remains the defining element for mass audience literature.

The Romance Novel of the nineteenth century, subsequently opposed by the cerebral novel of the Great Modernism, holds a predictable precedence: as the general public is predominantly made up of women, melodramatic plots, with their inter-relational thicket, are the most sought after. Don Juan figures, the *femme fatale(s)* or victims of villains populate this universe so prevalent nowadays in soap operas. The erotic novel is a variant of the romantic one, less common in the long nineteenth century (there are still ongoing lawsuits against writers on moral grounds, oftentimes caused by a confusion between reality and fiction), but with a posterity that confirms its impact in what social and individual emancipation is concerned.

The Hajduk/ Outlaw Novel is seemingly the most popular subgenre within the timeframe we are currently discussing about, which is to be expected as it heavily draws from folklore, on the one hand, but also from the Western model of the “Robin Hood” type of bandit, on the other. As a subgenre combining elements of the local imaginary with a foreign cultural influence, it demonstrates the way in which *paraliterature* is not entirely innocent in what text production mechanisms are concerned, and authors are not mere dilettantes, devoid of talent and culture. Like any strong representation of mentalities, the image of the hajduk was eventually confiscated by the interwar extreme right. However, after World War II, the prototype of the hajduk-hero will exert an influence on rock, folk, and pop music, countering nationalist suggestions and allowing for dissent. A variant of this type of novel is the bandit novel, in which the heroic features are belittled.

The Mystery Novel, which Marian Barbu defines as an *epiphenomenon* (Barbu 1981, 7), is in direct competition with the novel of everyday banality promoted by

High Realism. The imitation of Western models (e.g. *The Mysteries of Paris*, *The Mysteries of London*) is profoundly explicit even from the very titles, where only the toponymy is changed. Mysteries are, after all, incredible intrigues that draw, in turn, on the English Gothic novel of the eighteenth century, which, in order to contrast previous works from the Age of Enlightenment, had capitalized on the medieval imaginary. Another category partially overlapping *the mystery novel* is the *sensational novel* (this is, in fact, one of the most used paratextual labels), a formula that also emphasizes the importance of unrealistic, but extraordinary action, keeping readers on the edge of their seats. *The black novel* or *the criminal novel* (tags are based on their subtitles, meant to stir the buyer's curiosity) feeds the reader's imagination with spectacular intrigues, as epic augmentations of events found in newspaper publications, given the fact that some of the writers (such as Ilie Ighel) were first and foremost journalists.

Of all subgenres, the historical novel has the great advantage of not just a European tradition, but also of a local one because it builds upon historiographic writings, as well as upon folklore. The sword-and-sorcery novel, widespread in the West, has a direct correspondent in the Romanian context, chiefly when one has a look at the recipes of historical adventures. We can conclude, therefore, that "there are as many novel subgenres as there are media, crafts, techniques, and possible human situations" (Robert 1983, 55), and that the dominant Romanian social contexts of the nineteenth century have an impact on certain imaginary directions.

Researcher Ioana Drăgan proposes, in turn, a possible typology, adding to the subgenres mentioned above the novel of *the hero par excellence*, the novel of the *woman* or novels of adultery, revolt, individual heroism, judiciary or criminal novels (this is the nineteenth-century name for the detective novel), social-militant or apolitical novels (Drăgan 2006, 94). Beside this typological attempt, it is worth mentioning romanticized biographies, children's and young adult novels, the novel of the slums, travel novels. In certain cases, they are subdivisions (subgenres) of other formulas, but specific in their themes, chronotopes or intended audience.

An important erratum in the history of Romanian literature can be found in the case of the texts entitled *Catastihul amorului* [The Catastrophe of Love] and *La gura sobei* [By the Hearth], “the first writing which excellently parodies the two circuits, literary and paraliterary” (Drăgan 2006, 16) and “a literary anomaly in the context of the post-1848 Romanian novel, one of the literary oddities encountered in the beginnings of Romanian literature” (Drăgan 2006, 195). Published anonymously and later attributed to Radu Ionescu (Bălăieț in Ionescu 1974), the text proved to be only a localized translation (Teliban 2024). Even so, if we go back to the parodic exercise from *Țiganiada*, we might say that both the meta-discourse and the spirit of parody had been illustrated in the Romanian cultural context before the publication of the two much-debated pieces. However, given that Budai-Deleanu’s work would only be published later, at the end of the nineteenth century, its echoes are feeble and not relevant for the evolution of the Romanian novel, which is the object of our chapter.

The Romanian novel in the digital age—archives, corpora, platforms

The digital market for literary texts, although initially timid (*Wikisource* and more or less clandestine PDF files), has started to progressively develop in recent years. Electronic books promoted by contemporary publishing houses are also a means to recover books of the past, difficult to render on paper. Digital libraries, particularly university ones, were first developed, followed by the successful attempt at creating corpora that would allow, apart from reading, other types of interventions on the texts. The first advancements were registered in the lexicology field, then the resources, methodologies, and tools gradually extended towards other philology areas.

A first example of an interoperable, open-access corpus, with novels encoded as TEI-xml, is the *European Literary Text Collection* [ELTeC]. This is a multilingual corpus, created with support from a COST action (*CA 16204: Distant Reading for European Literary History*) that started in 2017 and ended in 2022. Roxana Patraș was one of the MCs for the Romanian team and, as a part of WG1 and WG3, she coordinated the selection, digitalization, encoding, and analysis of the Romanian

collection (ELTeC–rom). Her role was also one of promoting Romanian literature as a valuable resource for cross-linguistic computational analyses. Each research group that participated in the project proposed an initial core selection of 100 novels for their respective national collections (to which a few more were subsequently added), based on the following criteria: genre diversity, varied text dimension (short, medium, long), reprint number (to balance out canonical and marginal texts). With a view to future stylometric experiments (which require both text variety and good sampling), some authors (between 9 and 11) were included with 3 books each, while others with only one item. The corpus entries were grouped in four periods (1840–1859, 1860–1879, 1880–1899, 1900–1920) in order to allow for a clearer observation of periodization issues, generational changes, and other serendipitous trends. The types of metadata included in the corpus refer to the author, the title, text composition characteristics, origin, first edition, language or script/ alphabet, aspects of orthography. In addition to being a fundamental resource, recovering many forgotten texts, the corpus has also generated relevant conclusions as a result of quantitative and comparative analyses. In its actual form (<https://distantreading.github.io/ELTeC/rom/index.html>), ELTeC–rom provides 100 Romanian novels published between 1840 and 1920 as well as a visualization on the relationship between texts written by men and those written by women and on the corpus' s time slots.

The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel [MDRR] is the main result of a different project, coordinated by Ștefan Baghiu and Vlad Pojoga, with the support of the “Astra” Museum Complex in Sibiu, involving a large group of collaborators. At a first glance, perhaps *digital library* would have been a better-suited name; however, the reader-friendly interface and the visitors' access to covers of a bygone era offer the necessary justification for calling it a *museum* (<https://revistatransilvania.ro/mdrr/>, <https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/collection/MuzeulDigitalAlRomanuluiRomanesc/>). It is not just the contents, but also the very objects themselves that are brought back to the public's attention, who can also take note of the appearance of prints of old, rather than the digitized and processed texts. As it stands now, MDRR is an archive of the Romanian novel, encompassing three large eras: the nineteenth century

(with an index of series and first editions, including over 160 digitized novels, roughly 90% of the Romanian production of the age), the first part of the twentieth century, containing items with no copyright restrictions (1900–1932, over 360 digitized novels), and 1933–1947. The final period starts, therefore, with 1933, which Paul Cornea deemed “the golden year of the interwar Romanian novel”, and ends with the first years of communism.

By using these resources and by corroborating qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, researchers have conducted studies on the geography of the Romanian novel—either in the national context, or abroad—, on identity (social, ethnic, gender) or on the novel’s internal temporality. Some conclusions may seem predictable, if we take into account the socio-historical context (for instance, the fact that in addition to Romanian, other frequent ethnic identities found in nineteenth-century novels are the Turks, Roma, and then the Jews). Nevertheless, the fact that the nineteenth-century Romanian novel is predominantly urban and not rural, as the famous theory by Lovinescu would have had us believe, was indeed a revelation (Baghiu *et al.* 2019).

Another accomplishment in terms of digitizing Romanian literature is a corpus of hajduk texts (Hai-Ro), most of them novels and short prose texts presumably sharing the same topic and the same literary period (1850 and 1950). With a most fortunate acronym (referencing both Hajduk Romanian Novels, as well as the popular motto “Hai, România!” [Let’s go, Romania!]), the corpus demonstrates that the hajduk subgenre was sufficiently widespread in mass culture, irrigated on the one hand by popular creations (ballads and hajduk suburban songs), and on the other hand, by the models of the Western heroic novel. Along authors specialized in this particular theme, such as N.D. Popescu or Panait Macri, many canonical authors, such as Mihail Sadoveanu or Panait Istrati, have capitalized on the hajduk prototype, and as such this strand has produced hypertexts and is worthy of in-depth research. Quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis have emphasized defining aspects for the Romanian hajduk context (the hajduk is a local picaro, crossing multiple suggestive spaces and media) or the specifics of the protagonists.

Coordinated by Roxana Patraș, the project *Romanul de consum și subgenurile sale în literatura română din secolul al XIX-lea: editare digitală și analiză de corpus literar asistate de calculator* [Romanian Popular Novels and Their Sub-genres during The Long Nineteenth Century: Digital Editing and Corpus Analysis]—shorthand Pop-Lite ([see https://pop-lite.org](https://pop-lite.org))—is a continuation of the investigations carried out within *ELTeC* and *Hai-Ro* projects, which further recovers feuilleton novels, some even unfinished, suggestive of the way in which authors would quickly respond to public demands; the project, thus, indexes and samples not only edited volumes, but also some series and instalments. 123 samples are included in the corpus, novels or fragments of novels published between 1850 and 1920, belonging to best-selling authors of the long nineteenth century (N. D. Popescu, N. G. Rădulescu-Niger, Panait Macri, Ilie Ighel, George Baronzi, Theodor Stoenescu), as well as rarities signed by George Allan (Mite Kremnitz) or less-critically-acclaimed works belonging to canonical authors such as Vasile Alecsandri and B.P. Hasdeu. The interoperable format (TEI-xml), machine-readable and open-access, allows a diversified approach to texts, both with close-reading methods, as well as with complementary ones spawning from the distant reading approach, with diverse use cases in language history, lexicology, study of the imaginary or stylometry. Departing from the idea of operationalizing a “prototype” of the mass novel in the Romanian long nineteenth century, the selection criteria for the texts are: serialization, critical reception, republishing situation (some published in a single edition, others – best-sellers), text dimension, typeface, illustrations, type of paratext (whose scope was commercial, meant to attract readers), and, of course, the generic label (hajduk/ sensational/ romantic/ historical/ mystery/ criminal).

Another ongoing project is *MEMORO: Romanul memoriei în postcomunism: subgenuri, generații, rețele transnaționale* [The Novel of Memory in Post-Communism: Sub-genres, Generations, Transnational Networks], coordinated by Andreea Mironescu, whose chief importance lies in the fact that it indexes novels published after 1989, therefore it meritoriously touches on contemporary works ([see https://www.novelofmemory.eu/acasă](https://www.novelofmemory.eu/acasă)). As such, some of these projects have created

archives, corpora, and databases already available to the public and to researchers, while others are still ongoing and will offer an important amount of data and metadata.

The metaphor of the iceberg, suitable in genetic criticism, might, therefore, be extended at a macro-literary level. For the tip of the novel iceberg to exist, it must rely on an enormous, unseen mass, that would support it and offer it stability. Today's descendants of the mass novel developed in the nineteenth century—soap operas, internet mass literature, streaming series, comic books, graphic novels, etc.—demonstrate the vitality and relevance of this phenomenon, while complementary and interdisciplinary research methods ensure a wider coverage of the cultural milieu and the recovery of the digital cultural record.

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