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*Intertext and Narrative in the Poetics of the First
Romanian Novels*

(Rezumat)

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Over time, the interest in the topic of our first modern novels was circumscribed by the overviews of two major instances of critical discourse about them. The first favors the extra-literary context, appreciating the value of the novels of the beginning through the contributions of the founding fathers of modern Romanian literature, assessing the literary contribution from the perspective of their undeniable cultural merits. The second type of analysis reduces the endeavor of the the novelists of the time to simple "literary attempts" full of amateurism which the authors themselves do not seem to appreciate, with a creative impulse considered to be without literary motivation, devoured by eloquent ideologies that give a predictable course to their creative imagination. Not being within their powers to resist political temptation and general observations, their works seem unable to save themselves from falling into social observations and oratory.¹ In rebuilding the constituent phases of the genre as such, our first attempts at writing the novels are artistically indexed, in the category of simple exercises of "commanding the keyboard".² This given peripheral position is strengthened by an analytical reflex which tells us that, by strictly referring to their writing, they do not seem to be part of the major literature and are mentioned either to help understand the historical and literary context, or to show us how a minor phase (therefore lacking importance or aesthetic value) in establishing the genre is summarily solved.

The approach of this thesis has proposed placing the first Romanian novels within the literaturizing perspective, by analyzing them not only in terms of means of expression (the crystallization of their own artistic language, their attempts, their excesses, the multiple searches, imitations, copies, and literal translations of successful models in the Western world), but also of identifying a poetics of the novel genre, in terms of constitutive rules, recurrent forms and principles in the corpus of texts of the period, understood as a way of building and sharing of a literary model. For this it was necessary to appeal to a broad interdisciplinary area, including poetry, literary theory and history, history of mentalities. We have focused our attention on reference textual strategies, such as intertextuality, as part of the broader phenomenon theorized by Gérard Genette under the term transtextuality or "textual transcendence".³

The stakes of this research were to track the manner in which the early novelistic genre seeks its literary status (and how it achieves it), also pointing out how this occurs in the particular situations of the presence or absence of a programmatic way of conceiving it, understood as a theorizing consciousness of an explicit poetics.

The premise of the legitimacy of the first Romanian novels as literature has to accomplish a complicated journey, understandable for several reasons. On the one hand it is first mined - in the era of our first modernity - by the mistrust in the value or usefulness of the genre itself. In our own century, it is mined by the common beliefs which have built, by cumulation in time, a huge package of interpretations, which makes

¹ Cf. Eugen Negrici, *Iluziile literaturii române*, Ed. Cartea Românească, București, 2008, p.54-55

² Cf. Paul Cornea, *Constituirea unui gen. Între "romance" și "novel": Romanul românesc în secolul al XIX-lea în Regula jocului*, Ed. Eminescu, București, 1980, p.265

³ Cf. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982

use of constant returns to the same (de)valuing landmarks: minor authors, who fail from the literary standpoint, statesmen not writers. We also aimed to identify the techniques that the "pioneers of the Romanian novel" use in order to cope with the enormous volume of fundamental texts which they have to produce for the use of so many areas. To the difficulty of drawing the complex picture of the novelistic genesis of that period it also contributes the mixture between the poetics of the genre seen from the perspective of "high literature" with the paraliterary one, which makes the vision on the corpus of texts that we are addressing a very diffuse one, both both in terms of style and aesthetics.

By identifying this lack in a specific clipping of a well established corpus of texts for the period in question, our thesis brings a new element by creating a snapshot table of the Romanian original novel and the translated novel from our first modern era. The research undertaken started from the investigation of literary archeology that was given to us by the one-of-a-kind genre dictionaries in our literature, the result of an over 30-years' work by the team of the Institute of Linguistics and Literary History "Sextil Pușcariu" in Cluj-Napoca.⁴

In the problematic area of studying the Romanian novel productions of the period it is also registered "distant", "alienated" status of the contemporary reader in addressing the aesthetic code of a past era, but also the texts that we are dealing with, always accessible throughout cultural mediation and very difficultly by direct, unmediated approach. Besides multiple documentary sources, this paper also draws on the research undertaken at the Special Collections Fund "Popovici - Petrescu" in Cluj-Napoca, where the rare book collection of Dumitru Popovici is, as well as an impressive library. The appeal to this source of documentation starts with a professed desire waiving the ideal of completeness, the principle of valuation, the ambition to include everything and analyze them all, in favor of the principle of the selection of examples.

From the structural point of view, this paper is divided into six parts: *Historical landmarks (I)*, *Behaviors and readings during our first modernity (II)*, *Who's afraid of the literary history of the Romanian 1848 period?(III)*, *Intermezzo – distance and proximity (IV)*, *The poetics of the first Romanian novels (V)*, *Intertext and narration in the "worlds" of the first Romanian novels(VI)*, aimed at drawing a biography of contextual, poetic and intertextual phenomena around the first Romanian novels. The analyses have focused first on outlining a theoretical profile, followed by a series of explicit analyzes.

The problem of the beginnings of the Romanian novel cannot be studied outside the period in which it is manifested, namely the modernization of Romanian society produced after 1830. Thus, the first part of the thesis deals diachronically with the historical context of our first modernity, but it also approaches it from the point of view of the general theory of history. The very status of this discipline is such that it cannot be written outside from the narrative and this is why the intertext is always present. To better understand the genesis stage of the literary species of the novel, we must contextualize,

⁴ Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică și Istorie literară "Sextil Pușcariu" Cluj-Napoca, *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989*, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2004 și *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România de la origini până la 1989*, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2005

we must see the 1848 culture and society as a whole, in a defining stage of founding its modern bases, of the crystallization of its own artistic language, all of which were entirely new forms of expression for us at that time.

Starting with the second part, we were concerned with answering the question: how did the young noblemen, with their new clothes and ideas, manage to transform society? How have these changes (conspicuous in the new state reorganized from the grounds) been reflected into society, morals, the audience of the time, its literary tastes, in book publishing, in the reading preferences? How has change occurred in the Principates? We followed the cultural evolution according to the processes that it involved: the simple processes (those involving appearances in the inventory of modernization (body, home, sociability, behavior) are the easiest to transform and notice, but also cumbersome processes, related to the institutionalization of culture through the establishment of teaching, cultural societies, drama, or the press.

In the third chapter we emphasized repeatedly how the critical reception of the novel in Romanian literature starts as being marked by diachrony. The analysis model is represented by the strict chronological segmentations, according to the pattern established by N. Iorga in his study *The history of Romanian literature in the nineteenth century from 1821 forward*. I followed the particular forms in which Iorga's pattern of critical reception was continued, in its essential parts, by other major works that deal with the literary period in question. Our research has noted that only starting with the works of G. Calinescu, Romanian literary criticism enters the territory of the works where Iorga's diachronic model is abandoned, with the emergence of a new perspective on the period in question. The first (chronologically speaking) and perhaps the most famous one is *The history of Romanian literature from its origins to the present* by G. Calinescu, fully exemplifying the concept of chronological segmentations on typological spaces. In the same category of analysis which depart from the strict chronology of the old literary histories and push the study towards a more fertile territory, belong the works of Mihai Zamfir, Liviu Papadima and Ioana Pârvulescu, which we have interpreted in terms of abandoning the old clichés of literary history and opening to a new paradigm of examining the first Romanian novels.

The fourth chapter, entitled *Intermezzo* was built as an exercise of distances and approaches, in considering the role played by the individuals in the construction of the social world, with an emphasis on the processes of negotiation, the rules emerging from creative practices, on the acquisition of imposed disciplines or identities. Marking a shift in the cultural history, they focus on how social actors understand the objective determinations and either mobilize or transgress them. We followed the development of reading practices primarily by determining the types of readers, literary taste, inventory of reading catalogs, examining the activity of the cultural leaders, caught in the conflict between the desire to elevate the need to please, between the teaching mission and the commercial duty. Moving away from the overall picture provided by our literary histories and treaties, we have checked the manner in which we can approach directly the subject of our thesis. The first-degree contact with the literature of our first modernity, achieved by appealing to the Special Collections Fund "Popovici-Petrescu," has revealed new responses to the questions about what they were reading and how they related to the novelistic literary models of the time.

The poetics of the first Romanian novels represented the theme of the fifth chapter of our work. Based on the complex conceptual history of the term novel, our analysis sought the definitions which circumscribe this term either to the “high literature”, considered as valuable and having positive connotations, or to “paraliterature”, understood as mass / consumer / popular literature. We have then pursued the study of the birth of the Romanian novel, by recomposing the formation stages of the genre as such, operating in the semantic field of the concept the indispensable dissociation illustrated by the terms “romance” and “novel”. Our approach has reflected upon the prospects offered by the distant reading of the novelistic production of the period and gave us the opportunity to practice a new approach in this field, by preparing a synopsis of the translated and original novel in the Principates, in the time frame between 1820 and 1865.

The last chapter outlines the powerful elements of intertextual poetics and performs a typological clipping on the corpus of texts belonging to the “pioneers of the Romanian novel”, revealing recurring "scenes" in the texts of the beginning texts, which, circumscribed to thematic analysis and organized according to the poetic and rhetorical strategies used, can be organized in a triptych of worlds that make up this genre which was still in the process of crystallization. As a result of the analysis, we have grouped the fragments that illustrated most relevantly both the phenomenon of intertextuality and the transaction of the context, the message, the contact, the narrative worlds, within the enlarged formula of novelistic "worlds".

The structure of the thesis has followed the crystallization of a poetics of the genre and the phenomenon of intertextuality by moving from general to specific, so that the case study represents the most applied part of this thesis. The investigative methods used – the selection of texts, of the material to be studied, the collection from the rare books fund of the novel editions published in the era and the transliterations applied to them, all these have favoured the text. The information gathered was subjected to analysis and synthesis, analog approach, micro and macro-readings. This totalizing, globalizing universe has revealed, by focusing on the textual analysis, the existence of a triad composed of the inner world of the novelistic characters, an external world reflected in the novel, and one of the text itself; all of which subsumed to the idea of intertext in narratives of the first Romanian novels.

Our foray into the area of the concepts of poetics and intertext applied to the narratives of the first Romanian novels does not dwell on the presumption to have exhausted the subject. In fact this was not the purpose of our research, but instead, that of integrating the perspective sketched by the poetics of the first Romanian novels with input from fertile and less explored areas by our literary analyzes. We also recall that, for example, by assuming a "distant reading" of the evolution of the Romanian novel and benefiting from the valuable sources of information represented by the two dictionaries of the novel used as working tools (of the original and translated novels) further research can be undertaken on the evolution of literary ideology, of the concept of the novel, studies on the actuality and recurrence of themes and motifs, exegesis of literary sociology, statistical research, analysis of the dynamics of taste, representing just as many suggestions for possible future research.