BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF LETTERS

DOCTORAL THESIS

REEVALUATING ROMANIAN MODERNITY.

THE NOVEL AS QUANTITATIVE DATA

Abstract

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SUMMARY

My research aims to distant read the Romanian literary modernity. The main stake of my thesis is to perform a macroanalysis of the Romanian modern novel, targeting the evolution of its production in relation to the critical and ideological discourse of the time. My research aims, therefore, to investigate, with quantitative and digital tools, the novelistic production from 1845 to 1939 in relation to some of the most vocal figures and literary groups of the time, such as *Viața Românească* or *Sburătorul*.

There are three premises from which my research starts. The first one relates to the methodological framework of my study. It is already something of a critical consensus that, after the transnational turn in the humanities, the Romanian literary studies need an urgent update in terms of critical instruments and methods. In the last decade, there have been quite a few endeavours that meant to insert the Romanian literature and theory in the transnational circuit and employed last minute methodological tools. My dissertation aims to be such a contribution. The second premises is articulated around the notion of modernity and concerns the theoretical and ideological levels of my paper. In this sense, I work with the definitions proposed by Fredric Jameson and further developed by the Warwick Research Collective. I understand modernity as the combined and uneven shift from archaic ways of life to a capitalist habitus and I investigate how this socio-economic phenomenon was metabolised in the Romanian modern novel and in the critical and political discourse of the targeted timeframe. The third premises of my paper relates directly to the novelistic production. There is a significant gap between the critical and ideological discourse that aims to orientate the novelistic production in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century and the actual novelistic production. The coherence of these two types of discourse is, as I try to demonstrate in my case studies, rather a false phenomenon sustained by the canonical selection and the national literary histories that operated with biased selections than a reality. The novel surpasses in more than one way its ideological projects and creates a far more complex thematic and formal platform than the traditional historiography choses to show.

In terms of structure, my thesis has two main parts. The first part of the paper presents, by means of a metacritical inquiry, the main theories and methodologies that form together the framework of this research. I focused on the evolution of genre theory, starting from the Russian

formalism and thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin to contemporary endeavours such as Wai Chee Dimock or Ted Underwood's. The connection between Russian formalism and digital formalism is stronger than the latest volumes in the digital humanities tend to show and that is, most certainly, due to the fact that the international developments focus more on computational methods than on literary history. My paper aims to reconnect modern literary theory to the contemporary ones from this field.

The second part of my thesis gathers seven case studies that strive to demonstrate the aforementioned premises. The analyses I propose aim to show the benefits, as well as the limits of the computational methods in the literary studies. The first three chapters target the issue of novelistic subgenres – an ongoing debate – aiming to propose a partial taxonomy and to trace the digital marks of subgenres. The fourth chapter is meant to complete the analyses performed on the novels corpus with an overview of the critical and ideological climate of the two main groups that I already mentioned. The fifth chapter proposes an analysis of the modern novel set in the city – mainly in Bucharest. The relation between modernity and fashion is the first assumption that opens this chapter. Starting from this, I propose quantitative analyses of spatial settings, as well as a topic modelling that aim to find previously unknown connections between the Romanian city novel and the foreign city novel. The sixth chapter engages in a debate on the relevance of a less known subgenre that I named *interstitial* novel, referring to the novel set in peripheries, slums, small towns. The national critical discourse oscillated between the rural and the urban modernity in literature. My ambition is to show that there is another quantitative significant subgenre that was not only neglected by the official discourse, but had actually great importance in the process of modernizing the national literature. The seventh and the last chapter of my paper dealt with the sentimental novel. I tried to show, by means of a sentiment analysis, that there is a winning recipe for a successful romance novel that some of our national writers followed. Finally, my conclusions refer to the gains that the employment of statistical models and digital tools has in the study of the Romanian literature.