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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Florina-Ioana REVNIC

Lumea romanului românesc *perioada 1965–1989*



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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PERIOADA 1965 – 1989



LUMEA ROMANULUI ROMÂNESC
PERIOADA 1965 – 1989

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ADDENDA

SUMMARY

This paper is a laborious investigation into the autochthonous Romanian universe, without claiming comprehensiveness. An ingression into an apparently arbitrarily built bookish atmosphere. Nevertheless, the world that lets itself reveal through the operas that form the subject of this study is recognizable in many other novels of the communist years, in versions that only the novelists' talent can distinguish and make salient. The same world - in unequal texts as regards their artistic value; places, times, similar characters, similar events - memorable or mediocre - according to the authors' ability to save them (or not) from becoming clichés.

The Romanian novel world The period from 1965 to 1989 is a "pilot project" part of a broader research that aims to analyze a large number of novels in the Romanian literature, written from the beginning until 1989, in order to discover the laws that govern the fictional universe in the Romanian novels, how imaginary worlds are born, evolve and transform within a period, but also throughout (real) history. A diachronic and synchronic analysis, combining multiple perspectives - thematic, historical literary, essayistic and sociological - is the purpose of this endeavor set with this book.

The title *The Romanian novel world* foreshadows the hypothesis of the investigation: that there is a cohesive, coherent world that "lives" in the Romanian novels, that implicitly, can be revealed by analyzing a large number of works.

We started restoring the fictional world with a history of over three hundred years (calculated from the moment of writing of the *Istoria ieroglifică* of Dimitrie Cantemir) by reconstituting the *Romanian novel world between 1965 and 1989*.

On the one hand, the discussed temporal segment offers for analysis a novelistic production unprecedented in our literature – the *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* dedicates over 500 pages and 3089 articles to it.

On the other hand, from the point of view of the literary history, the period 1965 - 1989 provides multiple opportunities to analyze the interference between the literary phenomenon and the social historical coordinates. Echoes of the socialist realism before 1965 inertially extend to the creations published after the liberalization of our literary climate. The ideological debacle between 1965 and 1971, followed by the forced realignment of literature under the auspices of the poisonous influence of the communist ideology unquestionably influences the literature of those times.

To what extent is the complex and complicated historical context of those years reflected in the novels published back then? How does the Romanian novel world evolve, between 1965 and 1989, in relation to objective reality? Is there a direct dependence between the "papery" existence of the characters and the people who lived during that period? What sociological or psychological patterns migrate from reality into fiction and how representative for the spiritual profile of the Romanian people are certain recurring aspects of the Romanian novels? These are some of the questions that originated the present study.

*

We rebuilt the Romanian novel world between 1965 and 1989 using eighty books published in the lapse indicated in the title (Cf. Bibliography - consulted editions). Generally, they are literary works the qualities of which have been recognized from the moment of their publication. These are books written by Zaharia Stancu, Marin Preda, Paul Georgescu, Nicolae Breban, Augustin Buzura, Fănuș Neagu, Alexandru Ivasiuc, Ștefan Bănulescu, George Bălăiță, D. R. Popescu, Sorin Titel, Petru Popescu, Radu Petrescu, Costache Olăreanu, M. H. Simionescu, Constantin Țoiu, Gabriela Adameșteanu, Dana Dumitriu, Maria Luiza Cristescu, Mircea Nedelciu, Marin Sorescu, etc. Other operas - more modest as an artistic achievement - are relevant from the point of view of the sociological assessments.

Our option for novels with a different aesthetic value is deliberate. The chosen novels' world offers for analysis various places and times - from the inter-war period until the years of Stalinism and of Ceaușescu's communism. Its geography circumscribes mountain, plain or sea, village, inland town or imaginary provinces. In the center of it stands Bucharest. Within the boundaries of the Romanian universe lives a mixed population. As in a sociological survey, the subjects must represent the various social cultural groups, the selection of this "population" of characters starts from the idea of covering certain diversified social, professional and cultural categories. However, the representatives of these groups can be found both in novels aesthetically validated by the literary criticism and in mediocre books.

The books considered are thematically and stylistically diversified. The novel selection follows a theoretical sampling. Of the eighty titles, a quarter is represented by novels published from 1965 to 1971. The others cover the remaining lapse. This numerical distribution takes into account the number of novels published between 1965 and 1971, respectively between 1971 and 1989. According to the *Dicționarul romanului românesc*, of the total of 3089 reported titles (representing publications in books and periodicals), 487 (15.76%) were published from 1965 to 1971, and 2602 (84.24%) in the next years.

*

The presence among the books that are the object of our endeavor of several novels published in Moldova between 1965 and 1989 assumes that the Romanian literature of Bessarabia is part of our indigenous literature. The "small world" in the novels of writers like Vladimir Beșleagă, Aurelius Busuioc, Vasile Vasilache, Serafim Saka, etc. (marked by the recurrence of certain obsessive themes, but populated with characters similar - in terms of typology - to those in our literature) is part of the big world of the Romanian novel, despite the differences as regards the artistic value against the similar creations of the Romanian writers despite some desynchronizations explainable through a correct historical contextualization.

However, we believe that a holistic approach is not only necessary, but also natural, whereas among the writings of the authors from Moldova

there were novels that could not be ignored (any longer). First of all, there are the titles published in the SSR in 1966.

In 1966, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was in the first years after Khrushchev's debacle between 1953 and 1964 - a period of limited freedom. In the literature of the time, the Romanian writers of the nineteenth century began to be recovered by the authorities, in controlled and censored ways: Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, Vasile Alecsandri, etc., presented and "delivered" to the people as "Moldavian" authors. This was after the Stalinist period (1945-1953), the ties to the motherland had been suppressed, after the authorities had imposed a new language - the "Moldavian language" - and a new graphic system the Cyrillic alphabet, the written "garment" of the Romanian language spoken in Bessarabia after the access to the printed literature on the other side of the Prut river had been totally forbidden, and the "Moldavian" vocabulary - expurgated of words such as "Romania", "Romanian".

In the field of literary creation, there had not been notable figures (except for Ion Druță who published in 1961 an impressive novel – *Povara bunătații noastre*).

It was the dawn of Brezhnev's stagnation that was to last for almost twenty years. Two decades of getting back to the Stalinist ideology with disastrous results in the political, economic, social and cultural field.

In 1966 (when 43 novels were published in Romania⁴⁴, of which the only really important one remains *În absența stăpânilor* by Nicolae Breban, other titles of repute being *Alexandra și infernul* by Laurențiu Fulga, *Reîntoarcerea posibilă* by Sorin Titel; but the great novels of the Romanian literature were just to be published), three books that were to mark - forever - the fate of the Romanian literature in Bessarabia were published in Chișinău: *Povestea cu cocoșul roșu*, by Vasile Vasilache, *Singur în fața dragostei* by Aureliu Busuioc and *Zbor frânt* by Vladimir Beșleagă.

⁴⁴ In *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* (The Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004) for 1966, 50 titles are recorded, of which 7 are books announced in periodicals.

Fundamentally different in terms of narrative construction and style, the three writings are each iconoclastic compared with the literature up till then, contorted by the "aesthetic" interference of the socialist realism and later of the communist ideology. They mark, essentially, a shift from the crude reflection of the realities of the time, to the introspection, the reflection and the analysis of the states of consciousness, from conformism to unconventionalism and subversion (especially visible in the ambition of creating characters that do not look like the Soviet individual at all - old or new - or like the literary heroes until then) from schematism to complexity even epic verbosity (translated in trying to adopt complex narrative formulas that exceed the linearity and simplicity of the narratives of those times).

With all the lingering in ruralism with all their aesthetic flaws (including epic substance deficiency is the most glaring), these creations are discordant to the novels published in the previous years by attempts to refine the artistic formula and rescue themselves from the ideological contamination through the comic, using parable, allegory and symbol; Aesopic language; psychological realism, creating unusual characters - in relation to the socialist realistic "model".

*

The universe in the Romanian novels is reconstituted on two dimensions: a spatiotemporal one and an anthropological one.

Travelling through places and times in the book universe consisting of novels that are the subject of the present study, an imaginary Traveler would stop first in the local village, depicted either traditionally or confused by the unexplained happenings, or in full renewing burst, under the negative influence of the collectivization and modernization - an attack against the laws regulating the inner rhythm of the rural world and ensuring its consistency. Then, in the village beside the Prut, an invaded territory. Subject to the aggression of some forces from abroad - manifested during the war or during the communist occupation - the village remains the Bessarabian authors' preferred background for designing epic scenarios.

In his imaginary journey in the world of the Romanian novel, the Traveler abides in country towns (the deceptive tranquility - a convenient alternative to a twisted life, the mediocrity, the - fatal - lack of perspective; the pressure, the apathy, the petty aspirations, the leveling are the places' particularities) or in imaginary provinces, for ultimately making an end of his wanderings in Bucharest. The capital is a sum of contrasts - a mix of old and new, of traditionalism and modernity, of elegance and kitsch. The town charm fades with time. Bucharest is so much transformed that the fictional depictions of the colorful city seem to have no connection with the miserable town in the '70 - '80.

*

As for the world of the characters in the Romanian novels written between the years 1965 and 1989, the first thing discovered during a census of characters would be the blatant numerical ... superiority of the male main characters (of the male characters - in general) that are two and a half times more than the female ones.

The second - that the townspeople (almost all - persons adapted to living together in apartment buildings) outnumber the villagers. The detail otherwise predictable reflects the forced urbanization trend implemented at the time by the communist authorities.

The third - that all alike, men and women, town dwellers and farmers, have equitable access to education, by reason of the egalitarianism promoted by the same authorities. Almost all the characters are high school graduates, university graduates, and the number of those having attended elementary school classes or with no education at all is less significant. Almost all the characters are responsibly "active" in the labour market, diligently fulfilling over the 150, 200, 300, 400, 500 pages of a novel one single job. Women work on a par with men - the first rarely (or very shortly) remaining just housewives.

Workers, farmers, clerks, musicians, actors, sculptors, architects, journalists, writers, engineers, researchers, several contractors, muses, officers, teachers, many professors and physicians - they had occupations that could be included in a classification of occupations of the characters in the Romanian novels written from 1965 to 1989. Some are "trendy"

occupations - those of professor and physician (sometimes practiced simultaneously), journalist and writer.

*

Regardless of the historical period in which they live their papery life, the characters in the Romanian novels written between 1965 and 1989 show a marked appetite for reading, especially for reading other literature - an expression of a desire to escape, a compensatory escape of the book readers that are trapped in the narrow circle of their everyday existence.

What is noticeable as far as the characters of the Romanian novels published between 1965 and 1989 are concerned is their inability to extract a closed universe, other than by reading. With rare exceptions, the heroes do not even travel to far away destinations, and their wanderings are not driven by bold goals.

Some hit the road from one end of the country to the center of their world: from the province to the capital in order to find purpose, others - either to make existential clouds disappear or to rest - to the mountains or to the seaside. All these go only a few hundred miles away from their starting point. Very few dare to go beyond homeland.

The lack of appetite of the protagonists of the autochthonous novels for distant travels, the quasi absence of the spirit of adventure, of the desire or their inability to discover or to conquer new territories find their sublimation in this harmless occupation, which is reading books.

This research makes mention of identity representations about the Romanian world, reported in local literary texts or in Romanian and foreign cultural anthropology papers exploited in the fictional universe of the analyzed novels.

*

In our investigation, we mainly used the thematic criticism methods, in an attempt to establish "symbols" specific to the Romanian universe of the analyzed period, but also the principles around which appears and develops the universe of the autochthonous novel between 1965 and 1989. The thematism (or plurithematism theorized and practiced by Jean-Pierre Richard, by other representatives of the School of literary criticism in Geneva, prefigured in Romania by G. Calinescu, adopted, adapted and

applied by E. Simion in *Dimineața poezilor* or in other critical studies) allows scrutinizing in depth the Romanian novel world, may lead to the discovery of virgin territories that it subsumes and of which it can reveal the new unexpected dimensions.

We did not neglect the sociological perspective of such creations. In the foreword to the volume *De la N. Filimon la G. Călinescu – studii de sociologie a romanului românesc* (Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982), Paul Cornea talks about two fundamentally different ways to treat novelistic creation sociology: the novel's social status research and the study of the social dimension's place in the novel. Of these, the second serves to the approach initiated by us, as it supposes "a look from the inside to the outside" and has as its object of analysis the "novel's society" as a "relatively autonomous microcosm"(p. XI). Establishing "solidarity" of the novelistic universe and the social historical context is a type of inquiry that is related to the sociology of literature.

As far as the results and proposals that it may provide are concerned, our project's subject proves its usefulness in the field of literary sociology, cultural anthropology, literary criticism and history, and the history of mentalities. It opens ways to multiple approaches - of a comparative or interdisciplinary character - that can contribute to rebuilding in the minutes details the world of Romanian novels.

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