

Mobile Frontiers

Instrumentations of Paraliterature in Modern Romanian Literature (1878–2018)

MIHAI IOVĂNEL

THE PRESENT essay proposes a periodization of Romanian paraliterature into four stages. It follows its emergence, its relationships to mainstream literature, as well as the reflection of these processes in literary criticism. In view of simplifying a rich material, paraliterature is meant here to signify sensationalist literature, mysteries and adventure fiction, crime fiction, science fiction, and romance novels.¹

In Romania, paraliterature is an imported form which is “nationalized” depending on various socio-political parameters, practically (by the production of literature) and theoretically (through critical discourse). This nationalization is divided into two relatively distinct layers. A first layer “naïvely” diffuses paraliterary matter into the consumer market, that of the general reader, while the second layer assimilates it meta-literarily into mainstream literature and literary criticism.² Thus, this essay attempts to show how, throughout the modern literary history of Romania (symbolically and politically initialized by its gaining independence in 1878), paraliterature is a “shadow” which accompanies the literature regarded as canonical, contaminating the criteria according to which the latter is validated. This happened a long time before postmodernism gained a solid foothold in Romania, starting with the 1980s, loosening the opposition between “high” and “low” genres and facilitating the integration of the “low” genres into the “high,” or rather into a new cocktail in which “low” and “high” have lost their meaning. However, it is no less true that the emergence of theoretical postmodernism was essential for the subject of paraliterature to become academically relevant as an object of analysis, or, in other words, for it to become visible.

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0821/INTELLIT, within PNCDI III.

1. The 19th Century: Rejection

THE BEGINNINGS of modern Romanian literature are governed by the influence of French sensationalist novels, first of all *The Mysteries of Paris* (1843) by Eugène Sue. A series of imitations were published under his influence: *Misterele Bucureștilor* (The mysteries of Bucharest) by G. Baronzi (1862), *Mistere din București* (Bucharest mysteries) by Ioan M. Bujoreanu (1862), *Condamnata* (The convict) by Emanoil Arghiropol (1868), *Crima din Calea Moșilor* (The murder in Calea Moșilor) by Teochar Alexi (1887), *Otrăvitoarea din Giurgiu* (The poisoner of Giurgiu), a crime novel by Panait Macri (1884), etc.³ Another paraliterary model which undergirds modern Romanian literature is the romance novel, comprising novels like *Elvira sau amorul fără de sfârșit* (Elvira or the love without end) and a long series of similar works.⁴

Though mediocre, this literature generates the system within which the first important novels in Romanian literature would be published. It also lays the autochthonous groundwork of themes which the Romanian reader who does not have access to Western literature or who wishes for local subjects can continue to turn to. *Ciocoii vechi și noi* (Old and new oppressors) by Nicolae Filimon (1862), regarded as the first important novel in Romanian literature, is deeply indebted to sensationalist literature. The two planes (the “high” and the “low”) coexist in Filimon’s novel⁵ and their blend substantiates the importance of the sensationalist element in the crystallization of the autochthonous novel, as well as the fact that the distinction between “high” and “low” had not yet hardened. Other canonical writers influenced by paraliterature were I. L. Caragiale⁶ and then Mihail Sadoveanu, whose literary beginnings (1904 debut) was influenced by the *feuilletons* about outlaws from the end of the 19th century.

This whole process of importation and adaptation has posed a series of challenges to Romanian critics from the very beginning. On the one hand, they have asked themselves how they can reduce the influx of translations for the benefit of local literary production, on the other hand how they can export national literature in order to make it known throughout Europe. Thus, in his 1882 study “Literatura română și străinătatea” (Romanian literature and the rest of the world), critic Titu Maiorescu claims to have found the recipe for the successful exportation of national literature. According to Maiorescu, the successful formula is autochthonous content plus Western form (“this original element of matter, clothed in the esthetic form of universal art”⁷). If Maiorescu approved of the exportation of national content in a “universal” form, he fought, based on the same equation, but in the opposite direction, against “forms without foundation,” i.e. against those Western forms imported into Romania, but which did not find propitious ground here to allow for a successful transplant.

Maiorescu is important in this context because the formulation of the Romanian esthetic system takes place between the 1870s and 1890s, especially through the endeavors of the Junimea (The Youth) cultural association circle of the critic Titu Maiorescu—or rather through their interaction with the socialist critic C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea. Maiorescu initiates a “purification” of everything upheld as valuable in Romania, a crystallization of criteria. As has been already intimated, his arguments are nationalist and conservative:

the importation of a Western form is beneficial to the extent that it finds an organic correspondent on Romanian ground. Maiorescu frowns upon the programs of accelerated modernization involving the skipping of stages. Although he never did discuss the sensationalist novel openly, it is to be inferred that he would have discredited it in the name of the discrepancy between the sensationalist form of adventure and the Romanian people's traits, idealized by Maiorescu (to Maiorescu, the most valuable exportable Romanian good was "the specifically national life," by which he meant that "the main figures have to be representatives of entire social classes, especially that of the peasant and of the lower classes"⁸).

Among the members of the Junimea circle, the writer M. Eminescu is the one who openly discusses paraliterature. He takes over Maiorescu's ideas ("any important literary work contains . . . an encapsulation of preexisting elements from the life of the people"⁹) and he gives them a more violent shape when he directs them parodically against importations of sensationalist literature. For Eminescu, "pure fantasy," by which he means a sensationalist character devoid of realism (i.e. of the relationship to Romanian people's realities as idealized by Eminescu), does nothing but corrupt and ruin the national taste for literature and morals: "There are writers . . . who . . . forge all sorts of balderdash creations of pure fantasy with no correlation to reality, creations which will, by their sheer novelty, attract the public for a while and which are *en vogue*. . . . these authors . . . greatly endanger the taste, the feeling of truth and common sense."¹⁰

It can of course be argued that Junimea's counteraction against paraliterary translations is legitimated in part by the competition which the latter represented for autochthonous literature.¹¹ Thus, Eminescu's argument would read pragmatically: before imitating "creations of pure fantasy with no correlation to reality," Romanian literature should, according to this implicit argument, create its own reality (basis of subjects). It is however no less true that the ethical and ethnic argument employed by Eminescu was to have long-term negative consequences, influencing nationalist critics like N. Iorga, who would fight modernist literature and the "pornography" or "foreign spirit" brought about by it.

2. The Interwar Period: Partial Recovery

MAIORESCU AND Eminescu's method of assigning value was dialectically overturned in the second stage of the development of paraliterature in Romania. Historically, this phase coincides with the interwar period. It corresponds to the creation and consolidation of the modernist canon, by critics like E. Lovinescu¹² and G. Călinescu.¹³ Throughout this stage, paraliterature is critically mediated via the concept of adventure, imported from France. In 1913, just before the outbreak of WWI, Jacques Rivière publishes in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* the essay "Le Roman d'aventure."¹⁴ The concept of adventure with which he worked had been influenced by Joseph Conrad's or Robert Louis Stevenson's adventure novels. The fact that his essay was published in *NRF* was not coincidental: it was consistent with the ideology of the journal, which was under André Gide's influence.¹⁵ Rivière's concept would have an influ-

ence in Romania within Mircea Eliade's generation, via a route that also includes Gide's *acte gratuit*, which the latter introduced in the novel *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914).¹⁶ Eliade's essay on crime literature in the 1934 volume *Oceanografie* (Oceanography) epitomizes this stance. Eliade declares his adhesion to this literature through criteria which are evocative of Gide, an extremely important author for Eliade's generation: "A crime novel is always a relaxing, tonic and pure read. It is primarily a pure read; in it, all criminals end up being caught, all frauds commit suicide and the detective enters an engagement. It is the only variety of novel in which morals are not irksome; because it is a logical phantasy novel, and I don't know if you have noticed that in the (illusory) games of wild (i.e. perfectly logical) phantasy there is a paradisiac moral purity."¹⁷ It must however be mentioned that within the same text Eliade rejects romance literature, for which he can find no valorization.

A more significant moment for the inclusion of paraliterature, via adventure, into the Romanian esthetic system is the chapter devoted by G. Călinescu to Cezar Petrescu in his 1941 *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (The history of Romanian literature from the beginnings to the present). Călinescu ascribes no great literary merit to Cezar Petrescu; however, he does acknowledge Petrescu's role as supplier of sensationalist subjects in a literature dominated by a too pedestrian realism. To write sensationalist novels as Cezar Petrescu does—Călinescu says—is to "liberate creative consciousness, to free it from the tyranny of reality"; he adds: "The writer's fault . . . is . . . not wanting to write sensationalist novels with complete sincerity, in order to become a Eugène Sue or an Al. Dumas, both geniuses in their own way, on a par with Balzac."¹⁸

To conclude, the disdain for paraliterature as an accumulation of anti-realist sensational facts is overcome in this model. On the contrary, it is the very freedom from realism brought about by this accumulation that is upheld as positive. On the other hand, it must be mentioned that only genres such as adventure or crime fiction are retained from paraliterature, as opposed to sentimental or romance literature, which both Eliade (in the cited article) and Călinescu scorn. In other words, paraliterature is integrated into the mainstream through those segments (crime fiction, adventure fiction) which do not force the mainstream canon to reconsider itself: thus, the logical character of crime fiction or the masculine character of adventure literature are criteria which can be found among the validation criteria within the mainstream canon, as opposed to romance literature, whose overly "feminine" character is scrutinized with superiority by male critics.

3. Communism: Conditional Employment

THE THIRD model is historically situated during the communist period (1948–1989), but its groundwork is laid during the period of socialist realism (1948–1964). As opposed to the previous regimes, only sporadically interested in literature, communism would invest systematically and substantially in the literary field. It is communism that actually creates a proper market for popular literature and that will lend it respectability.¹⁹ The communist regime is interested in genres like crime fiction and science fiction for reasons of public utility (propaganda), a fact anticipated in a 1945 arti-

cle by N. Steinhardt, entitled “Apărarea literaturii polițiste” (An apology of crime fiction): “In a progressive conception of culture, crime fiction can become an excellent vehicle for promoting pacifist and anti-racist ideas or ideas regarding economic liberation. Keeping with the backdrop which consists in sensation and entertainment, an author can very well show heroes fighting predatory companies, international fascist organizations or other similar enemies.”²⁰ Paraliterature effectively emerges in the 1950s, supporting socialist realism, following the discussions in the Soviet Union which took place after the 2nd Congress of Soviet Writers (December 1954) concerning the literature for “children and teenagers” (the denomination has been kept until the present day within the Romanian Writers’ Association, itself an institutional production of communism dating back to 1949). It emerges therefore as an educational instrument, by which generations of young readers are to be narratively seduced, through the specific means of popular literature, appropriately indoctrinated with ideology. Although social realism significantly declines in influence after 1964, it remained most active, out of the whole of Romanian literature, in crime and spy novels, which tackle issues too ideologically and politically sensitive for their handling to be left to the freedom of the writer’s will.

Reading the first survey of contemporary literature published under communism (in 1965) proves to be instructive for understanding the way in which communism orchestrates these popular genres: Dumitru Micu and Nicolae Manolescu’s *Literatura română de azi, 1944–1964: Poezia, proza, dramaturgia* (Romanian literature today, 1944–1964: Poetry, prose, drama). In its contents, alongside chapters which are inevitable for the poetics of socialist realism, such as “Novels of Social Scrutiny,” popular genres are also present: “Other Novelistic Categories: Satirical, Memorialist, Adventure, Crime, Anticipatory, etc.” Thus, authors like Constantin Chiriță, Haralamb Zincă, Theodor Constantin, Sergiu Fărcașan, Victor Kernbach, and Vladimir Colin were covered in the survey. This kind of inclusion is ideologically mediated in order for the educational character of the writing to be foregrounded over its sensationalist character. Micu and Manolescu draw attention to “the heightened danger of lapsing into the gratuitously anecdotal, into meaningless sensationalism,” into which science fiction can fall: “Floating in the hypothetical, it imposes entirely imprecise boundaries upon the imagination and it may well be that certain authors, disappointed with not succeeding at the sensationalist novel proper, in the vein of ‘Colecția celor 15 lei’ [The 15 Lei Collection], after being rejected on principle by the evolved reader, should seek compensation in anticipatory literature.”²¹ The official ideology seeks to exclude any gratuitous character of the sensationalist (as opposed to Eliade and Călinescu’s theorizations), pragmatically directing the writers’ whole energy towards imagining the new communist individual: “Regardless of the era, past or future, into which they would transports us, literature justifies its existence to the extent that it mediates human knowledge. By discussing the humanity of the future, it actually proposes an image of contemporary man, considered in the process of his becoming.”²²

The general ambivalence of Marxism towards paraliterature must be highlighted here. On the one hand, Marxism takes it seriously, considering it to be ideologically relevant (see Karl Marx’s own classic analysis regarding *The Mysteries of Paris* in *The Holy Family*, 1845), but accessible to the masses as well, as opposed to elitist esthetic experimentation;

and, as we have seen, Marxism invests heavily in popular literary genres. On the other hand, it does nevertheless treat it with theoretical suspicion as a “serial art,” as a form of the capitalist exploitation of culture, i.e. as kitsch.²³ A synthesis of these difficulties is formulated by Ion Ianoși: “the confrontation of bourgeois ‘mass culture’ makes Marxist esthetics face problems more complicated than did so-called ‘elitist culture’: the latter had haughtily displayed its—unacceptable to us—aristocracy, while the former brandishes its ‘democracy,’ but to a purpose contrary to authentic artistic values.”²⁴

As was the case with the previous stage, during the communist period it is particularly those genres of popular fiction (science fiction, crime fiction) that are integrated, which can be associated with an already canonical model of rationality. Although romance literature had its own specialized series—e.g. the series “Romanul de dragoste” (The Romance Novel)—it enjoyed a standing inferior to that of science fiction or crime fiction. Criticism also ignored it, as opposed to the way science fiction was treated.

4. Postcommunism: Postmodern Tolerance

THE FOURTH model emerges with the establishment of the postmodern paradigm in Romanian literature. Although this phenomenon is institutionalized in the 1990s–2000s, its roots can be detected as early as the 1970s–1980s. A host of critics—Florin Manolescu, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, Marian Popa, Dan Culcer, Mircea Oprea, Voicu Bugariu, Cornel Robu—devote their efforts, at times as creative writers (Crohmălniceanu, Manolescu, Popa, Oprea, Bugariu), to the canonical recovery of certain paraliterary genres. The main genre benefiting from these efforts is science fiction. The main genre benefiting from these efforts is science fiction. Some mainstream writers of the so-called ’80s generation also experimented with science fiction (Mircea Nedelciu, Mircea Cărtărescu). Thus, throughout the ’80s, science fiction morphs into the most canonical of popular literature genres, the one closest to mainstream literature, a process that would continue after the fall of communism as well.²⁵ Thus, although theoretically clamored by postmodernists,²⁶ the integration of popular into mainstream literature still remains an incomplete process.²⁷

The fourth model mostly coincides with postcommunism and evinces an economic component which modulates its form. I will briefly comment on it. In *Remaining Relevant after Communism*, an important synthesis tackling Eastern European postcommunist literatures, Andrew Baruch Wachtel remarked on the way in which the cultural markets of this region had to manage aggressive imports of Western mass market literature after 1989: “The appearance of popular Western literary genres was certainly one of the most shocking results of the fall of communism to writers in Eastern Europe.”²⁸ Wachtel’s observation is supported by the reactions of Romanian writers in the wake of December 1989, the date on which communism fell, together with its system of centralized control over culture and society. Thus, Gabriela Adameșteanu (a writer with a good critical and public reputation whose literary debut dates back to 1979) saw in imported popular literature “our enemy . . . of tomorrow, as implacable as censure, though in a different way.”²⁹ Adameșteanu’s view is representative for the defensive reaction of Romanian writers facing a wave of translations which, they feared, would

“steal” their readership. Neither do younger writers, including the debutants of the ’80s, self-declared postmodernists as they are, view things very differently. Thus, Mircea Cărtărescu (who made his debut in 1980, but was a generation younger than Adameșteanu) in his turn saw “great alterations in the structure of literature. Paraliterary genres . . . will explode on the market and will hold the lion’s share of financial resources for publishers.”³⁰ Another member of Mircea Cărtărescu’s generation, Mircea Nedelciu proposed a much more pragmatic approach, a protectionist law of compensation which would exploit translated popular literature for the benefit of Romanian writers: “some improvements can be achieved by legal means: a popular book with cheap copyright (foreign author not legally supported in our country or deceased more than 50 years ago) should only be published by a publisher who has also published one or even two contemporary Romanian books!”³¹

The fears of Romanian writers were not unwarranted. The communist regime had imposed a protectionist politics on translations throughout 1948–1989. Although a plethora of books had been translated, some of these pertaining to popular fiction—the series “Romanul de dragoste,” “Enigma” and “Fantastic Club”—the number of translations had been kept under control, in order to encourage autochthonous literature production.³² With the disappearance of the control system and with the redistributions which encouraged literary production regardless of commercial output³³ after 1989, the number of translations exploded (in inverse ratio to quality), producing inflation; consequently, the marketability of Romanian writers declined. This fact is evinced by popular genres like science fiction or crime fiction. Although enjoying a large community of fans and readers in 1990 and continuing to launch important writers, Romanian science fiction experiences increasingly lower circulations. Conversely, the fall of communism would be almost fatal to the crime novel, given its association with its main characters, members of the *Securitate* and *Miliție*, which were among the most vilified figures of the communist regime, having served it as agents of repression. Especially during the ’90s, Romanian writers, devalued by translations, resorted to pseudonyms of foreign extraction, in a market where they feel crushed by important foreign authors. The phenomenon of false translations thus rises. First of all, it touches upon the popular fiction market—crime fiction, science fiction, spy novels. Thus, Sebastian A. Corn (itself a pseudonym of Florin Chirculescu) published *Dune 7: Cartea brundurilor* (Dune 7: The book of the brunds) in 1997, under the name Patrick Herbert, an alleged descendant of Frank Herbert, the author of the original *Dune* series. It is also Corn who published the erotic novel *Nu uita, Pasadena* (Don’t forget, Pasadena, 1998) under the pseudonym Sidney Sheldon (a real writer, author of a novel focusing on communist Romania, entitled *Windmills of the Gods*, 1987). He also published two novels about on the Vietnam War under the pseudonym Chris Buster Morris: *Pagoda musonului* (The pagoda of the monsoon, 1996) and *Sindromul Tirpitz* (The Tirpitz syndrome, 1997). The critic and science fiction author Voicu Bugariu produced under the pseudonym Roberto R. Grant the science fiction novels *Zeul apatiei* (The god of apathy, 1998) and *Animalul de beton* (The concrete animal, 1999). The science fiction author Aurel Cărășel made his debut in 1995 with the fantasy novel *Vânătoare de noapte* (Night hunting), published under the pseudonym Harry T. Francis, which he also employed

for the 2001 crime novel *Moartea ca o cocotă de lux* (Death like a posh Jezebel), an imitation of American hard-boiled crime fiction. As can be observed, all pseudonyms have Anglo-American sonorities—a telling clue for the global dominance of literature in English, but also for the lack of marketability of Southeast European writers.

It is ironic that reality should develop so differently from Romanian writers' predictions dating back to 1990 (Adameșteanu etc.). As opposed to other countries from the former communist bloc (Russia, Poland, Hungary), which have enjoyed significantly better capitalized cultural markets, popular fiction penned by Romanian writers has been the one to suffer the most, being almost wiped out by the competition of translations on certain segments (the crime novel has only very recently shown signs of revival). Meanwhile, mainstream authors like Mircea Cărtărescu have enjoyed decidedly higher sales than most popular fiction authors. Nevertheless, Cărtărescu's best-sold book was *De ce iubim femeile* (Why we love women, 2004), made up in part of texts initially published in *Elle* magazine. This brought about the accusation that he entered a compromise with commercial literature, which actually meant sentimental literature "for women." Given the fact that nobody ever reproached him for entering a compromise with the commercial by integrating certain science fiction elements into his "serious" novels *Orbitor* (Blinding) and *Solenoid*, these reproaches emerge as representative for the way in which popular fiction continues to be received depending on the pre-settings of the mainstream canon.³⁴

Conclusions

IN THE history of modern Romanian literature, which comprises almost a century and a half, popular fiction has uninterruptedly accompanied mainstream fiction, the latter being that literature which has successfully "institutionalized" itself by winning the games of formulating the criteria (esthetic, ethical, ethnic, gender, etc.) which would govern the literary canon up to the present. Although it has played a secondary role so far, remaining a mere "shadow," paraliterature has nevertheless succeeded to infiltrate the theoretical self-consciousness of mainstream literature at certain moments. The ways in which this influence has managed to make its presence felt are revealing for the canonical codification of mainstream literature. The analysis of the relationships between popular and mainstream fiction is thus able to further the reformation/opening up of mainstream literature which has been initiated in recent decades.

□

Notes

1. See also Mihai Iovănel, *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017), 163–182. In addition, see the issue dedicated to paraliterature of the journal *Caiete critice* (Bucharest), new ser., 2, 2 (1991).
2. For the two layers, see Paul Cornea, "Ciocoi vechi și noi sau Arta romanului e altceva decât romanul ca artă," in *Itinerar printre clasici* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1984), 105–106, 119–120.

3. The main critical work regarding this literature belongs to Ioana Drăgan, *Romanul popular în România: Literar și paraliterar*, 2nd edition (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006).
4. Paul Cornea, “Constituirea unui gen: Între ‘romance’ și ‘novel’: romanul românesc în secolul al XIX-lea,” in *Regula jocului: Versantul colectiv al literaturii: concepte, convenții, modele* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1980), 263–285.
5. Cornea, “*Ciocoii vechi și noi.*”
6. Florin Manolescu, *Caragiale și Caragiale: Jocuri cu mai multe strategii*, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002).
7. Titu Maiorescu, “Literatura română și străinătatea” (1882), in *Opere*, vol. 1, edited, annotated and commented by D. Vatamaniuc, with an introduction by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, Univers Enciclopedic, 2005), 555.
8. *Ibid.*, 557.
9. M. Eminescu, “*Novele din popor* de I. Slavici” (1882), in *Opere*, vol. 3, ed. D. Vatamaniuc (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1999), 573.
10. *Ibid.*, 573.
11. Cosmin Borza, “Translating Against Colonization: Romanian Populists’ Plea for Peripheral Literatures (1890–1916),” in *The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, eds. Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 31–43.
12. See Teodora Dumitru, *Modernitatea politică și literară în gândirea lui E. Lovinescu* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016).
13. See Andrei Terian, *G. Călinescu: A cincea esență* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2009).
14. Re-printed in Jacques Rivière, *Le roman d’aventure* (Paris: Éditions des Syrtes, 2000).
15. For researching the adventure novel within the NRF context, see Kevin O’Neill, *André Gide and the Roman d’Aventure: The History of a Literary Idea* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969). See also Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le roman d’aventure* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).
16. For the whole context, see Mihai Iovănel, *Evreul improbabil: Mihail Sebastian: o monografie ideologică* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2012), 92–96.
17. Mircea Eliade, *Oceanografie* (Bucharest: Cultura Poporului, 1934), 135.
18. G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (Bucharest: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1941), 690.
19. See the important study of Ștefan Baghiu, “The Functions of Socialist Realism: Translation of Genre Fiction in Communist Romania,” *Primerjalna književnost* 42, 2 (2019).
20. N. Steinhardt, “Apărarea literaturii polițiste,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (Bucharest), new ser., 1, 2 (1945).
21. Dumitru Micu and Nicolae Manolescu, *Literatura română de azi, 1944–1964: Poezia, proza, dramaturgia* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1965), 242.
22. *Ibid.*, 243.
23. See the definition of kitsch given by Victor Ernest Mașek in *Dicționar de estetică generală* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1972), which overlaps with the subgenres of popular fiction: “Kitsch means surrogate art, as well as all those artistic products conceived in the spirit of the exploitation of just one or just some of the groups of stimuli which make up art: *biological* (especially erotic), *ethical* stimuli (sentimentalism), *magical* or *playful* stimuli.”
24. Ion Ianoși, Preface to *Kitsch-ul, fenomen al pseudoartei*, by Hermann István, transl. Gheorghe Fischer (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1973), 7–8.
25. This integration remains relative. See the case study penned by the Spanish essayist and translator Mariano Martín Rodríguez regarding the integration of science fiction in postcommunist Romanian literary histories. He formulated the following conclusions: “the official disdain manifested by the main Romanian literary institutions towards the science fiction genre, as it emerges from the best-known literary histories, is not only unfathomable, but also

disadvantageous. How can Romanian literary historiography, and even the canon, renew itself without considering the contribution of this genre, which has thoroughly demonstrated its viability and its universalist potential through both its narrative production, which has enjoyed numerous translations into other languages, and through its criticism? Its marginalization within the Romanian canon is not only malapropos, in a time like this, postmodern still, but also unacceptable from a historical and scientific point of view, given its easily demonstrable value.” Mariano Martín Rodríguez, “Cine dictează canonul? Spirit conservator și inovație în istoriografia literară românească din primul deceniu al secolului al XXI-lea: Cazul literaturii științifico-fantastice,” *Viața românească* (Bucharest), new ser., 74, 7–8 (2012): 135–136.

26. See Mircea Cărtărescu, *Postmodernismul românesc* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999).
27. Sorin Antohi, “Culturile României,” 22 (Bucharest) 15, 828 (2006).
28. Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 214.
29. Gabriela Adameșteanu, “Înapoi la literatură,” 22 1, 11 (1990).
30. Mircea Cărtărescu, “Ce-i de făcut?,” *Contrapunct* (Bucharest) 1, 2 (1990).
31. Mircea Nedelciu, in *Tineretul liber—Suplimentul literar și artistic* (Bucharest), 1, 30 (1990).
32. Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privileghiul: Instituții literare în comunismul românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009), 166–170.
33. *Ibid.*, 58.
34. Nevertheless, there have been exceptions amongst the critics who discussed *De ce iubim femeile*, i.e. critics who have deemed salutary Cărtărescu’s overcoming of macho tradition in Romanian literature: “In an undeniably ‘masculinist’ tradition—when it is not undeniably misogynist—and in opposition to it and to an entire industry of clichés, of attempts to impose a certain ‘vision’ or ‘style’ on femininity, Cărtărescu manages an unprecedented feat. He lets the other—the feminine other—an entire paradigm of the feminine reveal itself to us, play its own role (actually, roles), without the directorial (authorial) intrusions of the ‘figure of the woman in literature’ [approach] to which we have been accustomed.” Christian Moraru, “De ce iubim literatura lui Mircea Cărtărescu,” *ALitudini* (Bucharest) 1, 2 (2006).

Abstract

Mobile Frontiers: Instrumentations of Paraliterature in Modern Romanian Literature (1878–2018)

The present essay proposes a periodization of Romanian popular fiction into four stages, from the perspective of its interaction with mainstream (meta)literature. It attempts to show how, on the one hand, paraliterature has influenced mainstream literature, but also how the latter has managed this influence according to its own theoretical and ideological pre-settings. Thus, the critics who held authoritative positions at different times were more tolerant of accepting certain genres like crime fiction or science fiction than they were with romance literature, thus evincing a deep gender bias, which needs to be taken into consideration in the current attempts at reforming the limitations which affect the way we read, understand and valorize literature.

Keywords

Romanian literary history, popular fiction, science fiction, detective fiction, romance