

THE NOVEL AS THE FOUNDATION OF ROMANIAN LITERARY TERMINOLOGY IN THE AGE OF CULTURAL MODERNITY

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Abstract The history of the Romanian novel intertwines with the earliest substantial theoretical explorations within Romanian culture. As the primary foundation of its own theorization, the novel has initiated a fruitful set of observations regarding the nature, objectives, stakes, and potential thematic contents of literature. Since the discourse on the novel must be articulated in an operative theoretical form, constructed with terms whose conceptual boundaries are precisely defined, the absence of homogeneous literary species or genres that could serve as literary foundations in analyses condemns sporadic sets of reflections without application to the national cultural environment. This situation creates difficulties in establishing literary terminology. The canon represents a record of aesthetic authority relations upon which there is consensus and, at the same time, the result of a battle for hegemony over a cultural system.

Keywords Novel, history, terminology, authority, discourse.

1. Terminological Overlaps and Internal Struggles within the Literary Field

The history of the Romanian novel is intertwined with the earliest comprehensive theoretical explorations in Romanian culture. As the primary foundation for its own theorization, the novel initiated a fruitful set of observations regarding the nature, objectives, stakes, and potential thematic content of the Romanian literary construction. This was accomplished not only through paratexts in prefaces or dedications, but also through the voices of the narrator or characters. The role of a catalyst in theoretical and terminological negotiations was

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accompanied by the position of an object of reflection aimed at explaining the synchronization process of Romanian cultural morphology with European culture. The instability of the literary language led to terminological overlaps, allowing for the use of different concepts or variations of the same term for the same category of literary texts. In this context, the consolidation of literary terminology evolved as a complex and long-term process, parallel to the development of the genres and species it sought to define. While there was consensus on descriptive notions and formal characteristics in poetry and theatre, these two genres preceded the emergence of novellas and novels. These latter forms developed concurrently, presenting significant challenges for the theoretical assurance of 19th-century Romanian writers. The writers and scholars of the era constitute the official, formal institution responsible for establishing the terminological and theoretical codes of the novel. The horizon of literary codes is filtered through the institutional, political, and social grids confronted by novelists at a given historical moment.

The development of native literature coincides with the emergence of literary species, necessitating the elaboration of specific notions to define and delimit the new forms. Terms such as “romant,” “roman,” “romans,” “novelă,” “nuvelă,” and even “noutate” coexisted in the literary, theoretical, journalistic, or advertising discourse, denoting, identifying, classifying, or analysing prose texts. The linguistic and cultural spheres of influence impacted the frequency of these terms in different Romanian regions, but instances where two or more notions overlapped in usage, not only within the same province, but also within the pages of the same publication or text, were not isolated cases, but rather indicators of terminological fluctuations. The assimilation of borrowings that name a new literary genre is mediated by the natural struggle between these conceptual sets, which can be reduced to two dominant pairs: “romant/roman” and “nuvelă/novelă”. These terminological doublets became interchangeable, designating any prose text of medium or large dimensions structured around real or fictitious events subject to the dominance of imagination.

The conceptualization of the theoretical efforts shaping the operating terminological codes in Romanian literature in the second half of the 19th century involves mapping the free struggle between different notions and perspectives on native prose. This terminological competition occurs within a precisely demarcated (trans)national circuit, equivalent to what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “literary field”.¹ This field represents a network of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic influences, formal and informal institutions, constraints, and social relationships.²

¹ For Pierre Bourdieu, the literary field is defined as an interplay of various social and institutional factors in which games of social, ideological, and cultural power are at play: “The constraints inherent in belonging to the field of power also apply to the literary field owing to exchanges that are established between the powerful - for the most part upstarts in search of legitimacy - and the most conformist or the most consecrated of writers, notably through the subtly hierarchized universe of the salons”. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 50.

² Bourdieu, 49.

The terminological competition is overdetermined by the different responses offered by theorists who professionalized themselves simultaneously with the emergence of the literary species they were reflecting upon. The notional support, like the lexical one, reflects the oscillations of the unstable literary language in the process of consolidation.

For novelists, the idea of a struggle for authority in the literary field, i.e., for popularity that attracts and secures a coveted market, share to support the “industrial” production of serial novels or volumes adhering to the serial formula sold to a wide audience, applies. Conversely, for writers with a specialized audience, more oriented towards philological studies and, consequently, towards the reflection on literary forms, such as Mihail Kogălniceanu, B. P. Hasdeu, or I. Heliade-Rădulescu, the stakes of the literary act are more collaborative, oriented towards conceptualizing literary genres that were in the process of formation. With a theoretical vocabulary in the process of stabilization, a condition influenced by numerous historical and cultural processes, literature takes on the status of a conflictual social production, shaped by the exercise of different forms of authority, inequalities, and contrasts, be they in value, aesthetics, or reception.

As the discourse on the novel must be articulated in an operative theoretical form constructed with terms whose meanings are conceptually delimited, the absence of homogeneous literary species or genres that could serve as a literary basis for analysis condemns sporadic sets of reflections without application to the native cultural milieu. The canon represents, on the one hand, a recording of aesthetic authority relations that reach a consensus, and, on the other hand, the result of a battle for dominance within a cultural system. The anxiety of influence, as described by Harold Bloom, highlights not only the struggle between genres for dominance within the literary field, but also an attempt to reconfigure the literary landscape by shifting the focus from literary lineage to evolution and artistic individuality.

For Margaret Cohen, who develops Bourdieu’s theory, the identity of a specific moment in literary history is defined not only by the pieces included in the canonical configuration but, more importantly, by the successive struggles that encompass broad categories of writers, readers, and texts.³ In *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Cohen makes a compelling case for a literary history concerned not only with the relationships between history and literature, but also with the episodes that constitute literary history per se, emphasizing the importance of collective identity in shaping writers’ access to cultural and economic capital in a given era. This process has a significant impact on how Romanian novelistic poetics encode struggles within the literary field. For this reason, the concept of evolution is not the most appropriate for discussing a cultural phenomenon that facilitated the emergence of the Romanian historical novel and its subgenres. Evolution presupposes a visible transformation, a significant modification of forms, implying the existence of superior stages in terms of value, a relative aspect in the study of literary morphology, as literary forms do not succeed one another linearly but coexist. In the case of the Romanian novel, it coexists and overlaps with other epic genres, which is why there is no precise generic delimitation. The

³ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7.

novel and the novella are consubstantial, equal species, between which no aesthetic superiority can be asserted, especially since modern Romanian culture seems to owe them an increasing interest in the expressive modalities of native prose.

In Romanian literature, in the second half of the 19th century, when the interest in creating original novels defines the direction of native culture, the artistic competition described by Pierre Bourdieu and Margaret Cohen between contemporaries responding to the same literary codes and constraints is instructive even in the theoretical field, that of novel reflection. Literary recognition and economic success represent the main goals of the diversity and diversification of Romanian discourses that herald the emergence of the native historical novel. Consumable literature does not preclude impressive elaboration and stylistic refinement, as the success achieved by writers like N. D. Popescu is not quantified solely by the number of publications, editions, and reprints, but also by the cultural practices of a highly receptive artistic emulation environment. The novel is a highly flexible and transparent terrain for numerous literary tendencies, and mastery of narrative strategies and the acquisition of a diverse readership meant securing a dominant position in the volatile artistic hierarchy of the time.

2. The Novel as a Digressive Literary Genre

In the second half of the 19th century, the theoretical language describing the specificity and functioning of poetry became more stable due to the existence of a literary reference point. The aristocratic aura of poetry, nuanced through various, more or less didactic theoretical texts describing the ethereal interaction between the reader and the poetic effervescence of verse, began to fade in the Romanian context starting from the fourth decade of the 19th century, with the emergence of epic genres. The aesthetic connection between poetry and the novel is a close one, relevant not only at the structural level of Romanian creation, which often integrates verses, songs, or develops the subject matter of ballads, a frequent technique in the *haiduc* novels, but also at the level of theoretical reception.

While one might expect one of the first mentions of the term "novel", or one of its variations, to appear in an article or preface, a preliminary record of the species name appears in a few verses from a poem by Mumuleanu. Thus, poetry also serves as the first mediator of a certain understanding of what a novel might be. In the poem "Muierile", from the volume *Characteruri*, published in 1825, Barbu Paris Mumuleanu speaks about one of the morally harmful indulgences that women engage in, namely, reading romances:⁴ "Either reading again, what does they read?/ Romances that bewilder them./ They don't read anything moral,/ But some pastoral romance,/ Not books to provide upbringing, / To the children they will have."⁵ In his scathing Preface, with which the volume opens, Barbu Paris Mumuleanu provides several examples of such useful and moral readings, intended to support the future intellectual

⁴ Barbu Paris Mumuleanu, *Scrieri*, (București: Editura Minerva, 1972), 77.

⁵ Original text: "Ori citind iar, ce citesc?/ Romanțuri ce le smintesc./ Nu citesc lucru moral,/ Ci vrun romanț pastoral, Nici cărți de creșteri să dea,/ La copii ce vor avea". Mumuleanu, *Scrieri*, 77.

development of the country's sons: "Mothers' walks and conversations are cherished more [...] than engaging in domestic matters and reading the Catechism, Geography, and Holy History within earshot of their sons."⁶ This vision of the novel as easy reading and trivial entertainment, especially enjoyed by women, was widespread in the era, specific to the first half of the 19th century, and was perpetuated even by some literary historians of the following century, those concerned with the literary phenomenon represented by sensational novels, with Dinu Pillat being no exception. Mumuleanu, resistant to the popularity of the novel, divides desirable readings into two broad categories: the moral and the useful. The novel, with its audacity to escape the two "messianic" aims of writing, prefers contrasting scenes that seduce readers in the name of fascination with stories rooted in the mundane. Therefore, reading such texts is equated with betrayal, a selfish act committed by women thirsty for condemnable pleasures, such as fashion and romances. In the same discourse serving as a moral guide, Mumuleanu emphasizes moral-Christian education as the cornerstone of virtuous knowledge, a formative equation from which fiction and "selfish" reading of novels are entirely absent:

"[...] philosophy and the sciences are much more necessary and lacking in social life, but when morality is absent, Logic and Metaphysics avail us nothing, except they sharpen our minds towards malevolence, quicken our spirits towards licentiousness, and furnish us with inventions by which to wound and injure ourselves and others."⁷

In the pre-revolutionary period, in the Romanian Principalities, poetry and theatre were regarded as effective ideological instruments, platforms for patriotism and the dawn of nationalism. The novel, however, was not assigned the same combative role, as it was not tasked with achieving significant political victories, but rather with recording facts and describing the results of the century's transformations. In an Europe that was beginning to understand literature as a network of social relationships governed by formal and informal institutions, the dominant aesthetic system underwent significant changes, shifting interest toward meticulous analyses of events and everyday life in all cultures of the old continent, whether of vast tradition like the French space or emerging, a stage that included the Romanian space. For post-union Romania, cultural modernity, political turmoil, and changes within social classes provided ample material for social observation and analysis.

The novel thus becomes a digressive literary genre par excellence, passive in relation to the combativeness of poetry or theatre. The first attempts at theorizing the Romanian

⁶ Original text: "Mai mult iubesc maicile plimbările și conversațiile [...] decât a să deprinde în lucruri căsnicești și a citi Catihisul, Gheografia și Istoria sfântă întru auzul fiilor." Mumuleanu, *Scrieri*, 17.

⁷ Original text: "[...] filosofia și științele sînt mult mai trebuincioase și de lipsă în viața soțială, dar când moralul lipsește, Loghica și Metafizica nimic nu ne folosește, decât ne ascute mintea spre răutate, ne agerește duhul spre desfrânare, și ne dă arme de născociri cu care să rănim și să ne rănim." Mumuleanu, *Scrieri*, 81.

novel, influenced by Western thought, reinforced this perspective, either by addressing preferred themes (the sentimental nature of romances, social fresco, custom analysis), or by the idea of reflecting the movements of life, reproduced in all their contrasts and perpetuated through morals. In his comprehensive course on general poetics, I. Heliade-Rădulescu describes the material from which novels should extract their subjects. For Heliade-Rădulescu, the new genre is the modern continuation of the grand epic, and its content should reflect “the deeds of famous and popular men, the wonders through which these deeds are believed to have been accomplished, the obstacles encountered by these men, their struggles, journeys, the fervour of the people, and their agitations in social and public life, virtues, loves, passions, and life stories.”⁸ I. Heliade-Rădulescu’s theory can be read as an interpretation of the novel as a literary compromise form that blends high heroism, characteristic of the epic, with humanity tainted by passions and vices, resulting in a literary alloy with a “popular” audience, extending beyond the niche audience of classical culture enthusiasts. The essayistic nature of the Romanian novel is pronounced in all its subgenres, from historical and sentimental to hajduc novels, mysteries, judicial novels, or didactic novels. Narrators and characters engage in discussions on various topics, moral lessons, philosophy, aesthetics, or literature, while the dramatic effects seem to be constructed to support a sense of fate. The determinism expressed by the Romanian novel at its inception resembles more a recording of a cumulative set of social, political, historical, and cultural data, rather than a call to action. Stylistically, the novel shifts its emphasis to events passed through serious digressions, essayistic passages, or lively narrative staging, while poetry or theatrical representation capitalizes on the rhetoric’s sharpness meant to influence present attitudes. For this reason, the novel proves to be a much more efficient ideological tool due to its latent abilities to provide panoramic views of a past filtered through heterogeneous discursive grids.

The exercise of translating French novels dominated the Romanian cultural climate in the first half of the 19th century and gradually changed the perspective on the new literary genre gaining popularity in the local space. Familiarity with this protean narrative form influenced and developed the understanding of the novel in a purely Manichean sense, opposing it to established genres that served morality. Thus, the construction of the Romanian novel was no longer exclusively seen as a literary form detrimental to ethical sensibility, corruptive and perverse, but gradually transformed into an instrument for distilling morality, serving as a means of social observation and moral analysis. Invectives like those launched by Mumuleanu no longer found supporters with the same ease, because the novel began to firmly establish itself in the Romanian cultural soil with the certainty that it carried the future of Romanian literature within it. Of course, the idea that the novel represents a libertine, morally harmful literary experience did not entirely lose its advocates. This is why the anachronistic

⁸ Original text: “[...] faptele bărbaților celebri și populari, minunile prin care se crede că s-au operat acele fapte, obstacolele ce au întâmpinat acei bărbați, luptele, călătoriile, avântul popoarelor și agitațiunile lor în viața soțială și publică, virtuți, amoruri, pasiuni, vițiuni.” I. Heliade-Rădulescu, *Curs întreg de poezie generală* (Bucharest: Tip. Lucrătorilor asociați, 1868-1870, vol. II.), 21.

opinion of the poet N. Nicoleanu, popularized in a lecture held at the Romanian Athenaeum in 1867, blames the pernicious influence of French romances, which corrupt the female soul with their immorality, inducing disgust towards moral duty.⁹ In Nicoleanu's discourse, "romant," another variation of the term "roman," encapsulates a prose narrative with a sentimental subject, a love intrigue, or a romantic narrative, a formula that does not align with the ideal of scientific utility, morality, or religion. With at least two decades before the appearance of Dimitrie Bolintineanu's novels, the publication of the anonymous text *Elvira sau amorul fără de sfârșit* in 1845 shows that the Romanian space had fully familiarized itself with what a novel could be, indicating that translations of popular authors of the time had fulfilled their purpose of mediating the assimilation of the new narrative form.

3. The Geography of Terminological Occurrences and (Proto)Theories of the Novel

Terminological occurrences are relevant for understanding the evolution of theoretical reflection on the novel in the Romanian cultural space. Additionally, the relationship between translations and texts distributed in the original language reflects the literary permeability to the aesthetic changes resulting from the transplantation of a foreign cultural form from a foreign cultural capital into the emergent body of native literature. In an article on literary lexicology, I. Ștefan demonstrates that the distribution of translated texts in relation to the circulation of original novels is uneven in Moldavia and Țara Românească, with a greater number of translations in the Wallachian region, while the Moldavian region exhibits a preference for works in their original language, as indicated by the catalogues of the time:¹⁰

"[...] in the principalities, many French books are also in circulation in their original language, a phenomenon that is particularly prominent in Moldavia, where the translations of novels are fewer in number than in Wallachia. For instance, the bookstores in Iași, around 1832-1833, received frequent shipments of foreign books, especially French ones, whose catalogues were subject to censorship."¹¹

In the short prose *Cum am învățat românește*, C. Negruzzi provides a picturesque description of his father's 1821 library, a literary testimony that records the trends of the era regarding the novel. The narrator observes that most of the translations in his father's library are from

⁹ G. Bogdan-Duică, N. Nicoleanu, V. Cîrlova, C. Stamati (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1906), 130.

¹⁰ See I. Ștefan, "Din istoricul terminologiei literare în secolul al XIX-lea", *Contribuții la istoria limbii române literare în secolul al XIX-lea* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1958, Vol. II), 140.

¹¹ Original text: "[...] în principate circulă și multe cărți franceze, în original, lucru care se petrece mai ales în Moldova, unde tălmăcirile de romane sunt mai reduse ca număr decât în Muntenia. Librăriile din Iași, de pildă, primeau prin 1832-1833, dese transporturi de cărți străine, mai cu seamă franceze, ale căror cataloage sunt supuse cenzurii.", in I. Ștefan, "Din istoricul terminologiei literare în secolul al XIX-lea," I. Ștefan, "Contribuții," 140.

sentimental French novels, such as *Manon Lescaut*, the famous work by Abbe Prévost, along with texts with historical subtext. Many of these volumes are categorized as “romanțuri,” a term referring to narratives infused with amorous sensationalism. Faced with this unknown and inaccessible realm, the narrator confesses that he was unable to read a romance from his father’s library. Instead, he learned Romanian through the reading of an erudite text by Petru Maior, *Istoria românilor*:

“I attempted to read a romance from those manuscripts, but the handwriting was so convoluted that I abandoned them, promising to visit them once I could decipher that hieroglyphic script that was customary in our region at the time. With the assistance of the Romanian History by Petru Maior and the available primer, I managed to learn how to read in just a few hours.”¹²

Therefore, the romance is no longer seen here as an easily accessible genre for smooth and fluent reading; it becomes a catalyst for lexical innovation, setting in motion complex structures of semantic construction and forging its own literary language, one that a simple dictionary could not capture due to its ever-evolving nature. Although most Moldavian writers opted for the term “roman,” Negruzzi prefers the term “romanț,” favoured by intellectuals in Wallachia. In terms of the content and themes of the texts in the genre he termed, the romance was broadly understood as narrative storytelling that “romanticizes” realistic aspects of life, combining real events with imaginative creations.

Translators understand the strong influence exerted by the languages from which they translate literary texts, and through their activity, they interact with the expressive deficiencies of the national language. The act of translation forces a series of lexical borrowings and calques that are not mediated by experience or practices of verbal or literary communication, resulting in the impression of artificiality in language and the awkwardness of many Romanian discourses. Lexicologist I. Ștefan, concerned with the evolution of literary terminology in the 19th century, reads C. Boerescu’s novel, *Aldo și Aminta sau Bandiții* (1855), as a construction that “neologizes excessively”,¹³ disregarding the visionary lexical innovations and efforts to enrich a fluctuating literary language. This transformed borrowed words like “culpabil” (guilty), “degenerat” (degenerate), “oportunitate” (opportunity), “disgrație” (disgrace), and “cupiditate” (greed) into terms with semantic coverage, quickly assimilated by a Francophile culture.

The beginnings of the Romanian novel and the preference for the new genre’s substance are highlighted by terminological overlaps, such as “roman original” and “istorie originală” (original novel - original history), both formulas often used to classify the same text.

¹² Original text: “M-am cercat să cetesc un romanț din acele manuscrise, dar scrisoarea era atât de încâlcită, încât le-am lăsat, făgăduindu-le a le vizita cum voi putea deprinde a ceti scrisoarea aceea ieroglică ce se obicinuia atunci pe la noi; și, luând Istoria românilor de Petru Maior, ajutat de abecedarul urgisit, în puține ceasuri am învățat a ceti.”, C. Negruzzi, *Nuvele* (Bucharest: Editura Erc Press, 2009), 15.

¹³ I. Ștefan, “Contribuții,” 143.

Authors and editors equated fiction with real events. The emergence of Romanian prose is closely tied to the circulation of the term “istorie” (history), which meant “story” or “invention” for several decades, temporarily replacing a more precise notion that would define the type of narrative. Romances and even epics were considered “istorii” (histories), expansive narratives dealing with a wide range of thematic aspects. As the number of translations increased, translators’ tendencies to theorize the new genre they were introducing into a different cultural environment also became more prominent. After 1830, the existence of a substantial library of novel translations led to the frequent use of terms like “roman”, “romans”, or “romanțuri”, signalling a shift in the perception of the novel. Transluctology and terminological innovation allowed translators to express their own interpretations and understanding of the novel. The choice of terminology became crucial, as it opened the possibility of classifying future novels, whether translated or original.

After 1830, the presence of a substantial library of novel translations increasingly introduces terms like “roman”, “romanț”, or “romans” into circulation, creating a conceptual ambiguity that opens up debates regarding the nature, contents, and specificity of Romanian literary creation. Also in 1830, in Wallachia, Simeon Marcovici, one of the most renowned translators of the era, translated the sentimental novel *Viața Contelui de Comminj sau triumful virtuții asupra patimii amorului*, to which he ascribed the subtitle of a moral novel. The translator, attentive to the thematic scope and message of the translated novel, applies a generic label, categorizing it into a literary species and subgenre. The use of the term “romanț” represents an innovation for Marcovici, and he seeks to justify this theoretical boldness through a preface that encourages the acceptance of a notion that merely describes “a contrived story”.¹⁴ In 1837, in another translation by Marcovici, *Istoria lui Gil Blas* is published, prompting several reflections by the translator on the ability of realistic fiction to capture the characteristics of humanity in broad strokes, a literary technique that sets it apart from the strategies of prose where fantasy takes control of the epic universe. The central character in *Istoria lui Gil Blas* is recommended to be viewed “as an icon of all of humanity and bears little resemblance to the heroes of romances taken capriciously or only from certain walks of life”, because “in him, one can see the most general characteristics that make up a being dominated by all sorts of passions.”¹⁵ Simeon Marcovici’s literary choices express the translator’s intention to support the timeliness and diversity of artistic forms while keeping pace with European taste for the most appreciated subgenres of the novel. The incipient form of theoretical reflection found in prefaces comments on Romanian poetics, articulating itself in an intuitive theory that will insist on the relationship between reality, history, and fabrication. Also in Wallachia, in the same year, I. Heliade-Rădulescu published the volume *Julia sau Noua Eloise a*

¹⁴ I. Ștefan, “Contribuții,” 144.

¹⁵ Original texts: “ca o icoană a toatei omeniri, și nu se aseamănă cât de puțin cu eroii *romanțurilor* luați sau după caprițiu, sau numai din câte o treaptă de oameni”; “într-însul se văd adunate caracterurile cele mai generale cu care să alcătuește o ființă stăpânită de tot felul de patimi.” I. Ștefan, “Contribuții,” 145.

lui Rousseau by Rousseau in his translation. The translator's preface categorizes this work as a "romanț", using variations of the term such as "romanțul", "romanțuri", and "romanțurile".

The term "romanț" becomes the main competitor of the victorious notion of the "roman", appearing as a subtitle in most translations of epic texts with sentimental or moral subjects from the first half of the 19th century. Since morally oriented literary material falls under the category of useful readings, "romanțuri" becomes a form of literature with practical utility. As for the other category of "romanțuri", the sentimental ones, which describe the fervour of sentimentalism through a melodramatic lens, they continue to be viewed disapprovingly. In the preface to his translation of a novel by J. Passard, *Judita franceză sau Clotilda și Edmond, romanț istoric*, a historical novel published in 1844, the painter I. D. Negulici speaks of the audacity of dedicating a translation¹⁶ to a "romanț" and, apologizing to potential readers for the bad reputation earned by this genre of writing, declares that "in this kind of writing, some are indeed very bad," but "there are others that are very good and uplift the soul and shape the heart", so "not all romances deserve condemnation."¹⁷

In Moldavia, the intuition of writers and translators favored the winning notion, "roman", which coexisted for a brief period with the term "romans". While the old cultural debate regarding the superiority of useful, scientific, moral, and religious readings over novels had lost some of its momentum, remnants of this conflict between different cultural products occasionally surfaced in the discourses of Romanian intellectuals. In an article from 1838, published in *Albina Românească* journal, G. Asachi praised scientific products, which he considered superior to romances and verses. Nevertheless, translations of novels were literary events, and the same publication enthusiastically announced new translations, as well as the contents of the upcoming "biblioteca romanțo-istorică", translated from the works of the newest authors of the time. The juxtaposition of the two terms in the collection's name highlighted the inseparable connection between literature and history, which would fuel the evolution of Romanian prose through the emergence of the historical novel. The translation project proposed by Heliade-Rădulescu aimed to set the literary norms of the Romanian language, exercised through "words, phrases, and expressions."¹⁸ The eclectic collection's catalogue included novels, as Heliade selected novels that were highly popular in the West, prioritizing their literary notoriety rather than thematic selection or universally recognized aesthetic value.

I. Heliade-Rădulescu demonstrates a keen linguistic intuition when, on the occasion of the publication in *Albina Românească* journal of the novella *Doctorul și coteleta* in issues 44, 45, and 46 from 1839, he rejects the term "romansurile" because he finds it an unfortunate

¹⁶ J. Passard, *Judita franceză sau Clotilda și Edmond, romanț istoric din al 6-lea veac*, transl. by I. D. Negulici (Bucharest: vol. I), II.

¹⁷ Original texts: "în acest neam de scrieri sînt unele în adevăr foarte rele"; "sînt altele foarte bune și care înalță sufletul și formează inima"; "nu toate romanțurile merită urgia." J. Passard, *Judita*, IV.

¹⁸ Original text: "vorbe, fraze și expresiuni." I. Heliade-Rădulescu, *Curs întreg de poezie generală*, (Bucharest: Tip. Lucrătorilor asociați, 1868-1870, vol. II.), 31.

adaptation of the French term. Instead, he recommends using the term “romanț”, with the plural “romanțurile”. This shift in terminology begins to be used in both Moldavia and Wallachia, coexisting with other notions and variations gaining popularity among intellectual circles, such as “roman/romans” or “nuvelă/novelă”.

In the region of Wallachia, the term “romanț” competes with “romans”, which sporadically makes an appearance in the pages of the same periodicals, and both terms substitute for each other. In the first issue of the newspaper *Românul* from 1857, the first part of *Omul Muntelui* is published, subtitled “romanț original”. This subtitle remains until the fifth issue when it is replaced with “romans original”. However, with the sixteenth issue, the term “romanț” reappears in an editorial note, announcing the resumption of the serial publication of “the novel titled *Omul muntelui*”. The term proposed by Heliade-Rădulescu convincingly prevails in the linguistic competition. The term “romanț” contains latent correlations with “romance” and the act of romanticizing histories or events.

The term “romans” has a short lifespan in the cultural territory of Moldavia, being replaced by the notion of “roman” as early as 1840. In an introduction preceding the partial translation of the travel journal of a Russian diplomat, A. Demidoff, published in *Dacia Literară*, Mihail Kogălniceanu discusses the attention that national history has received from foreign writers. He welcomes the appearance of a “complete novel about Mihai Viteazul.”¹⁹ Another figure mentioned in the same text is Mich. Czaykowski, described by the author as “one of the most significant authors in Polish literature,” who “borrowed many of our events and legends to compose his beautiful novels.”²⁰ This article also contains one of the first occurrences of the plural term “romane”, in which I. Ștefan identifies an “evolved linguistic sense”, a quality he does not attribute to authors like C. Boerescu, whose novel he considers excessively neological.²¹ With the literary exercise of creating a novel, *Tainele inimei* in 1850, Mihail Kogălniceanu interprets the native intention to create original novels by the habit of copying formulas from Western fashion. However, Kogălniceanu acknowledges that social observation gains greater impact and efficiency when using a novel rather than “a moral book”, drawing the attention of the privileged social class to some of the “most positive and complete novelties” in the life of the Moldavian capital.

In Transylvania, the term “roman” entered circulation quite early, possibly by way of German influence, and it appears regularly in the publications of the time. In an issue from 1838 of the Brasov publication *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură*, directed by Gh. Bariț, the current form of the evolving term “roman” is recorded. It is explained to the public as a “love story”. If most translations consisted of novels with sentimental plots, the genre eventually became synonymous with one of the most popular subgenres. The practice of periodicals to announce

¹⁹ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Scrieri* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1967), 132.

²⁰ Original texts: “unul dintre cei mai însemnați autori a literaturii polone”; “s-a împrumutat cu multe din întâmplările și legendele noastre pentru compunerea frumoaselor sale romane.” Kogălniceanu, 133.

²¹ Ștefan, “Contribuții,” 144.

future translations as eagerly anticipated literary events is instructive for understanding the circulation of terms and their competition for dominance in theoretical discourse.

In the pages of the same publication in Brasov, *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură*, it is announced that a book entitled *Aldo și Aminta sau Bandiții*, a national novel²² was printed in Bucharest. In an issue from 1855, the same newspaper communicates the information that the “last and renowned novel by Alexandru Dumas, translated by G. Baronzi,”²³ *Isaac Lakedem sau Jidovul rătăcitor*, is currently in print.

In Wallachia, the concept of “roman” begins to solidify in the second half of the 19th century, after 1853. Most original novels published by Wallachian writers of the period were subtitled as historical, even when the subject did not necessitate a large temporal gap from the present. The historical novels explored episodes from national or European history as well, as discussions derived from the contemporaneous context. A. Pelimon provides the subtitle “roman istoric” for *Hoții și hagiul*, while Dimitrie Bolintineanu chooses “roman național” for *Manoil*. However, the influences of the publishing circuit can interfere with the classification of Romanian production through the selection of subtitles and the chosen term to designate the genre. The preference for historical novels is a symptom of cultural modernity and an effect of the digressive nature of the genre. As a standard of cultural modernity, historical prose encapsulates the nostalgia or aspiration for an idealized past, equating modernity with the fascination for the city lost in time. The romantic fascination with ruins expresses the same founding impulse of a modernity increasingly attracted to defining essences and authenticity. While the philosophy of culture seeks to circumscribe the characteristics of a universal phenomenon, it offers an identity explanation for the nostalgia for history and its fictional reconfigurations:

“The desire for the auratic and the authentic has always reflected the fear of inauthenticity, the lack of existential meaning, and the absence of individual originality. The more we learn to understand all images, words, and sounds as always already mediated, the more, it seems, we desire the authentic and the immediate. The mode of that desire is nostalgia. A gap opens up between intellectual insight into the obsolescence of the concept and the lifeworld’s desire for the authentic. The longing for authenticity is the media and commodity culture’s romantic longing for its other.”²⁴

The novel feeds modern nostalgia for representations of authenticity, and the transformation of social observation, fragments of national history, or contemporary contexts into subjects of historical prose allows the genre to treat them in an essayistic manner.

²² Ibid., 146.

²³ Ibid., 147.

²⁴ Andreas Huyssen, “Nostalgia for ruins,” *Grey Room* 23 (Spring, 2006): 11-12.

In the region of Muntenia, the main rival of the term “roman” remains “romanț”, a term found in the works of Al. Odobescu, I. Ghica, or Nicolae Filimon. However, Filimon does not definitively choose between the two terminological variants, but uses both. In a review of the libretto of Lucia de Lamermoor, based on a work by Walter Scott, the author of *Ciocoii vechi și noi* criticizes the transformation of the novel into a libretto but recognizes that such a means can maintain the types of characters and their specificity, which he understands in this way as a writer concerned with physiognomies. A review of Filimon’s novel published in *Buciumul* newspaper and attributed to Cezar Bolliac reinforces this perspective of literary hegemony of realistic character types and physiognomies. The author of the review classifies Nicolae Filimon’s text as a “historical romance of manners, full of action and very moral,”²⁵ a judgment that can be interpreted either as an attempt to rehabilitate a genre considered for a long time as corrupting or as an attempt to highlight the effectiveness of historical prose in commenting on contemporary moral dilemmas.

In one of his letters to V. Alecsandri, published under the title, Ion Ghica constructs an empathetic portrait of Nicolae Filimon, highlighting his merit in writing several very well-chosen novellas. Ghica names Filimon’s most valuable works, *Slujnicarii* and *Ciocoii*, about which he states that “they are not romances in which the intrigues unfold; they are more of a collection of true and vivid pictures of our customs and manners from the transitional period.”²⁶ The writer uses both terms, “nuvelă” and “romanț”, for these two texts, classifying them as both novellas and romances. Filimon himself uses the term “nuvelă” in the preface to *Nenorocirile unui slujnicar* and in the one to *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, although the latter is subtitled as a “romanț”. These two notions overlap in the same discourse, becoming, in a way, synonyms referring to a certain type of narrative –one that shapes, starting from the data of life, incidents with a moralizing air, involving stock characters with physiognomies revealing their vices or virtues.

In the same letter, Ghica privileges prose writings that follow the model of *Ciocoii* and *Nenorocirile unui slujnicar*, underlining the importance of novels inspired by historical events and describing customs specific to the local area. The admiration for the Balzacian model, along with the interest in depicting customs and manners, turns Ghica into a promoter of the realistic novel. This form of literature could capture the originality of the local culture, allowing for the observation of various character types. In 1844, *Curierul de ambe sexe* publishes a fragment from *Fiziologia căsătoriei*, a well-known text from Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine*, and, in 1852, the translation of *Scene din viața privată* by C. Gane is released. Translations of Balzac’s works began to circulate in feuilletons in the first half of the 19th century, nourishing the realistic perspective on the genre that was gaining ground in Romanian culture.

²⁵ Ștefan, 149.

²⁶ Original text: “[...] nu sunt niște romanțuri în cari să se desfășure peripețiile unei intrigi; ele sunt mai mult o colecțiune de tablouri adevărate și vii ale obiceiurilor și moravurilor noastre din epoca de tranzițiune.” Ion Ghica, *Scrisori către V. Alecsandri* (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1967), 53.

With these translations, the Romanian public begins to become increasingly interested in the reflection on the nature of the novel, and periodicals publish short digressions and essays to address theoretical curiosities. In 1857, the newspaper *Românul* hosts a series of “epistles on literature”, translated from French. In one of the brief introductions, with a clear popularization role, the nature of the novel is discussed, considered a literary genre that reflects objective reality as truthfully as possible. In the preface of his translation of *Octavu*, C. D. Aricescu offers several relevant reflections on the specific construction of the novel. The translator states that “the romance, like the theatre, is a mirror that reflects lives and virtues, the sublime and the grotesque.”²⁷ He further emphasizes that the task of “romancers” is formative since through their writings, someone learns history, geography, the customs, and the costumes of past centuries.²⁸ Reading romances is perceived by Aricescu as didactic.

The theoretical debate continues in the very pages of the novels, in prefaces, in the narrator's digressions, or in the speeches of the characters. Pantazi Ghica, in his novel *Un boem român* from 1860, proposes an answer to the question about the nature and purpose of the novel. He comments on the genre's capacity to reflect the physiognomy of society, exercising a critical function: “A novel is always a portrayal of society, a critique of evil, of vitality, of prejudices [...] the novel is the study of life.”²⁹ Mihai Eminescu also seeks to explain the specificity of the novel in an article from 1876. For the poet, the novel opposes drama by nullifying psychological determinism, and the heroes of the novel are condemned to undergo events directed purely by chance and beyond their will. Drama, on the other hand, sets in motion an entire deterministic mechanism in which characters act according to their spiritual disposition, involving the tragic guilt of the entire dramatic ensemble:

“The novel is a narrative writing genre; it depicts what happens, its characters suffer unjustly the blows of fate, often alien to their character. In dramatic works, there is no chance. Drama shows what occurs in a particular character according to its natural disposition. Therefore, it inherently involves tragic guilt.”³⁰

²⁷ Original text: “[...] romanțul, ca și teatru, e un spekiu (oglină) ce reflectă vițiile și virtuțile, sublimul și grotescul”. *Octavu*, transl. C. D. Aricescu (Bucharest, Imprimeria Națională a lui I. Romanow and Comp., 1856), V.

²⁸ *Octavu*, transl. C. D. Aricescu (Bucharest, Imprimeria Națională a lui I. Romanow and Comp., 1856), V-VI.

²⁹ Original text: “Un romanț este întotdeauna tabloul societății, critic al răului, al vițiului, prezudițiilor [...] romanțul este studiul vieții”. Pantazi Ghica, *Un boem român*, (Bucharest: Tipografia Jurnalului Național, 1860), 116-117.

³⁰ Original text: “Romanul e un gen de scriere povestitor, el zugrăvește cea ce se întâmplă, eroii lui suferă fără de vină loviturile unei sorți, adesea străină de caracterul lor. În opul dramatic, nu există întâmplare. Drama arată ce se lucrează în cutare ori cutare caracter conform dispoziției sale naturale. De aceea ea implică în sine vina tragică”. M. Eminescu, *Opere*, Vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Cultura Românească, 1939), 466.

Eminescu's perspective is similar to that of Maiorescu, influenced by German aesthetics and Goethe's work. For Titu Maiorescu, tragedy involves central characters who are active and dynamic, initiating the action, while the heroes of the novel or novella are passive and subject to chance.³¹

The newspaper *Buciumul* will publish in 1864, in serial form, the "most serious historical romance that has appeared in our literature so far," the first part of the designed novel *Viața unui boier*, "Episodul I", *Copilăria lui Iancu Moțoc*, or *Ursita* by B. P. Hasdeu.³² Hasdeu's novel evokes the last years of Stephen the Great's reign, outlining a plot that sets in motion the idea of an inevitable destiny drawn from Greek tragedies. The story follows the fulfillment of a grim prophecy, the killing of Stephen, the grandson of Stephen the Great, by Iancu Moțoc, an event revealed to Stephen the Great by an astrologer from the moment of the future ruler's birth. Although Hasdeu is more concerned with presenting dark episodes of national history to enhance their dramatic potential, as a novelist, he shares, like Nicolae Filimon, the fascination of his era with physiognomies. Hasdeu mentions the name of the physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater in a passage where he outlines a disapproving portrait of a child whose specific crying reveals the seeds of a deviant behaviour:

"I don't know if everyone has noticed something; to me, it seems that not even Lavater himself could have guessed it. The nature of a child can be recognized when you see them crying. Tears do not distort certain childlike faces; on the contrary, they give them a gentle, sweet, charming expression; whereas there are children whose crying contorts and distorts all the features of their face, so much so that you cannot look at them without feeling disgust, aversion, involuntary repulsion."³³

Hasdeu's observation is more of a complement or nuance to Lavater's theories, attributing to natural behaviour the capacity to prematurely reflect the germ of deviant behaviour. In his article "Mișcarea literelor în Eși", Hasdeu introduces a novel literary term to designate a novelist, putting into circulation the form "romanist", also encountered in the defence argument during the trial for immorality resulting from the publication of the novel *Duduca Mamuca*. B. P. Hasdeu absolves the category of novelists, including himself, from the reprehensible actions of the stereotype characters constructed to illustrate a moral thesis: "In my romance, who exactly is immoral? That student-type, who is portrayed as the main

³¹ Titu Maiorescu, *Critice*, Vol. III (Bucharest: Editura Socec, 1928), 23.

³² Ștefan, 150.

³³ Original text: "Nu știu dacă toată lumea a observat un lucru; mie, unuia, mi se pare că nu l-a ghicit nici chiar Lavater. Natura copilului se poate recunoaște când îl vezi plângând. Lacrimile nu desfigurează unele fețe copilărești, ba încă le dau oarecare expresiune blândă, dulce, simpatcă; pe când sînt copii al căroră plîns le strîmbă și le schimonosește astfel toate trăsurile feței, încât nu te poți uita la ei fără să resimți un dezgust, o aversiune, o depărtare involuntară." B. P. Hasdeu, *Opere*, Vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1998), 96.

character of the plot, but certainly not the novelist.”³⁴ The writer’s choice of this term is not so much an error that could create confusion but rather a deliberate choice driven by terminological instability. Hasdeu proposes defining the prose writer using the term “prozaist”. The occurrence of the term “romanț” does not appear in Hasdeu’s work as a concept denoting the romanticizing of a historical episode but as an independent concept and counterpart to the term “roman”, fully assimilated into the theoretical vocabulary of the Romanian literary discourse. The theoretical insight of Mihail Kogălniceanu dictates the early use of the winning concept, that of “romancier”, dating back to 1840: “All our Evghenists are fluent in French, and some also in German; most of them are acquainted with the literature of these nations, especially the works of novelists.”³⁵ From the second half of the 19th century, the mentor of Dacia Literară will replace this term, under the cultural and usage pressures, with the notion of “romanțier”, frequently encountered in the Romanian literary discourse.

The term “romance” also overlaps with “roman”, “romans”, “romanț”, and “novel”, often seeking to delineate a narrative constructed around a sentimental intrigue. Scarlat Tîmpeanu’s intention to publish a “romance in two volumes” is announced in *Cantorul de avis și comerț*, and Heliade-Rădulescu uses this occasion to clarify the meaning of the term. He explains that a “romanța” is nothing more than “a fabricated story or an account of a true but embellished event.”³⁶ This represents one of the first (proto)theories of the novel in the Romanian cultural space and illustrates the profound connection established between reality, history, and fiction. Heliade’s theoretical consistency maintains “romanț” as the primary term for defining the emerging genre, to which he attributes the plural form “romanțe”. He declares that “historical romances... show us society in all its squalor.”³⁷ In addition to its exhaustive capacity to mirror life with a realistic tint, the Romanian thinker also intuitively discerns a digressive function of the novel, presenting and analysing a set of alarming social frameworks. This is where the ideological imprint of the novel’s construction becomes intelligible.

Starting from 1870, in the Helian theoretical vocabulary, a competition begins between the term “roman”, which becomes fixed in the intellectual discourse of Muntenia after 1850, and “romanț”. Hasdeu’s innovative solution is to propose a third variant, the use of the term “mitistorie” to name the Romanian text. This option aligns with Heliade’s concept of the novel’s epic descent, which becomes the vulgar or national form of myth. In *Heliade Rădulescu’s Literary Ideology*, D. Popovici identifies the origin of this term in Heliade’s intellectual background, noting that the publicist borrowed it from his professor, Vardalah. In contrast, the thinker resorts to the etymology of the term “romanț” to define the type of

³⁴ Original text: “În romanțul meu cine oare este nemoral? Acel tip studențial, care e înfățișat ca eroul intrigii, iar nici de cum romanistul”. B. P. Hasdeu, *Scrisori literare, morale și politice*, Vol. II (Bucharest: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă, 1937), 333.

³⁵ Original text: “Toți evgheniștii noștri știu franțuzește și unii și nemțește; mai toți cunosc literatura acestor nații, mai ales pre autorii romancieri”. Kogălniceanu, 136.

³⁶ Ștefan, 144-145.

³⁷ Original text: “romanțele istorice... ne arată societatea în toate mizeriile ei”. B. P. Hasdeu, *Scrisori*, 275.

Romanian text to which it should be attributed. If “mitistoria” reveals the epic descent of the novel, the term “romanț” would encompass “love stories”. However, Heliade-Rădulescu nuances the theory regarding the thematic content of a “romanț” since “romances are not just love songs, but they narrate customs, beliefs, heroic battles, journeys.”³⁸ Although a term like “mitistorie” proves difficult to assimilate and harmonize with the name in the languages of universal circulation, the remarkable theoretical intuition prompts the publicist to opt for the winning plural form.

The first dictionaries and vocabularies of the modern Romanian language record the oscillations in literary terminology and the competition among various notions. *The Romanian vocabulary* elaborated by I. D. Negulici in Țara Românească, published in 1848, includes approximately 6000 terms and retains the form “romanț” as the notion defining the new genre, understood as “narration, fictitious history, prose narrative of events.”³⁹ The same dictionary also offers the adjectival form of the word, “romanțesc”, meaning “related to romanț, fabulous.”⁴⁰ The inventive adjective provided by Negulici underscores the excessive fabrication of the narrative, which seems to share nothing with familiar reality. Understandably, such a reading provoked disapproving opinions, at least in the first decades of the 19th century since the production of fabrication that does not present strict utility is understandable. Another dictionary, published in Moldova, in Iași, by T. Stamati in 1851, records the term “roman”, with the plural form “romanuri”.⁴¹ The same dictionary defines the novel as a “history, written account of fictitious events, mainly about love.”⁴² It seems that, for Stamati, romans were built around romantic, sentimental stories but ones that were plausible and originating from imagination. If Negulici’s *Vocabulary* aimed to be a comprehensive collection of inherited words and neologisms, in his *Disionăraș romînesc de cuvinte tehnice și altele greu de înțeles*, T. Stamati fixed the name of the literary genre in a specialized collection aimed at popularizing terms not found in common vocabulary. The same dictionary correlates romanticism with the emergence of the novel, defining the adjective “romantic” as “evoking poetic and novelistic ideas.”⁴³ The Poenar’s dictionary translates the name of the genre as “roman”, following the French equivalent, and defines the notion as “any fictitious prose narrative by which the author attempts to arouse interest through the development of

³⁸ I. Heliade-Rădulescu, *Curs întreg de poezie generală*, Vol. II (Bucharest: Tip. Lucrătorilor asociați, 1868-1870), 13.

³⁹ I. D. Negulici, *Vocabular român de toate vorbele străbune și reprimite pînă acum în limba română* (Bucharest: Tipografia Colegiului, 1848), 325.

⁴⁰ I. D. Negulici, *Vocabular*, 325.

⁴¹ T. Stamati, *Disionăraș romînesc de cuvinte tehnice și altele greu de înțeles* (Iași: Tipografia Buciumului Român, 1851), 245.

⁴² Original text: “[...] istorie, spunere în scris de întâmplări închipuite, însă putincioase mai ales de amoriu.” T. Stamati, *Disionăraș*, 245.

⁴³ T. Stamati, *Disionăraș*, 215.

passions, the portrayal of customs, or the description of extraordinary events.”⁴⁴ The definition provided by Poenar insists on the moral dimension of the genre, seen as a tool for analyzing and sanctioning passions and morals. However, the same dictionary also uses the term “romanț” as an equivalent for “nuvelă”, while the writer of prose texts is referred to as a “romanțiar”,⁴⁵ indicating that the period of terminological oscillations and overlaps was to continue for a while. For L. Protopopescu and V. Popescu, authors of *Noul dicționar portativ*, the name of the genre is “romanț”, described as “a tale inspired by fantasy, meant to depict either the passions of the human heart, or the customs of the people, or historical events”⁴⁶. This intuitive definition of the novel mentions three subgenres, discussing the existence of the sentimental, moral, and historical romance.

The post-union period brought about a more dynamic exchange of ideas between Moldova and Țara Românească, resulting in the consolidation of a common literary terminology. After 1875, when the domestic inventory of Romanian productions included a relatively rich collection of texts, subjects, subgenres, and formulas, the term “roman” secured its place as the dominant term. However, the name “romanț” still sporadically appears in the discourse of Romanian writers such as Alexandru Macedonski. Since most major printing houses were located in Bucharest, where most Romanian publications were produced, the term “romanț” enjoyed greater popularity there. The overlap and co-occurrence of these two terms were not solely due to oscillations in literary language but were part of a more complex cultural process. While the name “romanț” was common in the subtitles of novels published in Wallachia, which represented the overwhelming majority of Romanian publications, its replacement by the definitively accepted term could not happen overnight.

⁴⁴ Original text: “[...] orice istorie închipuită scrisă în proză, prin care autorul încearcă să insuflă interes, prin dezvoltarea patimilor, sau prin zugrăvirea năravurilor, sau prin descrierea unor deosebite întâmplări.” P. Poenar, F. Aaron, G. Hill, *Vocabular franțezo-romînesc*, Vol. II (Bucharest, 1841), 244.

⁴⁵ P. Poenar, F. Aaron, G. Hill, *Vocabular*, 244.

⁴⁶ Original text: “[...] o povestire inspirată de fantasmă, destinată a arăta sau patimele inimii umane, sau moravurile popoului sau evenimentele istorice.” L. Protopopescu, V. Popescu, *Nou dicționar portativ* (Bucharest: Librar Editor G. Ioanide & A. Spirescu, 1862), 552.