MODERN NEGOTIATIONS: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE IN ROMANIAN MODERNIST LITERATURE

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Abstract Drawing on Modernist Studies, Critical Theory and the work of Bruno Latour, the aim of my paper is to explore how Romanian modernist literature from the late 19th century to the first three decades of the 20th century engages with, participates in, and contributes to a culture of modernity. I will investigate the way in which Romanian modernist literature negotiates the relationship that the modern society constructs between the public and private dimensions of life, starting from two important sociocultural and economic phenomena: (1) the intensification of migration, and (2) the development of cultural tourism. In the first part of the article, I will provide an operational definition of the concept of modernity starting from Hartmut Rosa and Bruno Latour's work and discuss its intertwining with literary modernism. In the second part, I will delve into the way that the Romanian modernist characters, both male and female, migrate from one place to another in pursuit of employment opportunities and a better life. In the third part, I will explore the modern context of travelling the world, and the idea of youth culture from both historical and sociological perspectives. This section sets the stage for the final part of the article, in which I will focus on what I consider to be the first modern female cosmopolitan in Romanian literature and I will explore the aspects of modernity that the cosmopolitan novel sheds light on and constructs. The literary modernism discussed in this article spans from the late 19th century, exemplified by Vasile Alecsandri's novel *Dridri*[1] (1871), to novels from the second and third decades of the 20th century, including *Codin*[2] (1926), *În lumea Mediteranei*[3] (1934) by Panait Istrati, and *Femei*[4] (1934) by Mihail Sebastian.

Keywords Modernity, The Frankfurt School, Bruno Latour, Modernism, Romanian modernist literature, private life, public life, migration, tourism, cosmopolitism.

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[1] Vasile Alecsandri, "Dridri," in Ștefan Baghiu,, Vlad Pojoga, Cosmin Borza, Andreea Coroian Goldiș, Daiana Gârdan, Emanuel Modoc, David Morariu, Teodora Susarenco, Radu Vancu, Dragoș Varga (eds.), *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The 19th Century* (Sibiu: Complexul Național Muzeal ASTRA, 2019 [1871]).

[2] Panait Istrati, "Codin," in *Chira Chiralina. Codin, Ciulinii Bărăganului* (Bucharest: Astro, 2016 [1926]).

[3] Panait Istrati, *În lumea Mediteranei. Răsărit de soare*, vol. 1, *În lumea Mediteranei. Apus de soare*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura HOFFMAN, 2020 [1934, 1935]).

[4] Mihail Sebastian, "Femei," in *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit. Femei* (Bucharest: Cartex, 2018 [1934]).

My paper is positioned in the broader context of contemporary criticism, characterized by a historical turn − a concerted effort to examine how literature is integrated into the world.[5] It draws on the field of New Modernist Studies, which has achieved two significant accomplishments over the last three decades. On the one hand, it has successfully placed modernist literature in its original context and examined its positions in relation to it. On the other hand, it has embraced the present landscape of humanistic research through an interdisciplinary approach. The historical turn within New Modernist Studies, placed within the framework of the New Historicism, reveals, as asserted by Jean-Michel Rabaté in the current issue of *Philobiblon*, that modernism and modernity are two levels that must always be connected.[6] As such, we not only understand literature as a space of negotiation between the two but also, following in the footsteps of the Frankfurt School, as an art form that becomes "a vitally important sphere of society."[7] According to Hartmut Rosa, art, and therefore literature, is not only about "exploring" and "experimenting" ways of being in the world, but also about creating new ones, being a space of diverse and multiple potentialities.[8] Thus, the modernity to which I will refer throughout this work is not, and never has been, fundamentally detached from literary modernism. I will operate with an understanding of modernity constructed at the intersection of Bruno Latour's epistemological hypothesis, which argues that we have never been modern,[9] and a dynamic concept of modernity defined in various versions by thinkers of The Frankfurt School. Regarding the modernity of The Frankfurt School, we interpret it in terms of both progress and the commodification of the idea of novelty, as articulated by prominent figures such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. And also as a composite and dynamic reality in which societal emphasis replaces the theological focus, aligning with the thinking of a second-generation thinker like Jürgen Habermas.[10] However, it is essential to acknowledge that, above all, modernity entails a transformation in the temporal structure of life,[11] as put by Hartmut Rosa, a representative of the last generation. Everything accelerates with modernity –

[5] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 9.

[6] Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Unlocking Modernism. Theory's Fulfilment in the 21st Century," Interview with Jean-Michel Rabaté by Amalia Cotoi, in Amalia Cotoi and Alexandru Matei (eds.), "Modernism and Bruno Latour: For a Resumption of Modernity" (special issue), *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities,* Vol. 28, no. 2 (2023): 349-354.

[7] Hartmut Rosa, in Thijs Lijster, Robin Celikates & Hartmut Rosa, "Beyond the Echo-chamber: An Interview with Hartmut Rosa on Resonance and Alienation," *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 1 (2019): https://archive.krisis.eu/beyond-the-echo-chamber-an-interview-with-hartmut-rosa-on-resonance-and-alienation/ (accessed in November 2023).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, transl. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993 [1991]).

[10] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration. A New Theory of Modernity* transl. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2013 [2005]), 1-32.

[11] Rosa, "Beyond the Echo-chamber: An Interview with Hartmut Rosa on Resonance and Alienation."

the social, the technical, and the rhythm of life[12] –, hence, the idea of *modern negotiation* that we target in this work, one that takes place between a public social space and a domestic space of intimacy.

The Critical Theory's understanding of modernity and the much more abstract concept employed by Bruno Latour converge in the point of modernity's failed promise to ensure sustainable progress. Modernity fails to ensure social progress and to make the "temporal culture of capital,"[13] as described by Peter Osborne, productive within the context of a subjective relationship with the world. Derived from the 21st century modernity, Latour's theory, much like Hartmut Rosa's, directs attention to a consistently highlighted, yet insufficiently explored aspect: the modern's lack of self-awareness. According to Latour, modern cosmology is defined by the separation of nature from culture, the detachment of the universal from its local expressions, the division of subject from object, and the "obscurity" of these divisions.[14] What modernity lacks, according to Latour, and consequently why it can never truly be modern, is the capacity to reflect on itself in relation to the world and all the entities composing the world.

Considering modernity as "acceleration",[15] there are two modern phenomena that have marked Romanian society, which I will consider in this work: (1) the demographic phenomenon of migration and (2) the emergence of a culture of tourism. On the one hand, there is the unprecedented migration, amplified both in Romania and in Europe, as well as elsewhere, after 1840,[16] at the end of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840). While the Industrial Revolution did not significantly influence the Romanian landscape, the migratory phenomenon gained momentum within the boundaries of the Romanian Kingdom starting from the late 19th century.

My exploration begins with data presented by Sorin Negruți in the article "Cetăţenie şi migraţie în România în perioada 1865–1938," as follows: (1) statistics from 1865, highlighting the fact that the majority of those crossing the borders within the Kingdom of Romania were Romanians driven by economic motives;[17] and (2) the legislative act from April 1925, outlining the liberalization of migration.[18] The second phenomenon is connected to the first, in the sense that the intensification of migration, facilitated by the development of urban areas and infrastructure, is accompanied by the fluidization of both internal and external borders. This is further enhanced by the opening of navigation on the Danube River, as stipulated in the Treaty

[12] Ibid.
[13] Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition. Critical Essays* (London: Verso, 2021), 21.
[14] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* 40.
[15] Rosa, *Social Acceleration*.
[16] Pierre Singaravélou, Sylvain Venayre (eds.), *Histoire du Monde au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2019)*,* 78.
[17] Sorin Negruți, "Cetăţenie şi migraţie în România în perioada 1865–1938," *Revista română de sociologie*, XXVIII, 3–4 (2017): 205.
[18] Ibid., 213.

of Adrianople in 1829,[19] by the development of the industry of tourism that transforms leisure time into productive time. This industry became institutionalized in Romania by the mid-20th century, with the establishment of the National Tourism Office [Oficiul Național de Turism] in 1936.[20]

Beginning with the assumption that literature is one of the spaces that best acclimatizes and negotiates the contradictions of modernity, the question emerging from the previously mentioned sociocultural and economic contexts is how literature captures them and in what manner they remain relevant for a contemporary interpretation of modernism. Placing Romanian modernist literature in the broader sociocultural context of the era contributes to bringing together authors who otherwise might seem isolated when examined exclusively within a literary context. Moreover, by connecting Romanian literature to a modernity that is never singular, not even within the same discipline, we can integrate Romanian literature into the broader context of a sociocultural imaginary of modernity that is not confined to the Western world alone. The appeal to modernity, a concept about which a study in historical sociology asserts that is one we will never escape,[21] and the care to tailor it to the object of study, that is the interwar Romanian literature, will shield us from the potential reproach of applying a general concept to local realities. Not only because each culture has its own modernity, but also because even within the same culture, modernity is a constantly contested concept.

From I. L. Caragiale to Panait Istrati: About "an Intimacy that... Becomes Public"

The advent of the steam engine and the development of transportation and communication networks made the idea of geographic mobility a lifestyle accessible not only to the elite, but also to increasingly broader segments of the middle and working class by the end of the 19th century. In this new way of being in the world, much more dynamic and subject to the accelerated time of modernity, the two dimensions of life that Fordism and mass production lines increasingly separated in the early 20th century are being reassembled − namely, the public and the private dimensions. The public space becomes both a meeting place with others and an individually appropriable space, while "intimacy, in turn, becomes «public»," as noted by Ligia Tudurachi in connection with I. L. Caragiale's work:

> "If until this moment literature used to relate undifferentiatedly to urban spaces, considering them both environments of social aggression and dissimulation, starting with Caragiale's sketches and moments, the interior setting is abandoned, and the

[19] Narcisa Maria Mitu, "Evoluţia comerţului românesc în porturile dunărene oltene în secolul al XiX-lea şi prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea," *Arhivele Olteniei*, 23 (2009): 121.
[20] Filip Pațac, *Istoria comerțului și turismului* (Timișoara: Eurostampa, 2008), 52.
[21] Wolfgang Knöbl, "Theories That Won't Pass Away: The Never-ending Story of Modernization Theory," in Gerard Delanty și Engin F. Isin (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology* (London: Sage, 2003), 96-107.

> action shifts to the street. Intimacy, in turn, becomes «public», a consequence of the emergence, for the first time in Romanian literature, of a democratic political consciousness. The bedroom of Efimița and Leonida (*Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea,* 1880) is a space where, while reading the newspaper [«gazeta»], as much politics is discussed as in the café. Similarly, the musket [pușca de gardist] leaned against the window in the small-bourgeois room of Jupân Dumitrache (*O noapte furtunoasă*, 1879) announces the transformation of the intimate bourgeois setting into a public space for confrontation and defence of civic values."[22]

Characters in Romanian modernist novels often reside in temporary rented rooms, in the houses of friends or relatives, at hotels, or in sanatoriums, as seen in novels such as *Domnișoara din strada Neptun*, *Huliganii, Codin, Rădăcini, Enigma Otiliei*, *Femei*, *Inimi cicatrizate*, *O moarte care nu dovedește nimic* etc. The urban individual, European, Westernized, or aspiring to Westernization, a resident of a modernizing industrialized society, can no longer picture oneself confined to private interiors of the community of proximity.

As such, there is no coincidence in that, within the territory of the Kingdom of Romania in 1865, "the majority of those who crossed the country's border [of the Romanian Principalities − m. n] were Romanians."[23] Transylvania, under Austrian "protection" had the most intense communication with the Romanian Principalities: 47% of those who emigrated to the Principalities were farmers from Transylvania, while 55% of farmers from the south migrated to Transylvania.[24] The primary goal of economic migration from rural to urban areas, which intensified after World War I, was primarily the search for employment and is often depicted in literature in relation to the male working class. Păun Oproiu, in *Domnișoara din Strada Neptun* (1921) by Felix Aderca, migrates to the city to become a "machinist"[25] and to ensure an urban lineage for his family.

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[22] Original text: "Dacă până în acest moment, literatura se raporta nediferențiat la spațiile urbane, considerându-le în egală măsură medii ale agresivității sociale și ale disimulării, începând cu schițele și momentele lui Caragiale, decorul interior e abandonat, acțiunea mutându-se în stradă. Intimitatea devine la rândul ei „publică", consecință a apariției în literatura română, pentru prima dată, a unei conștiințe politice democratice. Dormitorul Efimiței și al lui Leonida (*Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea*, 1880) e un spațiu în care, citindu-se „gazeta", se face la fel de mult politică ca la cafenea, după cum pușca de gardist rezemată de fereastră la odaia de mahala a lui Jupân Dumitrache (*O noapte furtunoasă*, 1879) anunță transformarea decorului intim mic-burghez într-un spațiu public la confruntării și al apărării valorilor civice" [m.t. = my translation]. Ligia Tudurachi, "Literatura citadină," in Corin Braga, *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România*, *Imaginar literar*, vol 1. (Bucharest: Polirom, 2020), 214.

[23] Sorin Negruți, "Cetăţenie şi migraţie în România în perioada 1865–1938," *Revista română de sociologie,* XXVIII", 205 [m.t].

[24] Ibid., 208.

[25] F. Aderca, "Domnișoara din strada Neptun," in *Domnișoara din strada Neptun, Zeul iubirii, Omul descompus* (Bucharest: Cugetarea – Georgrescu Delfaras, S.A., 1945 [1920]), 7 [m.t.].

The migratory wave from rural to urban areas not only increases the desire for social ascent, illustrated in literature by the figure of the parvenu, an "urban human prototype"[26] that emerges with Caragiale, but also the desire for urbanization: social status is no longer ensured by matrilineality or patrineality, but becomes a lineage secured through migration. This gives rise to a double opposition: between the village and the city, and between the centre (the modern city) and the slum[27]. Nuța, Oproiu's daughter, is integrated into the slum community not because she has important ancestors but because she is "more on the street than at home" and developed habits and customs as a "child of the slum": "urban habits emerged in her soul as her blonde hair strands grew."[28]

This intermediate area of the slum, depicted in both Romanian literature and British slum fiction from the same period under the influence of proletarianization and naturalism, functions as a no man's land where everything is permitted − a realm of decadence and the degradation of interpersonal relationships. It is a space that becomes more visible, especially due to the accelerated migration at the end of the 19th century. The cholera epidemic that briefly reaches the mouth of the Danube River in 1913, at the beginning of the Second Balkan War,[29] is noted by Panait Istrati in *Codin,* a novel published in 1926, as follows:

> "Quarantine was instituted. The courtyard of the cholera-stricken man was isolated. In the following days, the doctor and the intern who came to inspect the neighbourhood picked up a few suspects. Before the end of the week, two people fell in broad daylight. After three days, another one. Then came the catastrophe: the entire neighbourhood was contaminated, and soon the entire city. The health service could barely cope: they gathered the cholera victims, dead or sick, sorted them at the hospital, and buried them drowned in lime. A horrifying black van roamed from morning till night. It mistakenly took the drunken ones who, to «avoid» the disease, found nothing better to do than get drunk. When the epidemic became widespread, the quarantine fell on its own, and the migrations began, following the example of the wealthy who fled first. The journey of the poor was not too long. Those from Comorofca went a kilometre behind the slaughterhouse to set up their tents on a vast barren plateau."[30]

[26] Tudurachi, "Literatura citadină," 214 [m.t].

[27] For an accurate analysis of the slum in Romanian modernist literature, see Daiana Gârdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023), 191-235.

[28] Aderca*, Domnișoara din str. Neptun,* 18 [m.t.].

[29] Călin Cotoi, *Holera și "Duhul Comunismului". Inventarea socialului în România, 1831-1914* (Cluj: Idea Design&Print, 2022), 18.

[30] Original text: "Se institui carantina. Curtea holericului fu izolată. În zilele următoare, medicul și internul care veneau să inspecteze mahalaua, ridicară câțiva suspecți. Înainte de sfârșitul săptămânii, doi oameni căzură în plină zi. După trei zile, încă unul. Pe urmă veni catastrofa: toată mahalaua fu contaminată și, curând, întregul oraș. Serviciul sanitar abia puitea prididi: aduna holericii, morți sau bolnavi, îi tria la spital și-i îngropa înecați în var. Un îngrozitor furgon negru umbla de dimineață până noaptea. Lua din greșeală

The trajectory of the cholera epidemic, going from the slum to the city, and the ensuing short-term emigration – covering long distances for the upper classes and approximately one kilometre for the neighbourhood residents – mirrors the transportation revolution.[31] On the one hand, the accelerated migration generated by natural disasters is an indication of an increasingly efficient infrastructure. On the other hand, the unprecedented development of transportation means leads to the expansion of epidemics, which, in turn, explains and intensifies migration, as stated by the historian Pierre Singaravélou.[32] We find in the preceding explanations the most compelling confirmation of the modernity we defined earlier − namely, that as technological progress accelerates, it not only ushers in prosperity but also increases the circulation of harmful agents. While we previously referred to epidemics, the same principle applies to economic migration, where uprooting can exert undesirable effects on human evolution.

Pierre Singaravélou also observes that the decline of plague and smallpox on a European scale led to significant demographic growth between 1820 and 1900.[33] This occurred simultaneously with an improvement in living conditions in cities, a decrease in mortality rates, and the dismantling of the communal family, giving rise to new forms of independence and, consequently, a change in the regime of geographic mobility: "By the end of the 19th century, long-distance migrations related to labour had largely replaced those stemming from slavery and military campaigns."[34] More and more migrants from the early 20th century become deliberate travellers, moving either by their own means or with the help of parents, friends[35] etc., often with the goal of finding employment. While it is typically males who migrate for economic purposes, there are even fewer instances of female characters changing neighbourhoods or migrating for economic reasons as well. One of the few mobile female characters in 20th century Romanian literature is Joița, Adrian's mother, the Dickensian child in Panait Istrati's novel *Codin* (1926). Adrian befriends Codin, the executioner of the slum, and despite his emotional attachment to his mother, he leads a life where the domestic space of the house is almost non-existent. Narrated mostly in the third person, Joița is a character who speaks about the realities of the early 20th century when both women and men increasingly migrate towards cities in search of a source of income. A laundress, Adrian's mother changes neighbourhoods or districts within the same

pe beţitivii care, pentru a „ocoli” boala, nu găseau altceva mai bun de făcut, decât să se îmbete. Când molima fu generală, carantina căzu de la sine și emigrările începură, după pilda celor bogați, care fugiră cei dintâi. Călătoria săracilor nu era prea lungă. Cei din Comorofca se duseră la un kilometru în dosul abatorului, să-și întindă corturile pe un mare platou sterp” [m.t.]. Panait Istrati, "Codin", in *Chira Chiralina. Codin, Ciulinii Bărăganului* (Bucharest, Astro, 2016 [1926]), 169.

[31] Pierre Singaravélou, Sylvain Venayre (eds.), *Histoire du Monde au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2019), 25.

[32] Ibid., 25.

[33] Ibid,, 25.

[34] Ibid., 78 [m.t.].

[35] Ibid, 78.

neighbourhood – two in the last ten years, although in the past, they used to move "two or three times a year"[36]). Firstly, she does it in order to ensure a decent life for her son: "I had to live here to save two lei per month on rent. That adds up to twenty-four lei per year, just as much as a set of clothes costs for you."[37] Secondly, she does it out of the need to reside in a clean social environment: "that's how my mother was; she moved from one place as soon as she felt that gossip was starting to take root."[38]

The community that continuously recomposes and regenerates itself with the development of infrastructure and means of communication is formed of mobile individuals seeking not only employment and a decent income but also a society built more on the principles of detachment and tolerance rather than attachment. Joița was looking for a new rental for herself and her son to avoid gossip, but it is essential to underline that the ease with which the female character changes residences implies that such an approach to life becomes natural at the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, it suggests that the communal bond had become precarious and that relationships with others were established based on their efficiency within an individual, personal life project.

The Cosmopolitan Mobility and Youth Culture. Travel as a Formative Experience

When mobility or migration is not work-related, a form finds limited representation in Romanian modernist literature, largely due to the scarcity of a working class presence, Romanian travellers at the end of the 19th century embark on journeys in a manner similar to their Western European counterparts. Their goal is to supplement their education and accumulate experience. This is a form of travel that, in the 19th century, rarely depends on a specific destination, as put by James Buzzard.[39] While certain destinations hold greater significance in a lifetime, like Italy or France, the segmentation of travel experiences into distinct destination for each type of experience takes place later and it coincides with the rise of mass tourism.

As the children of the Romanian boyars embark on initiatory and formative journeys abroad and the domain of publicity expands into newspapers, alongside the gradual establishment of bourgeois tourism, certain destinations begin to emerge as not only desirable but almost obligatory for a specific cultural experience.[40] The capital of literature, a modern city, and a space of Latinity, Paris becomes the favourite backdrop for Romanian writers. Romanian novels exploring travel as an introduction to the world showcase aspects that, although also present in local urban literature, are considered acts of rebellion in a literary

[36] Panait Istrati, *Codin,* 131 [m.t]
[37] Ibid., 131 [m.t]
[38] Ibid., 131 [m.t]
[39] James Buzard, "The Grand Tour and After (1660–1840)," in Peter Hulme, Tim Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 37.
[40] Ibid., 38.

landscape where geography remains national and hence stable. Topics such as betrayal, prostitution, financial precariousness, gambling, and bohemianism, all associated with a male profile, emerge in urban literature placed in a Romanian setting as representations of deviant behaviours. In contrast, within novels centred on travelling the world, these topics transform into coming-of-age narratives for the profile of the young intellectual. The young intellectual depicted by cosmopolitan novels such as *Trupul care își caută sufletul* (1932), by Sarina Cassvan, *Baletul mecanic* (1931) by Cezar Petrescu, *Omul descompus* (1925), by Felix Aderca, *Femei* (1934), by Mihail Sebastian etc. travels independently, often relying on personal means, and always in pursuit of pleasure.

The intensification of cultural journeys also reflect the negotiation between the public and private life. This involves a sociability within public sphere. Despite the protagonist entering societies different from their familiar one, the imperative for integration persists and remains equally crucial. Additionally, it is essential to note that these journeys are not centred around what we currently refer to as sightseeing; rather, they involve acculturation processes that individuals bring back to their home country. The characters become a form of "translators" of the Western culture they encountered, in a Latourian sense.[41]

In *Eu* (1927) by Mihail Negru, the story begins with the protagonist's stopover in Budapest before returning to Romania. The narrative then shifts to the character's return to Paris, while being entangled in a clandestine affair with a married woman. This topic of forbidden love, typical of the cinematic industry of that era, resonates with the emergence of youth culture. As jazz gains popularity, while photography and talking pictures also become widespread, the novel reflects a broader cultural modernity. This culture was promoted in Romania at the beginning of the 20th century by novels centred on travelling.

Its expansion during the interwar period aligns with the bourgeois cultural modernity, which emphasizes and cultivates distinctions between various stages of life. In the preindustrial life cycle, childhood and adolescence used to be inseparable stages.[42] However, the rise of the middle class resulting from the Industrial Revolution led to a notable shift, says John R. Gillis. Compulsory public education, acting as an institutional support, has segmented the inseparable stages of childhood and adolescence. This restructuring also prolonged the period children spend within their families before venturing into other households to complete their apprenticeships. For instance, the age at which this transition occurs has evolved in Western countries from 7-8 years in the 18th century to 14-15 years by the late 19th century. By the early 20th century, the perception of adolescence changed significantly. Its value was not solely attributed to institutional support from schools, but it was also influenced by the expansive wars that marked the era. These conflicts propelled a political shift that was

[41] Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 61.
[42] John R. Gillis, *Youth and History. Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 1.

increasingly relying on the younger generation. As such, youth ceased to be merely a stage of naivety; it emerged as a manifestation of the "regenerative force"[43] driving nations forward.

As such, the standard age in European and American modernist literature is one that we would confidently place in the category of "youth" today. Similarly, modernism itself becomes a "regenerative force" against classical and naturalistic realism: it speaks through and with the aid of "youth", but it also contributes to its reconfiguration as a creative and revolutionary force. Our contemporary comprehension of youth and its connection with the aspiration to travel, as depicted in Romanian modernist literature, not only stems from our current understanding of travel but also results from the effective establishment of early 20th-century modernity in the collective mindset. The modernist character travelling is a significant indication of the blurring boundaries between the secure realm of bourgeois interiors and the public sphere, a favoured space for social interactions. This phenomenon eloquently reflects the impact of modernity in the collective imagination, and underscores the role that literature plays in shaping and preserving the memory of both modernity and the collective imagination.

Derived from the logic of what James Buzzard terms the "Grand Tour ideology",[44] preceding mass tourism and leading European elites primarily to Italy from the 17th century onward, characters in Romanian modernist novels who embark on journeys after World War I are primarily motivated by the need to break free from the social constraints and norms of their original community. Their aim is to embrace a cosmopolitan experience as global citizens. If interwar characters were traveling freely, seldom providing details of the borders they cross or the means by which they do so (with occasional exceptions, such as Panait Istrati's narrator in *În lumea Mediteranei*), this can likely be attributed to the liberalization of migration on 20 April 1925. As Sorin Negruți points out, with the liberalization, the sole restriction became the financial status of the emigrant:

> "The law governing migrants is enacted, proclaiming freedom for both emigration and immigration but with specific limitations. While restrictions for emigration were mainly influenced by the emigrants' financial status, immigration faced a more stringent control, prohibiting entry into Romania for those unable to work, individuals without a profession, and those deemed as dangerous – the latter group being barred even in transit."[45]

[43] Ibid., 95.

[44] James Buzzard, "The Grand Tour and after (1660–1840)," 42.

[45] Original text: "La 20 aprilie 1925 se emite legea pentru reglementarea migranţilor, prin care emigrarea şi imigrarea erau declarate libere, cu anumite restricţii. Dacă, la emigrare, îngrădirile erau determinate, în principal, de starea materială a emigranţilor, la imigrare se stabilea un control mult mai riguros, interzicându-se intrarea pe teritoriul României a persoanelor aflate în incapacitatea de a munci, a celor fără profesie, precum şi a celor consideraţi periculoşi – aceştia din urmă nefiind admişi nici măcar în tranzit" [m.t.]. Sorin Negruți, "Cetăţenie şi migraţie în România în perioada 1865–1938," 213.

Masculine and Feminine Cosmopolitanism

One of the first cosmopolitan women in Romanian literature is Dridri, the protagonist of Vasile Alecsandri's eponymous novel published in serial form in 1871, in *Revista Contimporană*. While male characters dominate the canonical Romanian modernist novel, cosmopolitanism is a trait more closely associated with women. The reason is that women appear in a patriarchal and property-driven society to be less attached to the land than men. Dridri, whose full name is Marie Angélique Chataignez, is a Frenchwoman born in Bordeaux and an actress at the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris. Despite the nationalization of her name, Dridri lacks features that would indicate her French origins. She is "so Parisian in spirit, so Romanian at heart"[46] as is "European"[47] Sarah from *Trupul care își caută sufletul* (1932) by Sarina Cassvan. Born in Romania to an Italian father and a mother hailing from Russia, the protagonist in Sarina Cassvan's novel, named Sarah, after her maternal grandmother, invites readers to infer her nationality ("I'll let you unravel the issue of my nationality"[48]) as she identifies herself as "European".

Dridri's connection to the Romanian space is established through her friendship with Vali, a Romanian boyar from Iași. This relationship is mentioned in the middle of the novel when, after the bankruptcy of Count de Farol, her protector in Paris, Dridri moves to London with Lord Arthur B., with whom she chooses to live, for financial reasons. Dridri's impressions of her stay in London, recorded in a letter sent to Vali, are valuable from the perspective of the cosmopolitan dimension of the culture she values. Alecsandri's character now ventures into the streets, a gesture typical of early 20th century urban novels and travel literature, where "the modern city is best captured from the point of view of a spectator in motion."[49] Like Adrian in *În lumea Mediteranei* (1934), for whom "all life [in Constantinople] takes place on the streets: you work, eat, sleep, and have fun, sometimes, in the company of scrawny dogs,"[50] Dridri gauges the pulse of London through a stroll in public space: "How sad London is! What a mechanical nation, what different customs from ours! Here, joy seems like a foreign import because the only people heard speaking and laughing in the streets are the French."[51] The Romanian cosmopolitan novel not only incorporates typologies of representation seen in characters and settings from Western literature but also, at a deeper level, embraces an anthropological perspective. The classic picaresque, which traditionally involves travel between settlements, has transformed into an urban picaresque. This shift arises from the

[46] Alecsandri, *Dridri,* 381 [m.t.].
[47] Sarina Cassvan, *Trupul care își caută sufletul. Reportaj sentimental* (Bucharest: Editura „Cartea Românească", 1932), 6 [m.t.].
[48] *Ibid*., 6 [m.t.].
[49] Scott McCracken, "Imagining the Modernist City," in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Andrew Thacker (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 646.
[50] Panait Istrati, *În lumea Mediteranei. Răsărit de soare*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura „Cartea Românească", 2011 [1936]), 22 [m.t.].
[51] Alecsandri, *Dridri*, 420 [m.t.].

understanding that urban living does not imply a sedentary lifestyle but rather constant movement, involving both the transient subject and the ever-changing urban landscapes. This evolution aligns with urbanization trends, which, to varying degrees of precision, can be linked with modernization.

As the narrative aligns temporally with the Wallachian Revolution of 1848, the critique conveyed by the statement "What a machinelike nation!"[52] can be linked to the impact of the Industrial Revolution. The narrator emphasizes that this era heralds significant transformations: "the English don't stroll, but everyone rushes about with business in mind, thinking about money and following their favourite precept that «Time is money», as they have monetized time."[53] That was the era when travel was still idealized, viewed as a privilege reserved for the upper classes, and when domestic trips were gaining popularity among the middle class. For example, the father in *Părinți și copii* (1907) by Sofia Nădejde, saves money so that his children can afford a trip to the mountains.[54] In Dridri's case, it is no longer about Grand Tours; it is simply about the traveller's superiority over the environments one enters. The modern traveller does not necessarily belong to the dominant classes, nor educates oneself solely through travel; instead, they find themselves in a position to observe and compare cultures.

As tourism and professional migration become more prevalent, there is a heightened awareness of hierarchies and social differences. This awareness contributes to a more faithful representation of travel experiences, which go beyond mere perception to reflection. Dridri, in the letter, highlights the emergence of class consciousness as a significant aspect. One of the factors that makes London unappealing to Dridri is the conspicuous gap between social categories:

> "Here is the place of the most exaggerated contrasts, of fabulous wealth and sordid misery. Aristocracy is displayed in Hyde Park with shining carriages, each drawn by two powdered lackeys, while the poor with bare feet are wrapped in some ragged clothes that surpass the harlequin's mantle in their motley appearance."[55]

Another important aspect to review in relation to the modernity of this narrative from a cosmopolitan perspective is the creation of an urban binomial formed by two of the most important artistic capitals of the late 19th century:[56] Paris and London. As pointed out by Scott

[52] Ibid., 420.
[53] Ibid., 420.
[54] Sofia Nădejde, *Părinți și copii* (Bucharest: Publisol 2022 [1907]), 167.
[55] Original text: "Aice e locul contrasturilor cele mai exagerate, a bogăției fabuloase și a mizeriei sordide, aristocrația se arată la Hyde Park în carete strălucitoare cu câte doi lachei pudruiți îndărăpt și săracii cu picioarele goale sînt înveliți în niște rufe peticoase care întrec mantaua arlechinului prin împestrițarea lor" [m.t.]. Alecsandri, *Dridri*, 420.
[56] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, transl. by M. B. DeBevoise, (USA: Harvard College, 2004[1999]), 1-6.

McCracken, after 1871, the proliferation of railway lines means that "no European city could be imagined except in relation to its peers."[57] Nevertheless, the allure of major capitals, particularly Paris, persists, endowing them with an exceptional status. As we advance into the 20th century, nevertheless, modernist characters never limit their travels to a single destination: Sarah, from Sarina Cassvan's *Trupul care își caută sufletul (1932)* travels to Venice, Florence, and Rome before reaching Paris; Dan, from Cezar Petrescu's *Baletul mecanic* (1931) lives in Nice, Monte Carlo, Cannes; the protagonist in Felix Aderca's *Omul descompus* (1925) travels to Paris, then to the Midi, then to Calafat, Craiova; Adrian Zografi, Panait Istrati's character, explores the Arab world – Egypt (Cairo), Lebanon, Syria (Damascus) and so on; Ștefan and Arabela from Mihail Sebastian's novel *Femei* (1934) tour Europe, collecting "romances from everywhere, outdated ones, from England, Germany, France."[58]

The modern city is not only dependent on the relationships between human subjects and places, but, as Henri Lefebvre notes, "on relation of immediacy, of direct relations between persons and groups."[59] Characters embarking on journeys, whether for life enrichment or employment opportunities, invariably belong to one or more local communities, comprising acquaintances, friends, and strangers. As the diversity of public spaces expands, these connections multiply, and the private space dissolves into the public sphere.

Because Paris exerts the greatest fascination for Romanian writers, Dridri prefers the French to the English in London. Visiting art galleries or tourist attractions is of little importance to these cosmopolitan characters because their engagement with the spaces they visit does not require canonical cultural interfaces that would only slow down any ethnological observation. They typically assume the roles of locals, leisurely navigating through familiar streets. For instance, the map of Paris depicted in André Gide's *Falsificatorii de bani* (1925) can seamlessly align with the one portrayed by Mihail Sebastian in *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit* (1932) or in *Femei* (1934). These characters encounter the same individuals, expand their circle of acquaintances through mutual friends, frequent preferred socializing spaces, choose specific observation posts in cafes or restaurants, and indulge in foods exclusively associated with the Parisian experience. Here is the full evocation of the Parisian experience of one of Mihail Sebastian's protagonists:

> "I sometimes find myself thinking about Paris, dreaming of a return there, picturing myself on those streets that I love so much, that their memory moves me like the memory of people. But I must confess this foolishness, that the first thing I would be delighted to do there is to enter a charcuterie and ask for a quarter of céleri rémoulade for 1 franc and 25 centimes. Here in Romania, I have explained the

[57] Scott McCracken, "Imagining the Modernist City," in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Andrew Thacker (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism* (Ofxord: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2010) 642.
[58] Mihail Sebastian, "Femei," in *Fragmente dintr-un carnet găsit. Femei* (Bucharest: Cartex, 2018 [1934]), 181.
[59] Henri Lefvebre, *Writing on Cities*, transl. and ed. by Eleonore Kofman, Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996 [1967]), 100.

> formula of this dish to all my hosts, but despite all the experiences, the celery with mustard sauce served to me was by no means the spicy, aromatic, and invigorating céleri rémoulade that brought joy to our dinners on Rue d'Alezia (sic), on the 6th floor, in a small room, under the gaze of the understanding Arabella, especially when they were so innocent and inexpensive."[60]

The poverty of Paris, observed from peripheral regions such as Romania, for which Paris becomes, in the late 19th century, the "world republic of letters" (Pascale Casanova), is approached from a rather aesthetic perspective. As Pascale Casanova notes, it is something "elegant" and "elective",[61] ensuring the possibility of living "la vie d'artiste".[62] Ștefan, the final protagonist in Mihail Sebastian's novel *Femei*, undergoes a transformation from a "serious gentleman" and a "doctor expert diplomat"[63] to the companion of Arabella, a cabaret singer. Together, they embark on a European career as musicians. Before that, though, the couple faces financial problems and moves "somewhere near Porte de Versailles"[64], into a "dubious society that smelled of poverty" consisting of "painters, poets, and singers". They dine in small restaurants, plan to travel in the second class on the metro, and Arabela suggests to Ștefan to smoke Gauloises because "they are cheaper and more flavourful."[65]

In Paris, the cosmopolitan character's poverty is portrayed as a matter of choice. Conversely, in Panait Istrati's *În lumea Mediteranei*, characters are confined to rigid social classes. Despite this, the narratives of travelling the the world converge through a shared existence, one in which the boundaries between the two dimensions of life blend. The protagonist, Adrian Zografi, forms a friendship with Musa aboard the ship they travel on. Even though the later laments being left with "a paltry pound sterling",[66] he experiences a genuine Turkish adventure in the company of his friend. Here is the complete quote:

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[60] Original text: "Mi se întâmplă uneori să mă gândesc la Paris, să visez o reîntoarcere acolo, să mă revăd pe străzile acelea pe care le iubesc atâta, încât amintirea lor mă emoționează ca amintirea unor oameni, dar trebuie să mărturisesc această prostie, că primul lucru pe care m-aș bucura să-l fac acolo, ar fi să intru într-o *charcuterie* și să cer de 1 franc și 25 de centime, un sfert de *céleri rémoulade*. Aici, în România, am explicat tuturor gazdelor mele formula mâncării ăsteia, dar cu toate experiențele făcute, țelina cu sos de muștar, care mi se servea, nu era nici pe departe acel *céleri rémoulade* picant, aromat și stimulator, care făcea bucuria dineurilor noastre, din Rue d'Alezia (sic), de la al 6-lea etaj, într-o cameră scundă, sub privirea Arabelei, înțelegătoare a tuturor lăcomiilor, cu atât mai mult când ele erau atât de nevinovate și de ieftine" [m.t.]. Sebastian, *Femei,* 165.

[61] Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* 42.

[62] Ibid., 42.

[63] Sebastian, *Femei*, 161.

[64] Ibid., p. 163.

[65] Ibid., 162. [m.t]

[66] Panait Istrati, *În lumea Mediteranei,* 27 [m.t.].

> "We strolled around like Turkish people, making fun of the tourists who rushed around, in a crowd, not wanting to miss anything from what their guide was chattering about. We ate a tremendous pilaf, with lamb meat, a kebab, even some grilled meat, and we drank a few glasses of *rachiu* that made us dizzy. And, since we were in the mood for antics, we bought fezzes. Thus adorned, Musa looked like a true Turk, because of his hooked nose, black eyes and eyebrows, and brought-in chin. I held on to it everywhere, and despite all his advice, I made the mistake of smoking a waterpipe just to tease him. I exaggerated, though, and the «bravery» turned my stomach upside down. I threw up: pilaf, kebab, and *rachiu*. We returned to the ship when the siren sounded for the second time, and we went to bed right away."[67]

Capturing the essence distinctive to Panait Istrati's literature, this scene documents the atmosphere of the place, gastronomic specifics, clothing details, and bodily reactions. The paradox lies in the fact that, despite ridiculing the tourist-led crowd, the two protagonists undergo an experience akin to what only an oriental space could provide in terms of gastronomic and clothing experience in the first half of the 20th century. Similar circumstances unfold in *Baletul Mecanic* by Cezar Petrescu, another example of a destination associated with a certain type of experience: Cannes provides the characters with a trendy cocktail, "startling, with very strong and bitter spirits, with a jelly-like oyster pickled in this mixture."[68]

Conclusions

The universe in Romanian modernist literature expands through the rapid crossing of national borders, either out of necessity due to economic migration or for cultural purposes stemming from the development of the tourism industry. The Romanian modernist character seldom records travel notes or does so very rarely. They are not mere tourists exploring foreign lands; instead, they embody a citizen of the universe (primarily within Europe), where stepping into the world does not entail abandoning a home or lacking a country. On the contrary, it is a kind of return to a form of daily life with which they identify much better than with the confined space of their home, which blocks their access to the world. They live in the world beyond national borders surrounded by groups of friends and acquaintances, within a public space where expressing preferences and desires is unrestricted.

[67] Original text: "Ne-am plimbat ca niște curcani, bătându-ne joc de turiștii care alergau, buluc, să nu le scape nimic din ceeace le sporovăia ghidul. Mâncarăm un pilaf strașnic, cu carne de oaie, un kebab, chiar niște mușchi la frigare și băurăm câteva păhărele cu rachiu, care ne amețiră de-abinelea. Și cum aveam gust de pozne, ne-am cumpărat fesuri. Astfel împopoțonat, Musa părea un Turc adevărat, din cauza nasului său coroiat, a ochilor și sprâncenelor negre și a bărbiei aduse. Îi ținui hangul pretutindeni și cu toate sfaturile sale, făcui greșeala și fumai o narghilea, numai să-l fac praf. M-am încăpățânat, însă, pe pielea mea, deoarece „vitejia" îmi întoarse stomacul pe dos. Am dat afară: pilaf, kebab și rachiu. Ne-am reîntors la vapor, când sirena suna a doua oară și ne-am culcat numaidecât" [m.t.]. Ibid., 24.

[68] Cezar Petrescu, *Baletul Mecanic* (Bacău: Editura Junimea, 1987 [1931]), 43 [m.t.].

Therefore, we can assert that the intensified forms of migration, which began in the late 19th century, were amplified in the interwar period through the liberalization of borders, the opening of navigation on the Danube River, and the development of the tourism industry. These developments occur simultaneously with the literary field's process of relativizing and negotiating the two dimensions of modern life, domestic and public. However, the evaluation of this acceleration is not solely positive: Romanian modernity is paradoxical. The velocity of movement generates a vertigo that frequently turns into a creative impetus, giving rise to a necessity for personal and intimate notations that serve to shield the threatened self from the process of social and economic modernization.