

THE HISTORICAL LITERATURE OF NICOLAE FILIMON AND THE RECONCILIATION OF REALISM WITH THE TRADITION OF THE POPULAR NOVEL

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Abstract This paper explores the historical prose of Nicolae Filimon, emphasizing the reconciliation of realism with the tradition of the popular novel. It examines how Filimon's work reflects the evolving Romanian literary landscape, asserting that while he embodies Balzacian realism, he also addresses socio-political issues through a satirical lens. The analysis highlights the tensions between narrative techniques and the superficiality of character portrayals, revealing a dual legacy of moral critique and social commentary. Ultimately, the study positions Filimon within the broader context of 19th-century Romanian literature, illustrating the genre's role in shaping cultural modernity and audience engagement.

Keywords Historical novel, novella, realism, romanticism, narrative techniques.

The Commercial Aura of History

The historical novel is a literary form that gains popularity by inducing an impression of historical difference. It amplifies this impression by appealing to the normative experiences of everyday and contemporary life. This practice of interpretation has become a benchmark in the reading habits of an audience captivated by narratives of the past. Certainly, early Romanian historical narratives, novellas, and stories that nurture the evolution of the novel often challenge the idea of historical difference. Under the influence of romantic historicism, it is not the temporal distance or the multitude of centuries separating the present from the past that matters, but the story that acquires moral, ideological, or sensational attributes. The protean nature of the Romanian historical novel throughout the long nineteenth century is supported by the subversive potential of a literary form that utilizes conventions specific to other genres to construct dynamic narratives that engage a broad audience. The challenges in defining the historical novel stem from the genre's volatile and expansive boundaries, which amalgamate different thematic configurations,

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discursive strategies common to other literary patterns, and narrative conventions that shift the past from the pages of obscure chronicles to those of novels intended to delight the curiosity of readers for whom reading becomes both entertainment and an aesthetic experience.

The array of aesthetic, intellectual, political, and social phenomena that led the Romanian space to the construction of cultural modernity has had implications beyond literature. Mutations also occur in how literature is understood and represented. From the classical image of literature as a means of spiritual, intellectual, and moral perfection, and from the pragmatic perspective that sees it as a source of scientific or useful information for daily life, reading becomes an object of delight for the imagination and a source of entertainment. Whether discussing translations of the classics of Enlightenment literature or original texts, the book, once a luxury item published in sumptuous editions and small print runs in the early nineteenth century, transforms into a widely circulated commodity, affecting the quality of materials used in the publishing process. The consolidation of the bourgeoisie and the refinement of commercial means reflect upon the appearance of the book and literary production. Despite what has become a cliché in the interpretation of the early Romanian novel, popular or consumable literature, regardless of the label assigned to it, is not dedicated to the simple person or the masses. It is targeted only to the two privileged social categories that represent the literate minority familiar with the Western novel: the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Part of the negative reputation that the novel acquires, as easy entertainment harmful to high culture and a dissolvent of morals and traditions, stems precisely from this accessibility and secularization of literature.

Reading is no longer an elitist ritual but a symptom of cultural modernity, akin to reading newspapers. Not coincidentally, the publication of novels in serialized formats or facsimiles further advances this process of lowering literature to the level of a social practice. Canonical literature ironically reflects this mutation that affects the image of the act of reading. The character Zița in Caragiale's comedy *O noapte furtunoasă* confesses that reading the popular novel written by Éugène Sue, *The Mysteries of Paris*, served as a remedy for boredom three times, bringing the act of reading into a self-pitying conversation with the ease of gossip:

“ZIȚA: Wait, let me tell you... But don't ask me, dear, to recount what I experienced with that brute! Just you wait, it's something else... Can you believe it, the scoundrel dared to block my way and try to assault me! Just you wait, dear, I'll tell you, and you'll be shocked, I assure you. Just earlier, I was sitting at home. As you know, God made it so that auntie turns in for the night early. I was absolutely tipsy. The dramas of Paris that have come out so far—I've read them three times. What can I do? I had nothing else to read.”¹

¹ Original text: “ZIȚA: Stai să-ți spui... Dar nu mă-ntrebi, țăto, să-ți povestesc ce am pățit cu mitocanul! Să vezi, e halima... Auzi, mizerabilul! să-ndrăznească să-mi ție drumul ca să-mi facă un atac... Stai, țăto, să-ți spui și să te crucești, nu altceva. Mai adineaori ședeam acasă. Tușica, cum știi c-a făcut-o Dumnezeu, se culcă o dată cu găinile. Eram ambetată absolut. *Dramele Parisului* câte au ieșit până acuma le-am citit de trei ori. Ce să fac? N-aveam ce citi.” I. L. Caragiale, *Opere. Teatru* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat Pentru Literatură și Artă, 1959), 33.

The stylistic virtuosity and the message of ethical conformity take a backseat to the elaborate intrigues that can become subjects of discussion in society. This cultural phenomenon of the serialized novel precisely anticipates this broad social participation in the literary circuit, which starts with the feuilleton or facsimile and later evolves into full volumes. Serializing the text into small doses regulates the tension and curiosity of an audience that becomes a participant in the success of a fictional narrative. The dominance of intrigue in reading preferences continues to be viewed as an effect of demystifying the act of reading until the early twentieth century. In the novel *Patimi* (1903), Sofia Nădejde uses the reading habits of Matilda and Maria to highlight the antithetical spiritual gifts of the two sisters:

“Lady Matilda, before the boyar arrived, took to reading a novel. She wasn’t really keen on reading, which is why she skipped the descriptions and was more interested in the intrigue of the novel. As for the beauty of the descriptions, the elegance of the style, the chosen language in which the author wrote, she had no idea. Even more so, she didn’t concern herself with the psychology of characters, nor with the analysis of traits. Whether she read a novel by the best author or listened to Anica recounting a plot from the village, it was all the same to her. When she saw Maria reading a novel attentively, marking beautiful passages, apt comparisons, and figures with a pencil, she could hardly contain her annoyance. — What? Are you learning it by heart, sister? she would say jokingly.”²

The fascination with stylistic qualities and the depth of literature measures the refinement of Maria’s character, while Matilda’s concern for discovering intrigues in both books and village life reveals her self-centeredness and superficiality. This same process of secularizing representations of reading is reflected in how history is imagined. The historical novel activates a mechanism for the secularization of history, just as the development of commercial strategies has fuelled the transfiguration of the meanings of the book. In the novel, history loses its almost sacred aura of being a succession of significant events, recorded in chronicles that are accessible only to those chosen to study them. Historical fiction reminds the audience of a tangible human history, characterized by a series of underhanded intrigues, which explains the popularity of novels that describe alternative histories, events, and fictional characters associated with real personalities from the past. Walter Benjamin describes, through the concept of the “messianic time,” this way of understanding history as a transcendence of the reductionist meaning of cause-and-effect relationships popularized by historicism:

² Original text: “Cucoana Matilda, până să vină boierul, luă să citească un roman. Nu prea avea spor la citit, de aceea sărea descrierile și se interesa mai mult de intriga romanului. Cât despre frumusețea descrierilor, despre eleganța stilului, despre limba aleasă în care scria autorul, habar n-avea. Cu atât mai mult nu-și bătea capul cu psihologia persoanelor, nici cu analiza caracterelor. Ori ar fi citit un roman de cel mai bun autor, ori ar fi ascultat pe Anica povestind o intrigă din sat, pentru dumneaei era tot una. Când o vedea pe Maria citind cu luare aminte un roman, însemnând cu creionul bucățile frumoase, comparațiile și figurile nimerite, nu mai putea de necaz. — Ce? Îl înveți pe de rost, soro? zicea ea în bătaie de joc.” Sofia Nădejde, *Patimi. Roman din viața românească* (Petrești: Publisol, 2021), 129-130.

“Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary.”³

In the essay “On the Concept of History,” included in the volume *Illuminations*, the philosopher emphasizes the relative character of the selection of sequences from the past that come to be posthumous history after other events that separate them by centuries. History appears as a process of reevaluation and reconsideration of the past. The historical novel operates under the same principle of selection and continuous revaluation of the past, but it takes sufficient liberties with facts by virtue of the imaginative modes it can draw upon. Nonetheless, the historical novel involves the application, knowledge, and understanding of more representational conventions of the past than in the case of other genres.

According to Jerome de Groot, through reading a historical novel, the reader consents to engage with a set of tropes, settings, and ideas that are foreign and strange to them but belong to the genre of fiction they are reading. For this reason, although it appeals to the realistic conventions of depicting the world and social relationships, a historical novel appears as a more nuanced literary form in terms of temporal distance and inherent conceptual differences than other types of literary fiction: “[...] the historical novel as a form is something which demands an unusual response from its audience: an active response, at the least, and a sense of otherness and difference when reading”⁴. Thus, the audience that enjoys novels becomes more aware of the imaginative stakes that attempt to describe and explain something other than contemporary knowledge and experience, i.e., the past. In de Groot’s view, the historical novel reader undergoes a process of estrangement from the familiar horizon through a reception process based on the conjunction of the fictional strange with the factual authentic. This consciousness of historical difference and estrangement does not manifest to the same degree in literatures with a well-established tradition of historical fiction. In the nineteenth century, the Romanian historical novel invents a form modelled after translations from the inventory of Western novels and simultaneously creates an audience gradually made aware of how its conventions function.

The historical novel experiences an initial stage of its evolution in the Romanian space in the form of the *romanț*, a term that has become pejorative due to its association with the occurrence of a sentimental-melodramatic horizon. This type of fiction is generically flexible and infused with recipes gleaned from translations. Its thematic configuration was not considered worthy of the rationalist and civilizing ideas associated with Enlightenment literature and, subsequently, with realist novels. The novella is the intermediate stage that prepares for the rise of the historical novel and coexists with the *romanț*. A possible explanation for the co-occurrence

³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Schocken Books: New York, 2007), 263.

⁴ Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London and New York: Routledge: 2010), 6.

of novella and *romanț* during the period of 1850-1880 is the association of the first term with a more noble literary form, one with a tradition that solidified during the revolutionary period, while the latter is labeled as a hallmark of romantic sensationalism. However, the *romanț* demonstrates its complexity and thematic and stylistic versatility early on, blending conventions specific to multiple genres. The hybrid nature of the Romanian historical novel in the nineteenth century is largely due to the generic flexibility of the *romanț*, which successfully captures the literary preferences of the era.

The Historical Novel: Between Fiction and Evocative Work

In the Romanian context, among those who have commented on the viability of the fictional model of historical evocation with documentary aspirations, G. Ibrăileanu also serves as a guiding figure for the “Viața Românească” journal. Ibrăileanu addresses in his article the challenges of the aesthetics of evocation, questioning the validity of an independently existing narrative genre that imposes so many demands for representation. Harmonizing the various gnoseological directions arising from the debate between documentary value, the authenticity of factual data, and the fictional domain proves challenging in the writer’s vision; yet, the critic from Iași admits that the limits of historical knowledge can be transcended by mediating the poetic factor:

“The use of the past—with the aim of representing life as it once was—is, in my view, an artistic error, because the past cannot be authentically reconstructed by anyone. One must either incorporate contemporary life into the past, rendering the use of history purposeless and resulting in a hybrid work, or avoid contemporary existence altogether and attempt to recreate the life of that time—a task that ultimately fails, as such a life cannot be accurately represented by someone who does not truly know it. Instead, this leads to the creation of a conventional and inauthentic existence.”⁵

After analyzing the possibilities of the occurrence or co-occurrence of the past and the present in historical-inspired narratives, Ibrăileanu offers two ways to reconcile the inexhaustible resources of the past with the appropriate artistic manner to render these contents as faithfully as possible. The first aesthetic solution proposed by the critic is Aristotelian in origin and concerns the writer’s thematic choice, as the author must embody the constant spiritual fund—the eternal and universal aspects of humanity — “the great, primary feelings” such as hatred, love, and jealousy.⁶ The mentor of the group from “Viața Românească” journal nuances his theory, extending it with considerations regarding the period decor that will be depicted in the historical novel. Ibrăileanu

⁵ Original text: “Întrebuințarea trecutului – cu pretenția de a reda viața din trecut – o socot ca o greșală artistică, pentru că trecutul nu-l poate reda nimene!... Ori pui în trecut viața de azi, și utilizarea trecutului n-are nici un rost – și opera e hibridă, ori te ferești de viața de azi și-ți închipuiești că redai viața de atunci – pe care n-o redai, că n-o cunoști – ci crezi astfel o viață convențională, neadevărată”, G. Ibrăileanu, *Spre roman* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1972), 32.

⁶ Ibid., 36.

recommends a realistic depiction of the atmosphere, clothing, and local color, as well as adherence to the principle of historical accuracy in his descriptions. However, “if history does not provide them,” it is the novelist’s task to use “an approximate decor, in any case, different from that of today.”⁷ Therefore, it is imperative for the writer to know the recorded historical truth, but in the absence of documented attestations, he can fill the gaps by resorting to imagination and creative fantasy, provided he maintains a balanced depiction of reality, drawing a visible line of demarcation from descriptions of the contemporary world. Fidelity to historical events is a condition under which authors like N. D. Popescu, Al. Pelimon, N. Filimon, N. Rădulescu-Niger, and Ciru Oeconomu take sufficient liberties, being more interested in a behind-the-scenes history that intersects with the official one, enhancing its sensationalist aura. The second path proposed by G. Ibrăileanu requires the artist “to depict feelings primarily through action, not through their analysis, for action is more germinating than the psychological motives that determine it.”⁸ The epic formula recommended by the Iași critic is complex, negotiating the freedom of action of the faculties of invention, which are restricted compared to the expansiveness of reality imitation.

The inclination towards realism in Ibrăileanu’s “recipe” is also justified by his admiration for Tolstoy’s work, which succeeded in refining the formula of the historical realist novel through a balanced technique of inserting imaginative creations against the solid background of the past’s veracity. Moreover, these theoretical guidelines emerged after the publication of Nicolae Filimon’s novel *Ciocoi vechi și noi* and the works of Duiliu Zamfirescu. By this time, the normative system of Romanian literature had become established through custom, and the evolution of the novelistic form could be traced based on these examples. The belated emergence of the Romanian novel and its narrative tectonics is often attributed to the inexperience of early Romanian writers, who struggled with the inconsistency of a nascent tradition. The ambivalence and unique characteristics of the cultural paradigms within the Romanian principalities would have significant consequences for the Romanian literary phenomenon, as noted by G. Ibrăileanu. He offers a phrase that precisely reflects this void in experimental writing practice, explaining the delay in the consolidation of the novelistic form by encouraging what he called an “unripe literature,” composed of mere writing exercises. In the view of the Poporanist mentor, the preferred techniques and expressive resources of Romanian authors had not reached full development, which also induces the impression of dilettantism that hovers over our first novels. Nicolae Manolescu also subscribes to this line of inquiry, studying the “naivety” of the pioneering Romanian novel. He nuances this clarifying line and speaks of a “change in writing mentality” that favors the emergence of a new genre, stating that “all our novels up to *Ciocoi vechi și noi* are, in whole or in part, adaptations. Large passages are simply translated.”⁹

The boundary between originality and adaptation is fluid; often, plot schemes are borrowed and modeled to correspond to the historical and social reality of the Romanian reader.

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ G. Ibrăileanu, *Opere IX* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974), 405.

⁹ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe: eseu despre romanul românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 2018), 55.

The names of characters and the places where the action takes place are usually localized, even in the most "Europeanist" subgenres, such as mystery novels, which generated a veritable series. Novels such as *Misterele Bucureștilor* (The Mysteries of Bucharest, 1862), *Mistere din București* (Mysteries from Bucharest, 1862), and even *Misterele Ploieștilor* (The Mysteries of Ploiești, 1892) show an openness to adapting a successful formula and transforming it into a source of original creation. The numerous correspondences with texts from sensational French literature are, in essence, no longer surprising to researchers of the phenomenon, for whom the fragment of a novel by Ion Ghica, titled *Istoria lui Alecu*, appears as an obvious calque, in the good descent of sentimental-decadent mannerism. The same critic establishes the premise that, in fact, theoretical formulas and forms of literary import, translations and adaptations, ultimately guided Romanian literature toward the coagulation of the genre, and "to look for autochthonous sources would be useless."¹⁰

The conclusion reached by Manolescu's theoretical endeavour is that, following the path left by the fragile autochthonous novelistic tradition, the appearance of the new epic species must be achieved through a distancing from national literary customs because "neither the literature of the chroniclers, folklore, nor even medieval novels (the commonly referred to as 'popular books') can explain Manoil or *Misterele Bucureștilor*." Borrowings, translations, and adaptations are the elements that definitively and programmatically orient the literary-aesthetic options of our first novelists, encouraging an expansion of the modalities and expressive resources of Romanian literature, a fact also signalled by Nicolae Iorga:

"The trend towards translations, which began to serve the greatest benefit of a literature seeking new forms of expression and venturing down untrodden paths, found itself, in this way, redeemed through hasty renderings in a careless Romanian that was neither old nor new—perhaps, however, much better than the translations that would follow—of transient works called to life by sentimental or 'social' romantic fashions, destined to fade away along with them."¹¹

Iorga indicates the features that circumscribed the atmosphere of the early nineteenth century, prefiguring the appearance of the novel in Romanian literature, which developed in parallel with the literary language and its expressive flexibility. From translations, adaptations, and transparent borrowings of subjects and plots to the novel was only a step away. Novels or Romanian sketches of novels, disparate projects, or fragmentary but cohesive texts invested with such autonomy and relative originality thus begin to trace the developmental directions of autochthonous literature. Romanian culture is thus connected to the artistic trends of the West while refining the demands of public taste for the hybrid species that was gaining more and more ground.

¹⁰ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca*, 55.

¹¹ Original text: "Curentul spre traduceri, început spre cel mai mare folos al unei literaturi care căuta forme de expresie nouă și se îndrepta pe drumuri încă neumblate, se mîntuia astfel, prin redarea pripită, într-o românească neîngrijită, nici veche, nici nouă – poate însă totuși mult mai bună decît a traducerilor următoare –, a unor cărți trecătoare, pe care moda romantică sentimentală ori «socială» le chemase la viață, și care erau să piară odată cu dînsa." Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii românești în veacul al XIX-lea*, Vol. III (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1983), 116.

The Influences of Romantic Historiography

The vitalistic tendencies of the first Romanian historical novels reside precisely in the remnants of Enlightenment thought and in the spectacular development of historiography. Historiography offered not only a wealth of life material rich in imagological representations and philosophical arguments but also a clear perspective on the distinct evolutionary itinerary of the nation. In *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács describes the moment of activating interest in history from the evolution of nationalist movements as an alloy of “regeneration and reaction” that awakens the sense for experiencing history: “The call for independence and national specificity is necessarily linked to the revival of national history, to the memory of the past, of past greatness, of moments of national humiliation, regardless of whether this leads to progressive or reactionary ideologies.”¹² According to the theorist’s vision, this experience of history by the masses favours the rise of the national element and attracts claims related to social reorganization. Nicolae Bălcescu joins the same direction of the apostolate of promoting national history, arguing that historiography should not be seen as an end in itself but in the perspective of support for high patriotic ideals. It has the role of serving popular demands, of legitimizing the rights of Romanians, instilling in them the thirst for freedom, unity, and national dignity. Like Kogălniceanu, Bălcescu perceived history not as a succession of reigns and political intrigues but as an ideal projection, likely to offer examples of moral conduct and particularities of local colour.

Paradoxically, history, a supposedly objective science, acquires, through this cultural-patriotic determination, the attribute of subjectivization, also facing a methodological resurrection that sought to impose the tutelage of values that extend beyond scientific definitions. This perspective on the science of history explains not only the emergence of the historical novel genre but also the versatility of the romantic historical narrative style, with the two resembling each other through a reciprocal exchange of discursive strategies and expressive techniques. The tensions arising from their own cultural contradictions fuelled transformations in national aesthetic taste within the Romanian space. After the unfolding of the revolutionary movements of 1848, the social, political, and ideological mutations that occurred invariably prompted changes at the cultural level, as “any change that happens in the system of government or in the morals of a people must necessarily lead to revolutions in its taste.”¹³ Since the evolution of cultural forms runs parallel to the history of society, the artistic ideologies embraced by Romanian writers respond to the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic needs of a clearly defined historical moment. The transformations that gave rise to the formula of the Romanian historical novel favoured both the heightened sentimentalism of revolutionary romanticism and the edge of mimetic realism, each with its own transitional phases.

¹² Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1989), 26.

¹³ Teodor Vârgolici, *Aspecte ale romanului românesc din secolul al XIX-lea* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1985), 222.

As expected, the Romanian novel of evocation from its initial stage of evolution, like any initiator of a paradigm, does not escape rhetorical awkwardness or compositional errors, with the exercise of objectivity presenting serious challenges. This striking mixture results from the desire to employ all romantic literary techniques, hoping to captivate the audience to the same extent as the feuilleton novels did, whether read in their original form or in translations created by future novelists—texts that relied on unexpected intersections of lives, intrigues, and passions. The inventory of Romanian works, constructed on a skeleton adorned with melodramatic embellishments in a romantic-sentimental style and those of a documentary nature with claims to fresco, articulated around verifiable narratives with plots grafted onto a deterministic structure, demonstrates that, in the Romanian historical novel, mental and social phenomena find authentic reflection in art when it encompasses a cohesive array of varied representations and rendering techniques. However, the process of refining these modes of illustration is demanding, lengthy, and laborious. Literary history has confirmed this, recognizing Filimon as the first novelist with full rights, although he was preceded by numerous novelistic attempts. Meanwhile, Bolintineanu earned a secondary role with his novels *Manoil* (1855) and *Elena* (1862), completely overshadowed by his poetic works. In this sequence of literary history, it is noteworthy that Filimon's reliance on specific strategies of the sensational novel often goes unnoticed or is deliberately ignored. The relationship between veracity, documentary qualities, and the dynamism of a captivating plot constructs a complete novel, which, however, is not a unique example in the literature of the time. Consequently, the first novelists sought to make an abrupt leap to a comprehensive formula for the novel, utilizing resources derived from poetry, memoirs, short stories, and romantic drama, resulting in a prose of a poetic nature.

From Novella to Novel. N. Filimon's Historical Prose

The realism that captivates the vision of the author of *Ciocolii vechi și noi* is evident. The romantic breath is recognizable in travel impressions and in his first epic compositions, *Mateo Cipriani's*, *Friederich Staaps*, and *Ascanio and Eleonora*, a literary piece that remained unfinished. The hallmark of realism intensifies in the years of artistic maturity reached in *Nenorocirile unui slujnicar*, and *Ciocolii vechi și noi*. It is certain that there is a leap in value from C. Negruzzi's physiologies to the complexity of Filimon's portraits of upstarts and parvenus, proving that Romanian epic diminishes the force of romanticism's shadows and adopts the characters of realism, after the model patented in French literature. Although they are combined, the imprints of romanticism, the strategies of the popular novel, and those of realism are dosed in different intensities without manifesting uniformly, so that, depending on the narrative composition in which they manifest, some take precedence over the others.

The stage of romantic momentum is consumed in the historical short stories from the beginning of Nicolae Filimon's writing career, *Mateo Cipriani* and *Friederich Staaps*, an early stage in the crystallization of the realistic nuclei later developed in the novel. The plot of the short story *Mateo Cipriani* is of an amorous nature, which allows the author to intensely exploit expressive techniques and romantic visions. As Dimitrie Bolintineanu had accustomed his public, Filimon's

heroes in this literary piece are dominated by great ideals and tormenting passions, which they live paroxysmically. The unusual circumstances allow them to highlight a troubled inner universe, leading the sentimental drama down the same path of stereotypical pathos derived from the melodramatic recipe of the genre. The characters in the love scene come from socially contrasting backgrounds and face the intrusion of a set of unforeseen situations, mysteries, and confessions, relying on the inventory of popular, sensational literature. The dream, the oneiric horizon also holds significant weight in the narrative unfolding, along with contrasting settings featuring spectacular and macabre elements.

The protagonist, Mateo Cipriani, is an orphan with select spiritual qualities, corresponding to the protagonists of Eminescu's prose, Dionis and Toma Nour, sharing the same spiritual background. He is found at the door of the chaplain of the Santa Maria della Spina church in Pisa, who will protect him. At fifteen, he becomes "primo organist" and falls passionately and irremediably in love with Countess C who used to attend services. He will send the countess a fiery love letter, as Dionis will also do, and will hide it in her prayer book. After being rejected, he joins, through the chaplain's mediation, the patriotic struggles for the liberation of Italy, like Toma Nour, who will fight for the emancipation of Transylvania in an attempt to give a noble meaning to his existence. The patriotic theme will be valorised through the appeal to unrestrained rhetorical impulses, through which Mateo emphatically justifies the pure essence of the community mission. Filimon invests his character with the attributes of a hero of classical tragedies on a historically processed romantic background, condemning him to a death worthy of this status. Arrested and sentenced to death, carried to the scaffold, Mateo receives his pardon from the hands of his own mother but is stabbed. On his deathbed, it is revealed to him that the old chaplain is his father, in a final dramatic twist.

The romantic substrate and patriotic fabric behind the character of Mateo Cipriani can be interpreted as symbols of the author's artistic solidarity with the desiderata of the 1848 ideology, evidenced by a multitude of passages with critical emphasis and allusive insertions to the precarious state of Romanian society that must, at all costs, be combated. Also interesting is the way in which the musical imaginary is constructed within the short story, subordinated, however, to the pictorial qualities and sentimental imagery, a fact also observed by G. Călinescu, who states in the monograph dedicated to Nicolae Filimon that "Filimon puts in his short story the movement of opera librettos, but in a composition of colourist painter. Passion is analysed under a quadruple aspect: the voluptuousness of music, instrumental and vocal, precocious love, hatred against the tyrant, and vibrant tranquillity in the face of death."¹⁴ The author manages to transmit some pale waves from the grandeur and penetrating emotion of the opera, but these are suffocated under the pressure of theatrical ornamentation and the exaggerations of melodramatic ornamentation.

¹⁴ Original text: "Filimon a pus în nouela lui mișcarea libretelor de operă, însă într-o compoziție de pictor colorist. Pasiunea e analizată sub aspect cvadruplu: voluptatea muzicii, instrumentale și vocale, dragostea precoce, ura împotriva tiranului și liniștea vibrantă în fața morții." G. Călinescu, *Nicolae Filimon* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1959), 81.

The other short story with a pronounced romantic fibre, *Friederich Staaps*, is less narratively cohesive than *Mateo Cipriani*, excessively using the effects of theatricality, building an artificial fictional universe demarcated by exalted states. The plot has two major coordinates, the first being the sentimental life of the protagonist, and the second following the actions dictated to him by his patriotic convictions. Friederich Staaps comes to Halle to continue his studies and joins a conspiratorial group that was preparing the murder of Emperor Napoleon and the liberation of the country from under the yoke of French rule. Events evolve rapidly over the relatively small epic expanse, which leads to a condensation of the circumstances of the realization of the patriotic plan of romantic origin. Through a game of the arbitrariness of fate, members draw lots to determine who will carry out the task of killing the emperor. Friederich becomes the one delegated with the bloody and noble mission, but is caught by the emperor's guards and brought before Napoleon. The hero gives a fiery speech in front of the invader, exposing his reasons and bitter hatred towards the one who had stolen the freedom of his people, inscribed in the laws of nature. Asked by Napoleon about the source of his hatred that impels him to want to end his life, Friederich declaims:

"Well, the reasons that caused the implacable hatred to be born in my soul towards your person are these: I hate you, because, as a son of the people and of freedom, you have used these sacred names to reach the apogee of greatness, and afterwards you betrayed one and crushed the other; I hate you, because you have brought into the bosom of my country murder, desolation and depredation; I hate you, because you have killed the freedom of the German people, because, like a second Attila, you have become the scourge of my country."¹⁵

Magnanimously, from his pedestal, Napoleon offers him the opportunity to save his life by joining his army, but Friederich Staaps refuses, proudly, such a desecration of his ideals. He will be executed and, like Mateo Cipriani, will reiterate the tragic death of the hero of classical drama. Filimon's classicist culture is valorised through the integration of echoes of the ancient tragedy tradition, romantically distilled, which are felt through the introduction of what Aristotle called *hamartia*, the tragic flaw of the hero noble by his nature, an error that originates in his personality and power of judgment: "Someone who is neither distinguished from others by virtue or justice nor falls into misfortune due to malice or baseness, but rather because of a mistake; moreover, a person of stature and good fortune, like Oedipus or Thyestes, or other renowned men from families such as theirs."¹⁶ The character of Napoleon, himself a prototype of romantic literary ideology, is the source of death or deliverance, a solution that repulses the young patriot. Again, the topos of national freedom

¹⁵ Original text: "Ei bine, motivele care au făcut să se nască în sufletul meu ura neplacabilă către persoana voastră sunt acestea: Te urăsc, căci, ca fiu al poporului și al libertății, te-ai servit de aste nume sacre ca să ajungi la apogeul mărireii, iar după aceea ai trădat pe unul și ai strivit pe cealaltă; te urăsc, pentru că ai adus în sinul patriei mele uciderea, dezolațiunea și deprădarea; te urăsc, pentru că ai omorât libertatea poporului german, pentru că, ca un al doilea Attila, te-ai făcut flagelul patriei mele." N. Filimon, *Escursiuni în Germania Meridională. Nuvele* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1984), 132.

¹⁶ Aristotle's *Poetics*. Translated and with a Commentary by George Whalley (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 62.

and that of independence, uttered by the revolutionary generation, are grafted onto fictional subjects placed in another geographical space, probably as a reminiscence of the travels undertaken in Germany and Italy, selecting from the history of these countries episodes that could be painted using romantic tones, in the good tradition of the era. The romanticized historicism is also expressed in the clichéd manner of the 1848 and post-1848 period, illustrating the favourite tendency of Romanian writers of the 19th century. G. Călinescu will emphasize the descriptive inclinations of the composition which manages, despite the resumption of the outdated romantic recipe, to affirm an impressive evocative force: "In general, the local landscape and moral colour, however conventional through the overcoming of romanticism and through patination, is remarkable."¹⁷ Unlike the epic compositions that will follow, in these two short stories a certain autonomy is noted, manifested by the reduction or even elusion of the authorial insertions that will monopolize the chaining of narrative sequences from *The Misfortunes of a Servant* and *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, leaving the characters the possibility to self-characterize through their own actions and replies. For G. Călinescu, the ideological side is one of the most important components of these short stories, Friederich Staaps is composed as an "embodiment of the idea of independence," and in Mateo Cipriani the critic sees a favourable response to the "campaign for the secularization of dedicated monasteries."¹⁸

Although it does not definitively detach itself from the fantasies of the romantic inventory, the novella *Nenorocirile unui Slujnicar* is the first composition that announces the maturation of Nicolae Filimon's artistic vision and the dominance of realistic techniques and the inclination towards sober paintings, painted with verisimilar details and with strong accents of social criticism. This literary piece represents the intermediate stage between the two major tendencies, opening the way to what was to become Filimon's novel, *Ciocoii vechi și noi*. The epic thread of *Nenorocirile unui Slujnicar* is quite weak, the true center of gravity of the short story consisting in the gallery of portraits, an exclusively typologizing artistic edifice. The style is a tonic journalistic one, and each literary physiognomy is followed and subjectively nuanced by the comments of authorial histrionism, direct interventions, which stop the process by which the characters assert their fictional individualities, subjecting them to melting into a characterological class, an option that also manifests its hegemony over the universe of Filimon's novel.

The first chapter, *Slujnicăria*, attaches the seal of moralizing intentions and a kind of didacticism, the author tracing the exhaustive definition of the illustrated type and the subcategories that compose it, venturing to explain the terminology used through novel analogies. Servitude, associated with secret societies with obscure goals, "is an exotic and detestable plant, whose birth and spread in our country we owe to vicious poverty and the great lack of moral culture of a part of our youth."¹⁹ This pseudo-institution, nocively infiltrated in the form of a moral plague in Romanian society, has an agent to match, the servant, spiritually versatile, skilled in the art of dissimulation, the one who "is always a young man from twenty-two to twenty-five years old, well-made, well-dressed,

¹⁷ Original text: "În general culoarea locală peisagistică și morală, oricât de convențională prin depășirea romantismului și prin patinare, este remarcabilă." G. Călinescu, *Filimon*, 65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹ N. Filimon, *Excursiuni*, 272.

coiffed and gloved just like a lion from Paris.”²⁰ Filimon exposes the nuanced typology of servants, divided into categories or guilds, even organizing a tripartite hierarchy based on the sole criterion of wickedness. The first type, the one that is part of the “guild of poets,” appears as a versifier whose production is worthless and nonsensical, formed of “antics and declamations” with a hilarious effect on refined sensibilities. The second category, more dangerous than the previous one, includes servants who have passed “two or three times through the Faculty of Law,” deceiving clients with erroneous formulas of jurisprudence, but, the author tells us in a complicit tone, “this kind of servants remains null compared to political servants.”²¹ The last and most infamous category is that of political servants, terrible demagogues, charlatans, parvenus who launch into patriotic speeches.

The other chapters of the short story focus on the prototype of the political servant, Mitică Rîmătorian, a correspondent or, according to Călinescu, an avatar of Dinu Păturică, embodying all the moral defects that make him repulsive to readers. Filimon employs one of the techniques that Vasile Alecsandri and, later, I. L. Caragiale would later intensively utilize: the attribution of names with a satirical structure, which makes the moral physiognomy of the characters transparent. Rîmătorian appears as a ridiculous figure, accentuating the contrast between what he wants to appear to be and his true nature; he is ignorant, ungrammatical, and a buffoon who pretends to be a man of good society, ready to change his loyalties at a moment’s notice. His entire personality is chameleon-like, practicing café patriotism, where he impetuously perorates against the rule and the injustices to which the people are subjected. His moral instability is especially revealed after he is betrayed by his mistress, Rezi, leading to his arrest and torture in an attempt to divulge the names of those with whom he is supposed to have organized a plot. In front of the police, Rîmătorian denies all liberal principles and ideas, declaring to save himself: “I am the greatest adorer of despotism; I love the Regulation and privileges out of conviction, and I am the most irreconcilable enemy of the Convention.”²² His duplicitous character disgusts even the officer whose mission is to extract details of the plot from Rîmătorian through torture, as he intuitively senses his vile nature. The attitude he displays now, that of a supporter of the oppressors and a challenger of liberalism, is swiftly overturned months later when Alexandru Ioan Cuza arrives in Bucharest, at which point Mitică Rîmătorian is at the head of the retinue, honouring him with the same demagogic-patriotic fervour. Chapter VII, articulated in the form of a letter and aphoristically titled “The wolf changes its fur, but not its habits,” reveals that the protagonist’s efforts have borne fruit, leading him to obtain an important job in Craiova. The author’s moralizing exigency is concentrated with increased intensity, virulently blaming the entire class of parvenu pseudo-patriots with the instruments of journalistic verve:

“For some time, however, pseudo-patriots and ambitious people have multiplied in our country as well; there is no public place, nor private gathering in which you do not hear passionate and selfish

²⁰ Ibid., 273.

²¹ Ibid., 275.

²² Original text: “[...] sînt cel mai mare adorator al despotismului; iubesc din convicție Regulamentul și privilegiile și sînt cel mai neîmpăcat inamic al Convenției.” Ibid., 298.

discussions. Among these shameless people stands out a young man named Mitică Rîmătorian, a true outcast of the capital Bucharest, sent to Craiova by the first constitutional ministry.”²³

The dominant feature that emerges from Nicolae Filimon's short story is its aspect as a social fresco, accompanied by an obvious moralizing intention, achieved through the mediation of a painted typology representative of Romanian society in the mid-19th century. G. Călinescu argues that this literary piece is the product of a resentful philosophy held by the author, a modest clerk who is jealous of the success attained by his superiors: “Filimon, at this time, when he is an inferior employee, harbours hostility towards higher officials such as ministry directors and district prefects. His view is that improvised patriots apply for these positions out of incapacity.”²⁴ The idea of literature as a weapon or compensatory reality is somewhat reflected in the writing mentality of the era. The boastful, cowardly political impostor, defined by his duplicitous attitude, does everything in his power to construct an image of himself as a supporter of democracy and a progressive liberal; however, his actions contradict him, revealing his true character as a false patriot devoid of scruples, whose only goal is to achieve social climbing at any cost. This fictional prototype has a long and rich tradition in Romanian literature, also developing through the artistic means of drama.

The novella *Nenorocirile unui Slujnicar* represents an epic model and a narrative exercise for the more complex narrative development found in the novel, as it can be seen as a “romant” in which social criticism accumulates the moralizing tension that will later manifest in *Ciocoii vechi și noi*. The realistic fibre is prominent, and Filimonian literature consistently exhibits its evocative power, drawn from expressive sequences that reconstitute the general atmosphere of the second half of the 19th century along with the local colour and urban landscape of Bucharest. The gallery of historical events and personalities is also extensive, showcasing Nicolae Filimon's ability to literarily transfigure the tribulations of national history.

Dawn of Romanian Realism Under the Authority of Feuilleton Tradition

Regarding Romanian literary creation, Nicolae Filimon departs from the Bolintinian model and the temptation of Wertherianism or sentimentalism, opting for a formula closer to Balzacian realism and Stendhal's iridescences. The development of his novel between 1861 and 1862 coincides with his activity as a dramatic chronicler, which replaces his role as a music critic during this period. The realistic profile initiated in *Nenorocirile unui slujnic* is continued and perfected, with the author

²³ Original text: “De câțva timp, însă, pseudopatrioții și ambițioșii s-au înmulțit și pe la noi; nu este loc public, nici adunare privată în care să nu auzi discuțiuni pasionate și pline de egoism. Între acești oameni fără pudoare se deosibește un june numit Mitică Rîmătorian, o adevărată lepădătură a capitalei București, trimisă Craiovei de primul minister constitutional.” Ibid., 306.

²⁴ Original text: “Filimon are la epoca aceasta, când este împiecat inferior, un sentiment de ostilitate față de funcționarii superiori precum directorii de minister, prefecți de district. Părerea lui este că patrioții improvizați solicită aceste slujbe din cauza incapacității lor.” G. Călinescu, *Filimon*, 101.

intensively harnessing the artistic potential of popular literature, a repository of paremiological latencies and harmonious sonority. The work *Ciocoii vechi și noi* or *Ce naște din pisică șoareci mănâncă* (1862) is considered by most literary historians to be the first successful local effort in the territory of the novel, or even its foundation, marking the beginning of a new stage in the crystallization of the genre. The structural characteristics and particular meanings arising from the protean formula of the Romanian novel, still in the process of artistic stabilization and influenced by directions imported from Western literature, are evident in Filimon's work not only at the narrative level but also in the development of characters and the fictional universe. The lack of narrative vitality in the native novel, which decisively marks the beginnings of modern Romanian literature, is attributable to the burdens of lyricism, under whose influence the pioneering novelistic formula has been shaped, with D. Bolintineanu's prose being the most suggestive illustration of this case. The recovery of such a comprehensive literary sector signified a return for the first Romanian novelists to the criterion of emotional sincerity and the stereotype of sentimental confession, resulting in textual constructions laden with rhetorical fervour, favoured in the literary corpus of the 1848 and post-1848 periods.

Through Filimon, the narrative flow begins to smooth out, and the characters attain an aura of veracity. Broadly speaking, Filimon's text is concentrated and complex, with feuilletonistic qualities, employing detailed observation and thematic-compositional strategies of classical and realist origins, showcasing typical characters from social strata subject to remorseless psychological and historical determinism. The typological concentration reflects classical reflections as a means of discovering phenomena, essences, or general ideas while rejecting the accidental and arbitrary. In the *Dictionary of Literary Ideas*, Adrian Marino argues that aesthetic-literary typologies originate in a category of consciousness, serving as a substrate for all stylistic and structural determinations: "Categories express a primordial experience, a specific original vision, an essential way of perceiving, thinking, and expressing the universe, a 'model' that is supra-individual, 'archetypal,' thus eternal and irreducible, with an antinomic tendency towards divergent categories."²⁵ One of the fundamental traits of the typology highlighted by Marino and present in Filimon's novel is the predilection to classify other characterological models that do not correspond to the main one into an antinomic category, circumscribed by all the virtues lacking in the former. Thus, the *ciocoi*, no matter how well they conform to the external standards imposed by the society in which they wish to succeed, will immediately self-denounce as morally incompatible with it, with the category of respectable and honest people being forced to make an effort to segregate from corrupt entities. Filimon repeatedly advocates for the efforts to eliminate the vices and harmful tendencies that undermine the socio-political structure in the prologue and throughout the novel, intertwining these themes with the thoughts and actions of his characters.

²⁵ Original text: "Categoriile exprimă o experiență primordială, o viziune originară specifică, un mod esențial de a percepe, gândi și exprima universul, un «model» supraindividual, «arhetipic», deci etern și ireductibil, cu tendință antinomică față de categoriile divergente." Adrian Marino, *Dicționar de idei literare* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1973), 291.

The novel proves to be indebted to the expressive means encompassed in the inventory of Romanticism and consumer literature, as it illustrates violent passions through contrasting colors. Although the analysis of morals is perceptive, the depth of psychology does not represent one of the aspects in which the prose writer excels, which gives rise to the impression of a certain mechanization in the actions and inner universe of the heroes, constrained to orbit around the same axes: parvenism, diligence, and unscrupulousness in the case of Păturică; evil, the fanariot blood, and corruption of Tuzluc; and the honesty and noble spirit of the old noble, Banul C. The novelist compensates for this shortcoming through the accuracy in evoking local color and period tableaux. The perpetual concern of the novelist seems to be to synthesize volcanic feelings and passions into archetypal characters and life experiences with deeply human significances, as an expression of realist vitalism. Consequently, characters are created that become types laden with symbolic value. In the short stories, the heroes embody fervent passions, serving as evidence of the writer's adherence to the patriotic and militant ideals of the era, while in the novel, the actors of the fictional world capture the social morals of feudalism, anticipating the physiognomies of the satirical theater of the following decades. Even the book's dedication, articulated as a venomous plea for the awareness of the real existence of the portrayed typology — the category of *ciocoi*, presented passionately in the prologue — falls under the influence of the vast Romantic tradition. The attachment to the old noble class and the disdain for those who enrich themselves by speculating on the goodwill of the former (*ciocoi*) would later be adopted, following Filimon's thread, by Vasile Alecsandri in *Boieri și ciocoi*.

Nicolae Filimon's critical intentions are programmatically displayed and endorsed through an ironic dedication and a prologue that serves as a stigmatizing act. In the Dedication, the author erases the line of demarcation between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic, suggesting that the boundaries of the two domains become increasingly blurred as the novel draws its essence from reality, which it aims to modify as much as possible while also serving as a moral compass. Filimon justifies his choice and ironically describes his imaginary wanderings toward the social guilds eligible for the "honor" of being dedicated a rather unflattering narrative exercise. Although the old nobility, merchants, and clerics appeared among the first options, Filimon smirks, they also conceal among their ranks dignified individuals, and he finds himself in search of a homogeneous (a)moral category. As the life of the manuscript becomes symbiotically linked to the existence of a detestable human typology to which it is to be dedicated, the memory that saves the novel from flames is that of the *ciocoi*. The last paragraph of the dedication initiates the contours of a poisoned physiology of the *ciocoi*, conceived in the spirit of the era, which is to be continued and nuanced in the Prologue.

"To you, then, shining morning stars of vice, who have devoured the state of your masters and have risen on the ruins of those who did not allow you to die in misery; to you, who are the rot and mould that undermines and overturns empires and dominions; to you, who have stolen with a sly hand from the small offices and from the thousands of gold coins in the large ones, and now, having

purchased estates and palaces, you throw mud on your benefactors; to you and only to you do I dedicate this weak and insignificant writing.”²⁶

The physiology of the old *ciocoi* also serves as a means of articulating the plan and substance of the Romanian narrative, which demonstrates the premises of the prologue throughout the entire fictional universe constructed for the purpose of factual exemplification. The final part of the novel, dedicated to the “new *ciocoi*,” remains unfinished, even though hints of its projection are woven throughout the text. The prologue enumerates all the stages of becoming a *ciocoi*: a versatile, chameleonic individual akin to a servant—ambitious, hypocritical, proud, and determined to resort to any trick to achieve his vile ends. He starts from the bottom rung as a servant and, through duplicity and servility, accumulates wealth and advances politically and socially, relying on the protection of those he serves. The invective unleashed by the writer directs all of the reader’s antipathy, or even visceral hatred, toward the literary physiognomy profiled in the fiction, revealing the author’s belief in the social and moral purpose of art — a creed of 1848 origins. Filimon speaks in a vindictive tone; his sentences are constructed to hyperbolically highlight the wickedness of the *ciocoi* and the harm they inflict on honest people, grotesquely accentuating the typological figure through firm statements regarding the situations in which it intervenes. Reaching a spiritually jaded level, the *cocoi* ostentatiously discards the mask he has previously worn.

The entire impassioned force of Filimon’s writing denounces the harmfulness of this typological character that jeopardizes the fragile national balance. The associative dynamics established between the principles of the socio-political sphere and literary forms come to define the entirety of Romanian culture in the century. The representative literary production that clarifies this relationship between the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic domains includes the novel *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, a remarkable example of nationalism with ironic brilliance enclosed in an evocative narrative silhouette. The difficulties of objectivity culminate in numerous assertions of authorial histrionics, which even take the reins of the characters’ thought processes, distorting them to impose a unilateral, antagonistic interpretation of their attitudes—an aspect of early novels that has been repeatedly noted in literary history as a hallmark of novelistic rudimentalism. As a result, the literary physiognomies created by the author suffer from a striking diminishment of their expressive potential, being forced to submit to moral schematism and severe authorial censorship, failing to fulfil their intended role as autonomous heroes with a certain freedom of narrative movement. This is also noted by Al. Piru, who states that “Filimon does not intend to present his heroes with the coldness of objectivity; he comments on every gesture, arguing with

²⁶ Original text: “Vouă, dar, străluciți Luceferi ai viciilor, cari ați mîncat starea stăpînilor voștri și v-ați rădicat pe ruinele acelor ce nu v-au lăsat să muriți în mizerie; vouă, cari sînteți putrăjunea și mucegaiul ce sapă din temelii și răstoarnă împărățiile și domniile; vouă, cari ați furat cu zvanțul din funcțiunile cele mici și cu miile de galbeni din cele mari, iar acum, cînd v-ați cumpărat moșii și palate, stropiți cu noroi pe făcătorii voștri de bine; vouă și numai vouă vă dedic această slabă și neînsemnată scriere.” N. Filimon, *Ciocoii vechi și noi* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1978) 18.

the heroes' intentions and censoring or approving each of their actions in accordance with an ethical ideal."²⁷ In this sense, the feuilletonistic composition reiterates the tradition of a type of writing meant to meet the expectations of an audience accustomed to receiving sets of semantic and textual indices to guide their reading.

Paradoxically, one of the successes of Filimon's novel lies in the masterful delineation of the protagonist, enveloped in the credible hues of realism and historical determinism. The character Dinu Păturică is crafted as a memorable exponent of a social and psychological typology, with a lineage easily traceable in the universal canon of realist literature, regarded as a formidable counterpart to Julien Sorel. As a prototype that embodies all the attributes of the class to which he belongs, Păturică stands out through a multitude of plausible gestures motivated by socio-historical customs, which likely convinced G. Călinescu to assert that "there is no hero in our literature, commensurate with the shifting horizon, with a more solid civil status than Dinu Păturică"²⁸. The portrayal of rulers and Fanariot customs in the moral and administrative landscape of Romania emerges as the source of all social injustices; they, being patriotically unbound from Romanian territories and accountable only to the Ottoman Porte, exploited their privileged position to amass extraordinary wealth at the expense of the humiliations and ruin of the people. Filimon does not hesitate to condemn them for encouraging the rise of vile, servile, parvenu subordinates who indulge in the same plunder and exploitation—sending thickening ranks into the oppressive stratum. The power of evoking the historical sequence lies in the fact that, unlike most texts that precede it chronologically, where the chaining of moments is governed by arbitrariness and composition is fragmented by contradictory aesthetic tendencies, which are incapable of harmonizing and maintaining consistency across internal plans, Filimon's novel presents a well-structured and operational epic framework, wherein the writer's tactful penmanship is recognizable, demonstrating a significant degree of originality in relation to the recipes of artistic trends and the genre.

The dynamism of the plausible intrigue, the sustained conflict, the rich epic substance, and the representative characters of various human categories ensure an ascending unfolding of episodes. The compositional rigor combines the force of imagination with the feuilletonist's skill to speculate and heighten the curiosity of the reading public. Social and moral criticism is exercised through the protagonists who populate the fictional world, not just through the authorial voice. Unlike his short stories, where literary physiognomies lacked considerable autonomy, Nicolae Filimon allows his characters in the novel to individualize through their actions and thoughts, even if they are tyrannically pursued by the author's commentary. However, this individualization remains on a generalized scale, within the limits imposed by the typology to which the literary actors belong. Subtle shades of Cornelian psychology are also reiterated, expressed through the tragic endings and the moralizing symmetry at the conclusion, designed to show that the prestige

²⁷ Original text: "Filimon nu înțelege să-și prezinte eroii cu răceala obiectivității, el comentează fiecare gest, polemizând cu intențiile eroilor și cenzurând sau aprobând fiecare din faptele lor în conformitate cu un ideal etic" Al. Piru, *Istoria literaturii române de la început până azi* (Bucharest: Univers, 1981), 98.

²⁸ G. Călinescu, *Filimon*, 239.

of foreign models functions through literary reminiscences and stylistic suggestions. The language exhibits surprising variations and does not constitute one of the unifying aspects of the novel's construction. In the chapter dedicated to Nicolae Filimon in the first volume of *Scurta istorie. Panoramă alternativă a literaturii române*, entitled "A Balzac Lost in Bucharest," stylistician Mihai Zamfir appreciates the naturalness, vivacity, and historical accuracy of the dialogues, which, in this regard, surpass many Romanian texts claiming to be works of evocation that appeared during the same period as *Ciocoii vechi și noi*:

"The linguistic intuition of Filimon structures the dialogue. Beyond the naturalness and vivacity of the exchanges, we notice no stridency, no false note, nor any misplaced neologisms; the language of the Fanariot era seems to reconstruct itself autonomously, without contemporary impositions. If we consider that Filimon's novel appeared concurrently with so-called historical novels, such as *Aldo și Aminta* by C. Boierescu or *Logofătul Baptiste Veleli* by V. A. Urechia, where medieval characters speak in the most comical pașoptist language, the difference between Filimon and the others becomes overwhelming."²⁹

The style of the novel is fluid and polemical; however, the polemical tone is not of a sentimental-poetic nature, as seen in Eminescu, but rather charged with irony and invective. Nevertheless, the narrative tension is often broken by descriptive sequences that reiterate romantic pathos in a bland, clichéd formula, while the stereotypes of the Filimonian ethical model consist of punishing wrongdoers and rewarding benefactors. The vestiges of the Romantic tradition are perpetuated in Filimon's novel primarily through the positioning of characters within a framework of antagonism, sketching two categories of characters placed at opposite poles. Each typology is driven by its passions and outbursts, with their nature being base or noble, according to their characterological affiliation. However, exaltation and intense experience, manifested through rhetorical pathos or intimate thoughts, characterize both equally.

The most prominent typology of fictional actors is, of course, that at the negative pole: the old *ciocoi*, who are well individualized, convincingly illustrated, and integrated into the tableau of the era, supporting the critical scaffold and moralizing tendencies. Filimon's portraitist skills are quite advanced, yet they do not surpass the conventionalism of the period. The figures are memorable primarily due to their external appearance, as psychological analysis represents an appendage of a vast tradition and a literature that has reached an advanced stage of evolution. The author is aware of the gaps in the internal structure of his characters and seeks to compensate for this through his commentary and a specific dynamic of external behaviours, intricately mapping

²⁹ Original text: "Intuiția lingvistică a lui Filimon structurează dialogul. Dincolo de naturalețea și de vivacitatea replicilor, nu remarcăm la el nicio stridență, nicio notă falsă, niciun neologism deplasat; limbajul epocii fanariote se reconstituie parcă de la sine, fără imixtiuni contemporane. Dacă ne gândim că romanul lui Filimon a apărut concomitent cu romane așa-zis istorice, gen *Aldo și Aminta* de C. Boierescu sau *Logofătul Baptiste Veleli* de V. A. Urechia, romane în care personajele medievale vorbesc în cel mai comic limbaj pașoptist, atunci diferența dintre Filimon și ceilalți devine copleșitoare." Mihai Zamfir, *Scurtă istorie. Panorama alternativă a literaturii române* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2012), 229.

stances, facial expressions, gestures, and modes of expression. Nicolae Filimon demonstrates that these elements can decipher the moral architecture of his heroes, their characterological patterns, thoughts, passions, and feelings. The author skilfully balances the colours in the portrait of Dinu Păturică, announcing the completion of the characterological scheme and surpassing the rudimentary model created through Mirică Rîmătorian, allowing the hero of the novel to slip into the realm of the ridiculous without falling into caricature, thus maintaining him within the bounds of credibility and possibility.

Romanian Physiognomies as Support for the Ethical Imperative

The realistic tradition has transformed novel heroes into emissaries of the authorial ethical system, reflecting the dilemmas of the time that generate the literary text. Filimon is no exception, equipping his characters with a set of enduring moral traits. The first figures introduced into the literary world are the young Dinu Păturică and the postelnic Andronache Tuzluc. The former seeks protection and a position from the influential Fanariot, while Tuzluc, who hails from Constantinople and is closely associated with Caragea, ascends the ranks of boyar titles through servility and intrigue, managing to amass an impressive fortune and gain influence with the ruler. We learn that Păturică, the protagonist of the novel, is sent by his father, Ginea Păturică ot Bucov sud Saac, a minor country noble, to serve under the postelnic, who is also in the employ of Tuzluc. However, the young man harbors hidden ambitions and intends to follow the same path as his master, ultimately bringing about his ruin. From the outset, despite displaying a humble attitude before Andronache Tuzluc, he already has a plan conceived and is ready to resort to cynicism, theft, and treachery to see it fulfilled: "Here I am, finally arrived in the land of promise; I have put my hands on bread and knife; courage and patience, deceit and cunning, and by tomorrow I too will have large houses and riches like that Fanariot."³⁰ His duplicity is revealed from the first encounters with the postelnic when he composes a humble, yet deceitful and hypocritical demeanor in front of him, "with his eyes cast downward and with a face more humbled than that of a monk."³¹ Dinu Păturică is portrayed as a typical representative of the *ciocoi* class and parvenuism, initiating a rich gallery of similar characters in Romanian literature and serving as a precursor to Tănase Scatiu from Duiliu Zamfirescu's novels. Gifted with intelligence and intuition, he is concerned with his education to become a "great man," selecting readings commensurate with that ambition, as presented in the fifth chapter, aptly titled "The Education of the *Ciocoi*."

"Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Euripides, Anacreon, Sappho, etc., are good for women and effeminate men,' thought the *ciocoi* with disdain. 'I need books that will sharpen my mind, that will teach me how to rise to greatness. Plutarch suits me, Caesar's Commentaries, The History of Humanity, the

³⁰ Original text: "Iată-mă, în sfârșit, ajuns în pământul făgăduinței; am pus mâna pe pâine și pe cuțit; curagiu și răbdare, prefăcătorie și iușkiuzarlâc, și ca mâine voi avea și eu case mari și bogății ca ale acestui fanariot." N. Filimon, *Ciocoi vechi și noi*, 31.

³¹ Ibid., 32.

lives of great men from past centuries and our own; these are the books that, when read, allow one to say with a peaceful mind that time has not been wasted in vain.”³²

The main character of the novel is well aware of the steps he must take to attain his goals, diligently employing the art of deception. After gaining the trust of his master, Păturică is assigned the task of supervising the postelnic’s mistress, the chera Duduca. This moment is described with precise tones, tracking all the changes that this important mission brings to the demeanour of ciocoi Dinu Păturică, who is convinced that a new, unexpected, and gratifying perspective is opening up before him, which must be carefully exploited, all while revealing his ecstasy, impatience, skepticism, and confidence in his future. The first encounter with the chera Duduca follows the same pattern of disguise and behavioural staging, mimicking humility, servility, and submission. Against the backdrop of shared affinities between the two—both unscrupulous and eager to steal Tuzluc’s fortune—a romantic relationship begins to blossom between Păturică and Duduca, one that will contribute to the hastening of the downfall of the deceived. The woman, considered by H. Zalis to be “satanic in her ability to cultivate the partner’s vices and deplete his material resources,”³³ is equal to the ciocoi in the art of deception, forming an infallible duo. The architects of Andronache Tuzluc’s downfall devise a cunning plan, enlisting a merchant of precious items and jewellery named Costea Chiorul, who is himself notorious for his frauds, to act as an intermediary. The merchant will convince the postelnic to buy the most expensive gifts for his mistress, which she will subsequently return in exchange for money obtained from Tuzluc.

Păturică remains consistent in his inner demeanor, making the unilateral direction of his characterization easy to observe. In contrast, Andronache Tuzluc embodies a more complex personality; his weakness for the chera Duduca makes him appear more subdued, more human than his servant. The plan has multiple branches to enhance its efficiency. Concurrently with the growing trust of his master, Păturică is entrusted with significant duties that allow him to plunder the possessions of the Fanariot. He accepts bribes, exploits the peasants, sells positions, and engages in various forms of deception, even becoming a customs officer at Hătmănie, where he replaces precious stones with fakes. Without arousing Tuzluc’s suspicions, Dinu Păturică and Duduca successfully execute their plan, appropriating the wealth of the credulous Fanariot, who subsequently loses his sanity, and they marry. The epic sequences charged with paroxysmal tension, such as the climax of the two conspirators’ machinations, are laden with melodramatic reflections, demonstrating that the author cannot easily relinquish the sensational-sentimental inventory entrenched in the writings of his predecessors:

³² Original text: “‘Omer, Pindar, Sofocle, Euripide, Anacreon, Sapho etc., sunt buni pentru femei și oameni afemeiați’ — zicea ciocoiul în sine cu dispreț. — ‘Mie îmi trebuesc cărți cari să-mi subțieze mintea, să mă învețe mijlocul de a mă ridica la mărire. Plutarch îmi vine la socoteală, Comentariile lui Cezar, Istoria omenirii, viețile marilor bărbați din veacurile trecute și acelea în care trăim; iată cărți pe cari citindu-le cineva poate să zică cu cuget împăcat că nu și-a pierdut timpul în zadar.’” Ibid., 48.

³³ H. Zalis, *Nicolae Filimon* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1958), 36.

"At the moment when this infernal robbery ended, a hoarse groan was heard in the room. No one noticed it, except for Duduca, who turned as pale as a corpse. That groan, resembling the joyful howl of demons when they cause a saint to fall into their snares, was the expression of Păturică's infernal joy, who, through Duduca's current stratagem, became master of all that remained to the poor Fanariot."³⁴

The ciocoi's ambition does not stagnate; instead, it is fuelled by success, and from the position of postelnic, he conspires against Tudor Vladimirescu, the hero admired by the author. Păturică reaches the highest stage of moral decay and betrays national interests, switching allegiance to Alexandru Ipsilanti, who aspires to become the ruler of Wallachia. To become the ispravnic of the Prahova and Săcuieni counties, Dinu Păturică murders Vladimirescu, paving his way for even more intense exploitation of the peasants. Increasing taxes and forcing the humiliated people to pay, he enlists the help of Neagu Rupepiele. Filimon still resorts to the technique of names with characterological subtext used in *Nenorocirile unui slujnicar*, opting for this facile means of moral classification among his characters. As Păturică reaches the climax of both decay and social ascent, the moralizing punishment of the oppressor does not delay its arrival. The social dynamic shifts; the peasants appear "with a mat ablaze on their heads and a grievance on a pole"³⁵ at the court of the new earthly lord, Grigore Dimitrie Ghica, claiming the unjust treatment they have endured. They are offered justice, and Dinu Păturică is cast into prison, where he will die. D. Murărașu admires Filimon, seeing him as a precursor to Duiliu Zamfirescu, and retains in his history that Filimon is a brilliant portraitist who gracefully manoeuvres an expressive literary language:

"N. Filimon viewed the transformations of life around us with keen observation and intelligent interest, using a pleasant language and carefully characterizing his characters. The author could not hide his critical tendencies, and the articulations of the composition are weak. *Ciocoi vechi și noi* marks a milestone in the development of the Romanian novel, surpassing the attempts of Bolintineanu. Following in Filimon's footsteps will be Duiliu Zamfirescu."³⁶

The second typology, designed to interact with the first, which consists of Dinu Păturică, Andronache Tuzluc, the chera Duduca, Costea Chiorul, and Neagu Rupepiele, serves to reveal their wickedness and is enveloped in a romantic hue. The first was constructed with predominantly

³⁴ Original text: "În momentul când se termină această infernală tâlhărie, un gemăt răgușit se auzi în cameră. Nimeni nu băgă de seamă, afară de Duduca, care deveni palidă ca un cadavru. Acel gemăt ce semănă cu urletul de bucurie al demonilor când fac să cadă un sfânt în lațurile lor, era expresiunea infernalei bucurii a lui Păturică, care, prin stratagema de acum a Duduchii, devenea stăpân pe tot ce-i mai rămăsese bietului fanariot." N. Filimon, *Ciocoi vechi și noi*, 187.

³⁵ Ibid., 200.

³⁶ Original text: "N. Filimon a privit prefacerile vieții dela noi cu putere de observație și cu interes inteligent, a folosit o limbă plăcută și a caracterizat cu grijă personagiile. Autorul nu și-a putut masca tendințele critice, iar **articulațiile compoziției sunt slabe**. Ciocoi vechi și noi, lucrare superioară încercărilor lui Bolintineanu, însemnează o dată în desvoltarea romanului românesc. Pe urmele lui Filimon va merge și Duiliu Zamfirescu." D. Murărașu, *Istoria literaturii române* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1943), 210.

realistic, verifiable means, while characters like Banul C., his daughter Maria, and the former leader Gheorghe do not create portraits painted in vivid colours but are rather unconvincing manifestations of a transparent thesis. Their moral physiognomy stands at the antipodes of the inner configuration of the *ciocoi*, illustrating honesty, justice, dignity, integrity, and patriotism. For Petre Isachi and Ioan Lazăr, this heterogeneity or characterological dualism equates to the coexistence of a romance and a novel:

“The romance in this novel is that of Gheorghe, the leader, a righteous and worthy man who suffers because of the scoundrel Dinu Păturică and ultimately receives the reward he deserves for his honesty and fidelity. Alongside the true romance (completed by Banul C., Maria, Vodă Ghica), we encounter a narrative that is disproportionately developed in relation to the romance model, in fact, developed according to the canons of another model — the Stendhalian model — of social arrivisme.”³⁷

The premise stated is not operative when viewed through the lens that, driven by the same moralizing intentions, Filimon idealizes this typology grafted onto the romantic antithesis. The characters that make up this class have significantly fewer appearances in the textual economy compared to the exponents of *ciocoism*, thus not altering the core of the epic ensemble. Their idealistic coloration is relevant only insofar as they come into contact with the base side of the negative heroes, highlighting and critically sanctioning it. Consequently, the realistic, verifiable depiction prevails over the romantic figures, which serve as pale illustrations of certain principles.

Banul C., as a landowning nobleman with enlightened views, opposes the Fanariot regime and Caragea, resisting the seduction of the ruler who attempts to fulfill postelnic Tuzluc’s desire to marry his daughter. He displays his repulsion toward a vile *ciocoi* “who started at the table with a spoon and went from wretchedness to wretchedness, today becoming the scourge of honest people and of the entire country.”³⁸ Although honest and gentle, when he observes that Gheorghe, a young servant from his court, has fallen in love with his daughter, Banul initially rejects the prospect of a future marriage out of a sense of propriety and inviolable customs. Later, he changes his decision, arguing in favour of the union between Maria and the worthy man, who has repeatedly demonstrated admirable qualities, even citing a historical precedent by reminding that Romanian rulers had the habit of elevating simple soldiers to boyar ranks. Meanwhile, being courted by Andronache Tuzluc, Maria courageously rejects her suitor, justifying her refusal to her father with a rhetorical fervour incompatible with her actual age. She embodies the ideal wife for the clerk Gheorghe after he has shown exemplary character.

³⁷ Original text: “Romanțul din acest roman este acela al lui Gheorghe, vătaful, omul corect, vrednic, care suferă din cauza sceleratului Dinu Păturică și câștigă până la urmă răsplata meritată, pentru onestitatea și fidelitatea sa. Alături de romanțul propriu-zis (completat prin Banul C., Maria, Vodă Ghica) întâlnim, dezvoltat disproporționat în raport cu modelul romanțului, de fapt, dezvoltat după canoanele altui model – cel stendhlian – romanul arivismului social.” Petre Isachi, Ioan Lazăr, *Anotimpurile romanului*, Vol. I (Bacău: Editura Plumb, 1994), 83-84.

³⁸ N. Filimon, *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, 35.

However, Gheorghe, the future husband of Banul C.'s daughter, stands as the antithesis to the ciocoi, just as Maria serves as the antinomic principle to the chera Duduca. His social ascent is difficult, rooted in good intentions, integrity, dignity, and sincerity, as demonstrated in all episodes involving him. As the leader under Andronache Tuzluc, he tries to warn his master and expose the deceptions of Dinu Păturică, but the postelnic does not believe him and dismisses him from his court. Gheorghe later becomes the clerk in Banul C.'s house, where he falls in love with his protector's daughter, Maria. He places honesty and dignity above his own feelings, choosing to leave for Moldova to avoid disappointing the nobleman's expectations. The continuation of his story is suspended for a time until Tuzluc is ruined, and Gheorghe returns, positioning himself as a gentle defender of his former master. Lacking any revulsion or bitterness toward the vile Fanariot, he demonstrates unusual care for him, concerned for his fate and hiring a woman to take care of him, compensating her generously. Later, he confesses to Banul C: "I loved him as a father and submitted to him as to God."³⁹ Although he suffered injustice and was not rewarded by the postelnic — indeed, he was expelled — there is no trace of reproach or aversion in his behaviour and responses. This antagonist to Dinu Păturică, an anti-ciocoi, is rewarded with the hand of the woman he loves and with the respect of high dignitaries who join the wedding procession. The thesis is visible in the structure of his moral physiognomy, and the trajectory of his destiny does not appear to be plausible. By transforming Gheorghe into an idealist, Filimon tries to demonstrate the existence of an alternative to parvenuism, showing that a worthy man can advance in social hierarchy through entirely different means than deception:

"This happy husband was Gheorghe, the former court leader of commissioner Andronache Tuzluc; he was the noble young man we saw sacrificing himself to rescue his master from poverty and shame. He came to show the Romanians that it is enough for a person to be good and endowed by nature with virtues and intelligence, and regardless of how obscure their beginnings may be, they will attain greatness."⁴⁰

As an exponent of absolute good, the author suggests that social norms can be adjusted in accordance with his character, and the lack of noble rank becomes merely a means of showcasing his worthiness. Gheorghe's character becomes aesthetically relevant only insofar as he stands in opposition to the challenging ethical portrait of Dinu Păturică.

A Historical Novel in the Balzacian Model

The Balzacian influence on the narrative technique embraced by Nicolae Filimon is particularly notable at the compositional level, evident through the introduction of the main characters in the

³⁹ Ibid., 270.

⁴⁰ Original text: "Acest soț fericit era Gheorghe, fostul vătaf de curte al comisului Andronache Tuzluc; era acel june mărinimos ce l-am văzut sacrificându-se, ca să scape pe stăpânul său de sărăcie și de rușine. El venea să arate Românilor, că este de ajuns ca omul să fie bun și înzestrat de natură cu virtuți și inteligență și fie condițiunea sa oricât de obscură la început, el va ajunge la mărire." Ibid., 294.

very first pages. The literary choice made by the author should not come as a surprise, as Balzac, though never mentioned throughout the text, embodies the model of the archetypal novelist with one of the most valuable bodies of work. The characters are sketched with meticulous portraits, which also provide the titles for the first chapters. Significant details take on the role of pivotal elements in the drawn physiognomies, revealing the author's penchant for cultural archaeological detail, successfully recreating the verisimilitude of the atmosphere, local colour, and period clothing. The physiognomies, more elaborate and credible than those of Negruzzi, effectively encapsulate the inner configuration of the characters. The central hero, Dinu Păturică, is presented in a profoundly disapproving manner from the very first sentence, at the moment of his entrance into Andronache Tuzluc's house, as a young man dressed poorly, lacking any outstanding physical features that would mark him as a future hero:

"[...] a young man of 22 years, short in stature, with a swarthy face, dark eyes brimming with cunning, a straight nose with a slightly upturned tip, indicating ambition and coarse pride, dressed in a tattered anteriu of shamalagea at the back, with caravans of home-dyed brown cloth, cinched with a piece of fabric whose edges were sewn in embroidery, with bare feet crammed into some shoes of saffian, which had once been red but lost their colour due to age, adorned with colossal brass clasps at the waist, wearing a shawl whose colour could not be distinguished due to the patches of various materials with which it was mended, and donning as a main garment a cap of fabric like wheat straw."⁴¹

Filimon provides a direction for interpreting the aspects of clothing and speculates on physical details to evoke antipathy toward the characters, suggesting that their subsequent actions should not surprise us. In such sequences, the author appears more as a physiognomist than as a portraitist. Andronache Tuzluc receives the same authorial treatment, as his past as an intriguer driven by vile ambitions is recalled to justify each of his decisions or actions. Through such choices, Nicolae Filimon rejects J.J. Rousseau's theory of original purity and the harmful tendencies of society that corrupt the "noble savage." The chronological precision also bears a Balzacian quality, as Filimon carefully measures the time elapsed between the first and last scenes, from October 1814 to April 1825. The mechanical nature of psychological reactions and the fatalistic mysticism that constitute Filimon's ethical conception, set against the successfully constructed backdrop of the period tableau, produce an effect of exaggerated drama — an aesthetic consequence noted by Nicolae Manolescu in *Arca lui Noe*:

⁴¹ Original text: "[...] un june de 22 de ani, scurt la statură, cu fața oacheșă, ochii negri, plini de viclenie, un nas drept și cu vârful cam ridicat în sus, ce indică ambițiune și mândrie grosolană, îmbrăcat cu un anteriu de șamalagea rupt în spate, cu caravani de pânză de casă vâpsiți cafeniu, încins cu o bucată de pânză cu marginile cusute în gherghef, cu picioarele goale, băgate în niște iminei de saftian, cari fuseseră odată roșii dar își perduseră culoarea din cauza vechimei, la încingătoare cu niște călimări colosale de alamă, în cap cu cauc de șal a cărui culoare nu se pute distinge din cauza petecelor de diferite materii cu cari era cârpit și purtând ca veștmânt de căpetenie o fermenea de pambriu ca paiul grâului." Ibid., 17.

"[...] the meticulously painted background as the decor for the ascent and fall of certain ciocoi gives us the impression of a stage set for a show, which, while colourfully depicted, fails to explain itself. Not only are the roots of Dinu Păturică's ambition, struggle, and failure outside of this frame; but even when appealing to the social and historical factors, carefully staged by him as possible reasons for the destiny of his main character, the writer only manages to provide us with false motivations."⁴²

The critic continues his argument by highlighting all the compositional and thematic defects, concluding with the exile of the novel into the minor category of romances, thus placing Filimon alongside George Baronzi and Ioan Bujoreanu. Manolescu exaggerates the dimension of the author's conventionalism, the internal inconsistency of the characters, and their alignment with the trends of the time, dismissing a priori the innovative tendencies and the ability to project a cohesive epic structure with a plausible and operant plot. In his monograph dedicated to the writer, George Ivaşcu proposes a different perspective for receiving the novel, viewing the author of *Ciocoi vechi şi noi* as an idealist who aims for much more than he could achieve using the trappings of the era:

"Filimon seeks to suggest an unbroken process of social dialectics, a process whose end—implicitly understood—he does not see, lacking what we call the revolutionary perspective of a social order of a different origin and with a different purpose, one in which the instinct of exploitation of man by man would be extirpated; in other words, a society redeemed from the disease of self-alienation, through itself."⁴³

Ivaşcu's proposed perspective, while valid and supported by numerous textual clues, is based on the theoretical angle of authorial intentionality, a fragile and controversial component in the hermeneutical endeavour, and contains reverberations of sociological critique. The coordinates of Balzacian realism are particularly evident in the fresco-like appearance of the novel, coloured by digressions and notes on cultural, social, and historical themes. Filimon's didactic impulses are also articulated in the form of standalone chapters resembling reportage, such as "Scene de viaţă socială," "Muzica şi coregrafia în timpul lui Caragea," "Teatrul din Țara Românească," and "Italiana în Algir." These pieces are interspersed throughout the unfolding action and slow the rapid rhythm of the episodes, weaving picturesque scenes of social life, period tableaux, and documentary insertions regarding the art and developing dramaturgy of the time, as well as details about the

⁴² Original text: "[...] cadrul minuțios zugrăvit ca decor al ascensiunii şi căderii unor ciocoi ne face impresia unui decor pentru spectacol pe care, colorându-l pitoresc, nu reuşeşte să-l explice. Nu numai că rădăcinile ambiției, luptei şi eșecului lui Dinu Păturică se află în afara acestui cadu: dar, chiar când apelează la factorii sociali şi istorici, de el însuşi puşi în scenă cu multă grijă, ca la nişte posibile rațiuni ale destinului personajului său principal, scriitorul nu izbuteste să ne furnizeze decât false motivații." Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca*, 89.

⁴³ Original text: "Filimon vrea să sugere un proces neîntrerupt al unei dialectici sociale, proces al cărui capăt – se-înțelege implicit – el nu-l vede, lipsindu-i ceea ce noi numim perspectiva, revoluționară, a unei orînduiri sociale de o altă sorginte şi într-o altă finalitate, în care să fie extirpat instinctul exploatării omului de către om, o societate, adică, mîntuită de morbul alienării de sine, prin sine." George Ivaşcu, *Nicolae Filimon*, (Bucharest: Albatros, 1977), 188.

institutional organization of that period. The multiple disproportions at the level of the epic ensemble, which combine so many contradictory tendencies, have divided critics' judgments, leading them to champion the ingenuity of a particular sector or register of Filimon's work while discrediting others as mediocre. For instance, Șerban Cioculescu considers the novel to lack aesthetic value, with the only element conferring it any significance being its documentary character:

"A novel of dark machinations and infernal schemes, *Ciocoii vechi și noi* has no aesthetic value, but the social documentary elevates it, and the historical perspective raises its dignity to that of a capital work, in the sense of a flagship book from which all social-type novels derive, feeding their substance from the ascents of arrivistes and the downfalls of old classes."⁴⁴

Cioculescu's radical judgment is justified by the fact that, at the time of its formulation, Romanian literature had reached full maturity in all literary genres, having entirely traversed the evolutionary stages and delivered successful responses to Western cultural phenomena. Essentially, the reading of Filimon's text must value the context that generates it, the artistic possibilities of the moment, and the existence and inconsistencies of a tradition that imposes a limited inventory of techniques and aesthetic procedures. Nicolae Iorga shifted the literary prestige of Nicolae Filimon's novel into the realm of historical fresco characteristics and evocative accuracy, attributed not to the author's inventiveness but to biographical reflections.⁴⁵

However, there are two aspects regarding which critics and literary historians reach a consensus. The first is represented by the descriptive sagacity, acknowledged also in Filimon's short fiction, and consists precisely in the realistic portrayal, perfected through the technique of detail, of the atmosphere and local colour. The vividness of the images of early 19th-century Bucharest, with its breath, specific ambiance, and historical buildings, demonstrates the maturation of the genre that would earn the author the reputation of one of the best novelists of the pioneering stage, a stage that he concludes by imposing the refined rules of the indigenous genre. The second aspect pertains to the compositional defects, as the unity of the construction is fragmented by disproportions in the narrative discourse. What is certain is that Filimon manages to harmonize the aesthetics of realistic sobriety with the anecdotal and subversiveness inherent to the tools of popular literature.

⁴⁴ Original text: "Roman de urziri tenebroase și de infernale mașinațiuni, *Ciocoii vechi și noi* nu are nici o valoare estetică, dar documentarul social îl reabilitează, iar perspectiva istorică îi ridică demnitatea la aceea a unei opere capitale, în sensul unei cărți cap de serie, din care se trag toate romanele de tip social, ce-și nutresc substanța din ascensiunile ariviștilor și prăbușirile claselor vechi." Șerban Cioculescu, Vladimir Streinu, Tudor Vianu, *Istoria literaturii române moderne* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1971), 113.

⁴⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii românești în veacul al XIX-lea*, 323.