

The Dark Side of Romanian Prose

A Historiometric Inquiry

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Introduction

THE CONNECTION between creativity (genius) and psychopathology (madness) is an ancient topic, with Plato¹ and Aristotle² relating the poet (the genuine representative of the artistic personality, in their view) to *enthousiasmos* and melancholia, respectively, or—with meanings extended on the basis of modern medical textbooks—schizotypy and bipolarity. To put it differently, the answer is there and, indeed, the host of contenders to follow—including Shakespeare, Dryden, Pascal, Lessing, Lamartine, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, also Lombroso,³ Galton,⁴ Maudsley,⁵ Nordau,⁶ Lange-Eichbaum⁷—actually edited these statements.

With the abuse of eugenics in the early 20th century the debate lost its impetus, only to come back with renewed vigor in the late 20th century. The scientific world reacted in two ways: 1) anamnestic/empirically like Nancy C. Andreasen,⁸ whose Iowa Writers' Workshop study found mood disorders (n=24; 80%) and bipolar disorders (n=13; 43%), and also comorbidities like alcoholism (n=9; 30%), drug abuse (n=2; 7%), suicide (n=2; 7%); and 2) historiometrically/biographically—this latter view being the more popular mostly because the former is too costly and time-consuming, implying live questionnaires and interviews with the celebrities in question, also with control-groups.

Prefaced by Adele Juda,⁹ who found the highest rates of psychopaths (“schizoid eccentrics, emotionally unstable, weak characters, excitable and high-strung, hysterical”) among the poets (n=37; 48%), and Colin Martindale,¹⁰ who found a history of significant psychopathology (“nervous breakdowns, suicide, alcoholism”) in the eminent English poets born between 1670 and 1809 (n=21; 55%) and the eminent French poets born between 1770 and 1909 (n=21; 40%), the historiometric approach was to be consolidated by Kay Redfield Jamison,¹¹ Arnold Ludwig,¹² Felix Post,¹³ and Doina Cosman.¹⁴

By going about it in this manner, Jamison found that six out of the thirty-six major British poets born between 1705 and 1805 were committed to lunatic asylums or mad-houses, “a rate twenty times that of the general population living during the same period,” whilst two others committed suicide, a rate fifty times that of the general population; Ludwig found an impressive level (87%) of psychopathology in poets: alcoholism (34%), drug addiction (17%), depression/melancholia (77%), schizophrenia-like psychosis (13%),

psychosis (17%), anxiety (13%); Post's twenty-eight out of thirty-five poets (80%) suffered from bipolar psychoses, unipolar psychoses, severely disabling depressions, milder depressions, brief reactions only, depressive traits only, cyclothymic traits only. With reference to Romanian literature on the whole, Doina Cosman and Bogdan C.S. Pîrvu¹⁵ found the highest quota of psychopathology (81.54%) for poets (n=65), fiction writers (n=110) coming second (74.54%), and dramatists (n=25) coming third (72%).

Hypothesis

In line with our previous research, whether historiometric when dealing with Romanian poetry,¹⁶ Romanian drama¹⁷ and Romantic poetry,¹⁸ or anamnestic when focusing on contemporary Romanian literature¹⁹ and Romanian art,²⁰ we will be acting on the assumption that there is a strong connection between psychopathology and Romanian fiction.

Method and Material

Our inquiry is historiometric, in the sense that it 1) applies the hypothesis across a compact group, nomothetically-wise; 2) deliberately selects the samples (the top 100 Romanian prose writers); 3) quantifies biographical data to support the diagnosis historically-wise; 4) quantifies the results in terms of DSM-5 and Harrison 18th ed.

Given the (psycho)pathological dimension of the writers' biographies we cannot go lower than the mid-19th century, arguably the beginning of psychiatry and scientific medicine in Romania. The same need for fairly objective assessment criteria will oblige us to keep a safe distance and abstain from going higher than the 1990s.

The Romanian prose writers, born within the 1918 Versailles Treaty borders, are supposed to have written a significant share of their work in Romanian, prior to their masterpieces, in French like Emil Cioran or in English like Mircea Eliade.

Speaking of prose, one should know that, given the highly aesthetic tradition of Romanian literature, we found it more appropriate to use this denomination and include therein both fiction and non-fiction.

Results

Felix Aderca (1891-1962). Judicial investigation for literary pornography. Persecution mania between 1940-1944, when he felt "ostracized," and had "forced residence." Negative hypertrophy of the ego. Loss of orientation. Opportunism. "Brain disorders."

Ion Agârbiceanu (1882-1963). Interest in the dark, troubled, unadaptable "souls." Shy and isolated. Thanatic experiences.

Carol Ardeleanu (1883-1949). Attraction for life in the underground: crime, "craziness," bizarre fits, numbing down, no sense of orientation, abulia, utter ugliness, abjection, suicidal heredity. "Antipathetic." By night he used to typewrite directly, his wife meanwhile playing the piano.

Anton Bacalbaşa (1865-1899). Contracted tuberculosis while serving in the army. Died of "bacillary pneumonia."

Eugen Barbu (1924-1993). Conflictual and vindictive. Scandals around plagiarism issues. Concussion.

Jean Bart (1877-1933). Diabetes. Overstrain and depression.

Ioan A. Bassarabescu (1870-1952). “Senile psychosis.” Slipped on ice and broke his left hip. Died three weeks later, in hospital.

Nicolae Bălcescu (1819-1852). In 1824, his father died. Heavy detention regime (1840-1842) wrecked his health. Phthisis, depression.

Vasile Băncilă (1897-1979). The serious wounds from the war turned him into an invalid. He went through detention.

Ury Benador (1895-1971) Life-as-ghetto: grotesque suspicions, overstimulation, neurasthenia.

Ion Biberi (1904-1990). Psychopathology and introspection. Groundless dread, suicide, paranoia, epilepsy, death, drugs.

Princess Martha Bibescu (1886-1973). Gradually losing her eyesight. Died in her sleep.

Max Blecher (1909-1938). Contracted Pott’s disease in 1928. Depressive mood.

Gheorghe Brăescu (1871-1949). Lost his right arm in the 1916 campaign.

Ioan Alexandru Brătescu-Voinești (1868-1946). Seriously ill in the summer of 1943. Post-traumatic stress disorder.

Eusebiu Camilar (1910-1965). Overwhelmed with poverty and disease. Murky and delirious images.

Georgeta Cancicov (1899-1984). Slightly schizoid. In her villages one meets with Hantadura, Ilioaia, Ozonofia, Purhedia, Vasâlca, Madam Pușlenghe and Cristofor who suspects that Isopoaia cast an evil glance at his cow. A grotesque universe.

Mateiu I. Caragiale (1885-1936). Seeming to be a connoisseur in opiophilia, like his protector, Alexandru Bogdan-Pitești, who was prematurely wasted by narcomanic and paederastic excesses.

George Călinescu (1899-1965). “Cowardly, amoral ... without scruples ... cynical and amateurish ... hypocritical, histrionic ... megalomaniac.”²¹ Cirrhotic.

Alice Călugăru (1886-1933). Suffering from phthisis and insanity.

Ion Călugăru (1902-1956). In the background, dozens of carters, water-carriers, millers, stevedores, coach drivers, as well as couriers, gold miners, Jewish butchers; humpbacks and sexual aberrations; all kinds of neuropaths.

Mihail Celarianu (1893-1985). Pathological sexuality, sometimes with a humorous touch.

Ilarie Chendi (1871-1913). Committed suicide one day after Șt.O. Iosif had taken his own life. Severe depression.

Constantin Chiriță (1925-1991). Pestered with harassment before emigrating.

Șerban Cioculescu (1902-1988). Malicious and slightly amateurish.

Emil Cioran (1911-1995). “I am depressed even when I have no reason for it” (1963). “Is melancholy not a sign of precocious aging? If this is so, then I have always been senile” (1967). “For years on end, every day, on waking up I take sedatives to soothe my indignation” (1971). Alzheimer’s disease towards the end of his life, the recurrent depression being counterbalanced each time by an extended cure of alcohol, tobacco and stimulant drugs.²²

N.D. Cocea (1880-1949). “Mephistophelian.” “Paranoid” fits.

Petru Comarnescu (1905-1970). Volunteering for the experiments (intoxication with mescaline) initiated by Dr. Gh. Marinescu, whose medical records of 1932 described

his reactions: "A melody by Bach has triggered in him a state of ecstasy and suffering. He weeps a lot, groans, it seems to him he is in the stratosphere. He sees legions of angels, he feels sublimed, sexless, transcendent. [On hearing Ravel's *Fountain*] his heart swells, he feels the joys of the entire world. His body is dislodged, and eventually becomes spherical. [On hearing Glinka's *Doubt*] he feels he is in Russia. Inside his throat he has a large pepper sphere. He lingers in snows of ether, in pubs where people smoke opium, Russian ballet. He sees angels of cotton or dusty snow. At other times he sees colors that do not exist in nature. Music gives him olfactory sensations (auditive-olfactory synesthesia). Thus, the funerary march triggers in him sweet-scented sensations, of chrysanthemum and tuberose. The processes of passing from reality to mescaline intoxication and returning to reality are accompanied by a profound feeling of sadness."²³

Pompiliu Constantinescu (1901-1946). Chain smoking. Infarction.

Vasile Conta (1845-1882). Phthisis. "Depression."

Ion Creangă (1837-1889). Treated his epilepsy in 1881, at the Brâncovenesc Hospital.²⁴

Pavel Dan (1907-1937). Neoplasm. Post-traumatic stress disorder.

Lucia Demetrius (1910-1992). Sanatoria. Introspection. Pathological sexuality.

Octav Dessila (1895-1976). Unbridled drives, slightly morbid in nature.

Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855-1920). "Running to and fro," for more than a year, through prisons in Russia: Odessa, Kursk, Tula, Moscow, Petersburg, Petropavlovsk. A penchant for subversion, instigation and "Bacchic parties."

Mihail Dragomirescu (1868-1942). Good-natured and discretely generous. Still, a troubled intimate life. His first wife died of a "nervous disorder." Their children died suffering from "dementia," in their teenage years.

Mihail Drumeș (1901-1982). A romantic who was being undermined by masochism.

Petru Dumitriu (1924-2002). In exile, since 1960. Attempted suicide in 1970, 1975 and 1976. Writing next to nothing for ten years and hardly getting out of his house. An extended religious and existential crisis.

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). "I would go inside [in 1929] a house [in Calcutta] where one could smoke opium for some small sum of money ... My memories [are] rather dim. I could not always distinguish what was really happening to me from what I was imagining. I was exhausted, I could feel my head heavy, my eyelids cumbrous, like lead." "I would come at eight every evening. What on earth I was doing until morning, I do not really know all that well." As "opium strengthens female sensuality and suppresses that of men," in an ashram in the north of India, he tried an energizing drug of Ayurvedic medicine, "Brahma's leaf" (*Centella asiatica*), on which he wrote an article which he sent to Cluj-Napoca, published by Dr. Valeriu Bologna without delay, after Professor Emil Racoviță agreed to it.²⁵

Constantin Fântâneru (1907-1975). "Inhibited nature," tormented by extreme poverty and disease.

Nicolae Filimon (1819-1865). Corpulent and "red in the face," gourmand. A "mild, joyful and careless nature." A "chest" disease.

Gala Galaction (1879-1961). In 1898, the first signs of a dramatic "spiritual crisis" which was extended throughout the following year. Concussion of the brain in 1955. He was keeping a lucid mind all along, but he was able to move only his left arm. "Unimaginable suffering."

Emil Gârleanu (1878-1914). In 1912 he was diagnosed with “renal congestion” or rather “renal tuberculosis.” In 1914 Dr. Nanu-Muscel performed surgery on him at Colțea Hospital. He remained immobilized. He inherited from his mother a “delicate psychic structure.”

Ion Ghica (1816-1897). Very ill since 1894.

Sorana Gurian (1913-1956). In August 1938 she stayed at Berk-sur-Mer Sanatorium, “in Blecher’s room.” Bone tuberculosis. In 1956, a psychotherapist taught her how to die, without the daily morphine.

Calistrat Hogaș (1847-1917). Bohemian, gourmand and eccentric.

Anton Holban (1902-1937). Obsessed with death. Died from appendicitis.

Vintilă Horia (1915-1992). In exile since 1947. “Sapped by a pitiless brain tumor.”

Garabet Ibrăileanu (1871-1936). 5 years old when his mother died, and 16 years old when his father died. In 1928, the neurasthenia which had been tormenting him for over 20 years compelled him to interrupt his university courses of lectures. He recovered in 1931. He died at the Diaconeselor Sanatorium, after a long suffering.

Nae Ionescu (1890-1940). Promiscuity. Amateurish and adventurous. Histrionic personality disorder.

Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940). 5 years old when his father died. “Hypnotic eyes.” Unstable, probably cyclothymic, temperament.

Petre Ispirescu (1830-1887). Hard work in printing houses. Impoverished life.

Panait Istrati (1884-1935). 2 years old when his father died. In 1911, the first symptoms of tuberculosis; admitted to Filaret Hospital and, the next year, to a Cairo hospital. Throughout 1916, living in isolation. In 1919, the American Red Cross referred him to Sylvanne-sur-Lausanne Sanatorium. On 3 January 1921, a suicide attempt (cutting his neck with a razor) in Albert Park, Nice; admitted to Saint-Roch Hospital. In 1926, admitted to Montana-sur-Sierre Sanatorium, in Switzerland; in 1932, committed to Filaret Sanatorium.

Alexandru Ivăsiuc (1933-1977). Five years (1956-1961) in prisons (Jilava, Gherla, Uranus) or labor camps (Periprava, Stoenești, Salcia); forced place of abode at Rubla-Călmățui (Bărăgan lowlands). Died during the 1977 earthquake.

B. Jordan (1903-1962). Healthy and sometimes barely legal life in boarding schools.

Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943). In 1904, lung treatment in Munich (in autumn) and Florence (in winter). Post-traumatic stress disorder in 1937, on his mother’s death: putting into question his frustrations. His mood disorder was further triggered by the discontinuation of his newspapers (*Adevărul* and *Dimineața*), under censure by the Goga-Cuza Government. In 1943, admitted to Dr. Lupu’s sanatorium. Cirrhosis. Died in July, still in doubt about his progress in life, about his failures.

Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917). Recurrent suicide ideation, starting in 1876.

Gib I. Mihăescu (1894-1935). Phthisis, chronic exhaustion. Depression.

Ioan I. Mironescu (1883-1939). Failed rituals. Red-neck humor.

Peter Neagoe (1881-1960). Eccentric characters, oftentimes full-blown psychopaths.

Costache Negruzzi (1808-1868). At Ems Spa in 1855, most likely with gout. Apoplexy after excruciating pains. Depressive mood.

Constantin Noica (1909-1987). Losing one kidney in 1935. Forced residence in 1950-1958. In Jilava prison from 1958 to 1964.

Anișoara Odeanu (1912-1972). Post-traumatic stress disorder on her husband's death. Suicide.

Alexandru Odobescu (1834-1895). Addicted to morphine. Committed suicide. "Given the horrible distress I was living in, with my unfortunate passion and all, which everyone knows of, death is the best I can have. Life, as I can figure it, is by comparison by far the more inconvenient. Whoever loves me shall see my death as a relief."²⁶

Petre Pandrea (1904-1968). Four times under arrest for communist propaganda, seven times under arrest under the communist regime. 15 years in 14 political prisons: Bucharest, Jilava, Ocenele Mari, Aiud, Craiova, Pitești, etc.

Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu (1876-1955). Increasingly ill and isolated after World War II. Living in poverty.

Edgar Papu (1908-1993). Chain smoker. Imprisoned for a while, and then forbidden to get his writings published.

Dimitrie D. Patrașcanu (1872-1937). Politically and morally "executed" after World War I. Compelled to stop teaching for several years, and allowed to teach as late as 1924.

Vasile Pârvan (1882-1927). In 1917, his wife died in childbirth. Overcame depression by working hard.

Isac Peltz (1899-1980). Whores, fair actors and freaks. Neurosis and family feebleness of mind and body. Phthisis, cancer, epilepsy. Anxious fathers, dubious battles.

Dan Petrașincu/Angelo Morretta (1910-1997). With a split-up ethnic and linguistic personality, always in search of his identity, getting lost by taking schizoid by-paths.

Camil Petrescu (1894-1957). His mother died shortly after childbirth; his father had died before his birth. Wounded in 1916 and imprisoned at Sopron (Hungary). Referred to Vienna Sanatorium in 1920 for an operation meant to get his hearing back. An impaired, debilitating hearing for the rest of his life.

Cezar Petrescu (1892-1961). With the reputation of a man about town, eccentric and disinhibited. Actually with long-spent frustrations about letting his family down. A suicide attempt in 1920. Bone tuberculosis crises leave him slightly hunch-backed. In 1940 his only son shot his girlfriend dead and committed suicide to defy him over his reluctance to give him permission to marry. His sister was sentenced to life in prison, his wife defected from the country. Infarction.

Ion Petrovici (1882-1972). 17 years in prison, under the communist regime.

Spiridon Popescu (1864-1933). Thinking he was born with a mission: to help enlighten the Romanian village.

Titus Popovici (1930-1994). Died in a hunting accident.

Marin Preda (1922-1980). Alcohol consumption triggered by domestic troubles. Died in the aftermath of an alcoholic orgy.

Dragoș Protopopescu (1892-1948). Tragically changed in 1947-1948: severely depressed, fearing for his future, waiting for the worst to come. He slashed his veins in 1948, but was saved and put in Filantropia Hospital. In a short while, however, he got his skull broken into pieces by thrusting his head out while the elevator was coming down.

Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944). Lung cancer.

Radu Rosetti (1853-1926). His heart disease was a constant nuisance in his later life. Died in a Bucharest sanatorium.

Alecu Russo (1819-1859). 10 years old when cholera killed his mother. Tuberculosis.

Ion Marin Sadoveanu (1893-1964). In the 1960s, an X-ray treatment for rheumatism. Solitude and disease got the better of him. "Lying in bed. I cannot stand up... I have been weeping bitterly." Putting on weight, now and then. Recurrent hypertensive crises. Obsessional about his weight. "I'm being out of sorts and I fear for everything ... a most pathetic week ... I'm feeling dizzy, with headaches, feebleness, poor eyesight."

Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961). His only son was killed in the war, a "never-healing" wound. His first stroke occurred in 1955; the second episode, in 1957, left him with an infirmity.

Alexandru Sahia (1908-1937). Tuberculosis.

Cella Serghi (1907-1992). An avant-la-lettre feminism triggered by her lifetime, tumultuous love for Camil Petrescu.

Ioan Slavici (1848-1925). His mother (tuberculosis), and father (cholera) died in 1873; that same year he was admitted to a Vienna hospital for a "severe illness" that was to put him "to bed" in a sanatorium, for several months.

Henriette Yvonne Stahl (1900-1984). Lung troubles in childhood and adolescence. "Theatre manners." "Putting on airs." "Cynical" behavior. Too much sexual pathology, love psychosis and latent homosexuality. Her husband, Petru Dumitriu, defected in 1960 and thus put a lot of strain on her daily life: "I knew they would come for me. I only wondered why they were so late. I can safely say, however, that it was pretty tough waiting so long, knowing for a fact that my time would eventually come; this waiting was tougher than prison itself. Someone knocking on my door... my time is up, he's there for me!"

Zaharia Stancu (1902-1974). Going blind, living with this horror for all of his life.

Damian Stănoiu (1893-1956). Waiving and straying, in 1910-1913. A stable boy at Pantelimon Mental House, for some time. A monk since 1913.

Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989). In hard labor camps (Jilava, Gherla, Aiud) from 1959 to 1964. Bowel complaints ever since his teenage years, angina pectoris in his old age.

Constantin Stere (1865-1936). Abandoned by his mother to the care of butlers and maidservants. A heart disorder in 1930. A metaphysics-prone temperament. Breathing in a wild physical force.

Octav Șuluțiu (1909-1949). Erotic abulia, androgynism. Brain stroke.

Ionel Teodoreanu (1897-1954). Died in the snow, in the apocalyptic winter of 1954.

Radu Tudoran (1910-1992). "I was buried in 1947." Arterial disease. Died at Fundeni Hospital after several operations.

Urmez/Dimitrie Dim. Ionescu-Buzău (1883-1923). Schizoid personality disorder. Suicide at night, on a bench near a pub (Bufetul de la Șosea).

Elena Văcărescu (1864-1947). Living her unhappy love story with King Ferdinand for a lifetime.

G.M. Vlădescu (1885-1952). A counterturn way of life.

Mircea Vulcănescu (1904-1952). Sentenced to 8 years in prison.

Duiliu Zamfirescu (1858-1922). Philistine, arrogant, snobbish, suspicious and even paranoid, grandiose, proud, gourmand. Putting on airs. In 1921, his son was killed in a duel. Depressive mood. Hepatitis.

George Mihail Zamfirescu (1898-1939). In 1938, several leaves of absence for medical reasons; in December, seriously ill. In June, admitted to Moroeni Tuberculosis Sanatorium; in August, transferred to Dr. Nasta's Sanatorium. Left this latter sanatorium in October and died five days later.

Discussions

Distributed along three axes (psychiatric, neurological and somatic), the Romanian prose writers' disorders outline the following picture:

- **psychiatric disorder** (n=78; 78%): Felix Aderca, Ion Agârbiceanu, Carol Ardeleanu, Anton Bacalbaşa, Eugen Barbu, Jean Bart, Ioan A. Bassarabescu, Nicolae Bălcescu, Vasile Băncilă, Ury Benador, Ion Biberi, Gheorghe Brăescu, I.A. Brătescu-Voineşti, Georgeta Cancicov, Mateiu I. Caragiale, George Călinescu, Alice Călugăru, Ion Călugăru, Mihail Celarianu, Ilarie Chendi, Emil Cioran, N.D. Cocea, Petru Comarnescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Vasile Conta, Pavel Dan, Lucia Demetrius, Octav Dessila, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Mihail Dragomirescu, Petru Dumitriu, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Fântâneru, Gala Galaction, Emil Gârleanu, Ion Ghica, Anton Holban, Vintilă Horia, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Nae Ionescu, Panait Istrati, Alexandru Ivasiuc, Eugen Lovinescu, Titu Maiorescu, Gib I. Mihăescu, Costache Negruzzi, Constantin Noica, Anișoara Odeanu, Alexandru Odobescu, Petre Pandrea, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Edgar Papu, Dimitrie D. Petrașcanu, Vasile Pârvan, Isac Peltz, Dan Petrașincu, Camil Petrescu, Cezar Petrescu, Ion Petrovici, Marin Preda, Dragoș Protopopescu, Radu Rosetti, Alecu Russo, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Alexandru Sahia, Ioan Slavici, Henriette Yvonne Stahl, Zaharia Stancu, Damian Stănoiu, Nicolae Steinhardt, Constantin Stere, Octav Șuluțiu, Urmuz, Elena Văcărescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Alexandru Duiliu Zamfirescu, George Mihail Zamfirescu.

- **neurological disorder** (n=3; 3%): Max Blecher, Ion Creangă, Sorana Gurian.

- **somatic disorder** (n=19; 19%): Martha Bibescu, Eusebiu Camilar, Constantin Chiriță, Șerban Cioculescu, Mihail Drumeș, Nicolae Filimon, Calistrat Hogaș, Nicolae Iorga, Petre Ispirescu, B. Jordan, Ioan I. Mironescu, Peter Neagoe, Spiridon Popescu, Titus Popovici, Liviu Rebreanu, Cella Serghi, Ionel Teodoreanu, Radu Tudoran, G.M. Vlădescu.

Five (5%) of the 100 prose writers committed suicide: Ilarie Chendi, Anișoara Odeanu, Alexandru Odobescu, Dragoș Protopopescu, Urmuz; three (3%) attempted suicide and failed: Petru Dumitriu, Panait Istrati, Cezar Petrescu.

In point of fact, we expected higher differences between poets and prose writers in terms of psychopathology levels. In literature they are generally recorded as no less than 10%, especially with respect to psychosis, suicide rate and depression. Ours is approximately 6% (84% vs. 78%), and we are looking for an explanation in the special historical conditions in 1950s Romania. The truth of the matter is, like it or not, that poets were rather more opportunistic than fiction writers and found it easier to write odes and eulogies. In other words, they fared much better in rough, depressing times.

In a similar project,²⁷ including 50 poets and abiding by the same inclusion criteria, no women made it or were even shortlisted. They were in the picture to be sure, they even enjoyed a long-standing reputation in *salons littéraires*, but they did not have what it takes to achieve a significant degree of eminence. In fiction, on the other hand, they seem to have been luckier: Hortensia Papadat Bengescu would make any top 10 list, two or three others would easily make a top 50 list. This situation is certainly a surprise,

because poetry is likely to be described as “all inspiration” or “all intuition” that by common consent are women’s accessories; fiction, on the other hand, is thought to involve considerable training, hard work and staying power, which would hardly fit into the cultural status of the Romanian woman whose access to high education was an isolated phenomenon before the 1930s. Leaving the questions of gender and cultural status aside, though, this inverted expectation could be explained by the special quality of Romanian poetry, whose standards were extremely high from the very start, with Eminescu.

In a previous research our sample included 110 prose writers giving a 74.54% lifetime rate of any mental disorder. For the present research we left aside 10 individuals whom we considered to be less eminent than the other 100 names—there is now a change for the worse in the suicide rate (5% vs. 4.54%) and the lifetime rate of any mental disorder (78% vs. 74.54%). We will conclude that the more eminent the prose writer the more severe his psychopathology, which comes as no surprise at all: the same “rule” seems to have worked for poets.

Conclusions

WE SPEAK with no restraint of personality and artistic personality, but we stop short of the last but one step down (the literary personality) and the last one, the fictional/poetic/dramatic personality. We just helped build a “differential diagnosis” for the fictional personality, actually, a corpus of *differentia specifica* mainly in terms of psychopathology and, tangentially so, with respect to social history, cultural history and aesthetics. The reference point all along has been the poetic personality. □

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Abstract

The Dark Side of Romanian Prose: A Historiometric Inquiry

Fiction is often described in terms of social history, cultural history and, to be sure, aesthetics. Our historiometric inquiry including the top 100 Romanian fiction writers and spanning approximately 150 years of Romanian literature, suggests that psychopathology could be taken as a reliable reference point when it comes to the assessment of literary creativity.

Keywords

Romanian fiction, psychopathology, literary creativity, historiometric research