# Big Numbers

## A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania

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## State of the Chart

The present article proposes a quantitative analysis of the development of the novel in Romania. Despite expectations which can be explained by the existence of reliable (meta)databases attempting to circumscribe this phenomenon, the concept of the "novel [published] in Romania" remains, as will be shown in the following, extremely problematic and needs various delimitations and qualifications. This is mostly caused by the fact that quantitative analyses of the novel have been rather scarce in Romania and that, consequently, an in-depth discussion of the relevant key concepts has not yet taken place. In fact, it is this small number of approaches which requires that they be surveyed and briefly commented on in what follows.

Thus, the scholastic literary historian Gheorghe Adamescu can be considered, rather surprisingly, to be a precursor and simultaneously a pioneer of the quantitative research of the novel in Romania. In two texts occasioned by the commissioning of a thematic issue devoted to the novel by the journal *Cele Trei Crişuri* (The Three Criş Rivers, 1937), he drafted the first allegedly exhaustive bibliography of the Romanian novel up to that time, accompanied by a short commentary.[1] The bibliography is fairly well executed, particularly the part covering contemporary fiction—e.g. Adamescu indexes 368 of the 544 novels published between 1930 and 1937, thus over two thirds—, and it promotes the author's belief that "the novel has made quite significant progress in our literature and would deserve a thorough study."[2] Even if Adamescu is far from carrying out such a study himself, the brief essay accompanying his bibliography offers a few useful suggestions in this regard. It is true that the division of epochs is carried out rather mechanically (by decades), yet, nevertheless, the literary historian generally evinces plausible intuitions—e.g., that "the *epoch* of the Romanian *novel*" only starts in the 1911–1920 decade,

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when "truly *specialized novelists*" emerge, such as Mihail Sadoveanu, N. Rădulescu-Niger and Liviu Rebreanu.[3]

A notable further step towards the quantitative analysis of the novel in Romania was made by Dinu Pillat, in his study entitled "Romanul de senzaţie în literatura română din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea" (The sensationalist novel in Romanian literature in the second half of the 19th century, 1947).[4] As opposed to Adamescu, Pillat no longer works with numbers, but only with lists, yet his study has other major merits. On the one hand, he is the first commentator to look at the evolution of the Romanian novel in parallel with the dynamic of translations, thus observing that every stage of the sensationalist novel coincided with "a new wave of translations."[5] On the other hand, he is the first Romanian critic who dares to professionally explore the "great unread,"[6] i.e. non-canonical writers and genres. It is not just G. Baronzi and I. M. Bujoreanu, but also N. D. Popescu, Panait Macri and Ilie Ighel that benefited from Pillat's attentive and pertinent commentaries.

A new stage in the quantitative research of the novel in Romania commences with Paul Cornea's studies, which, inspired by the theories and analyses of Lucien Goldmann and Robert Escarpit, made their mark on account of the innovative character of the issues they raised, as well as of the superior accuracy of the data they were based on. With the help of several groups of students from the Faculty of Philology in Bucharest, Cornea managed to collect samples of data sufficiently representative to enable him to successfully investigate aspects like the relationship between translations and local literature in the 19th century, the relationship between the novel and the *romance* (in the popular fiction vein), or the causes for the rise of the Romanian novel in the 1930s.[7] Cornea's studies are, for that matter, still considered to be models of quantitative approaches today, for, although the data the author employs are often subject to change (e.g. for the period 1845–1910, Cornea records only 175 novels, as opposed to 467 titles subsequently indexed by *DCRR-1*[8]), the issues he investigates are as relevant today as subjects of reflection as they were back then.

Ioana Macrea-Toma also employs a private database, borrowed from Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, for the chapter in her monograph on Romanian communism's literary institutions, which deals with the book production of the time.[9] The strength of this approach consists in placing the Romanian novel within a wider relational context, since the author compares domestic prose not only with translated prose, but also with other genres, such as poetry. However, although Macrea-Toma's observations are correct most of the time, some of her implicit assumptions raise certain questions. For instance, the fact that she records almost 100 autochthonous prose titles published annually throughout the mid–1950s indicates that she amassed not only the novel with shorter prose, but also newly published works with later editions, a fact that limits the relevance of her charts and observations.

Last but not least, of the more recent contributions, the most important seem to be Ştefan Baghiu's[10] and Daiana Gârdan's.[11] Despite differences in object and approach between the two young scholars, what they share is the fact that both take advantage of the finalization and publication of (meta)databases like *DCRR* and *DCRT*, which they can now explore in detail. Thus, starting from *DCRT-1*, Baghiu's studies focus on the translation

of foreign novels during the communist period, following the gradual diversification of cultural sources connected to the Romanian literary circuit and then correlating this phenomenon with varios political and economic factors. Conversely, Gârdan's studies rely more on *DCRR-1* and seem to relate especially to particularities of genre and gender of the Romanian novel of the first half of the 20th century. At any rate, based on the survey effected above, it follows sufficiently clearly not only that there is not yet in place a quantitative analysis of the entire history of the Romanian novel from the *produced* vs. *translated* point of view, but also the fact that when such an analysis was attempted on limited segments, it mostly evinced an empirical and unsystematic character.

## Corpus

Regarding the corpus under scrutiny in the present study, it is important to state that by "the novel in Romania" I mean the domestic or translated novel published in the Romanian language, within the current boundaries of the Romanian nation state. As a matter of fact, such a concept is practically imposed on all those who try to work with data provided by *DCRR* or *DCRT*, although the indexing options of these dictionaries are not always amongst the most felicitous or even amongst the most consistent.

Let us start with the Romanian language: its exclusiveness in delimiting the corpus of novels automatically leads to the exclusion of novels published in Hungarian, German, etc. and, by means of this exclusion, to the annulment of the literatures produced by "national minorities." However, an even greater problem is inconsistency: although it excludes the aforementioned category, *DCRR* is extremely generous with certain titles published in (and translated from) French, such as the ones penned by Panait Istrati, Vintilă Horia or Eugène Ionesco, although their rightful place would have been in *DCRT*. On the other hand, similar inconsistencies are met regarding the place of publication as well: *DCRR* indexes the three volumes of the novel *Sclavul amorului* (The slave of love, 1873–1875) by Iosif Vulcan, published in Budapest, but ignores all the novels published in the interwar period in Chişinău (by prose writers like Nicolae Spătaru, for instance). Such an act of unnecessary "diplomacy"—at least after the dissolution of the Soviet Union—suggests that *DCRR* has not entirely put its communist afflictions behind it. Such reminiscences also account for the decision to record, at times, manuscripts at the estimated date of their writing and not at the date of their publication, "in order to emphasize the organic continuity in the development and establishment of the novelistic genre."[12] It is not very clear why—other than for reasons of pure propaganda—it would have been necessary to emphasize such an "organic continuity" when in fact it did not exist. At any rate, it is a fact that such inconsistencies have determined me to make a series of choices which do not comply with the selection and organization criteria of the two dictionaries.

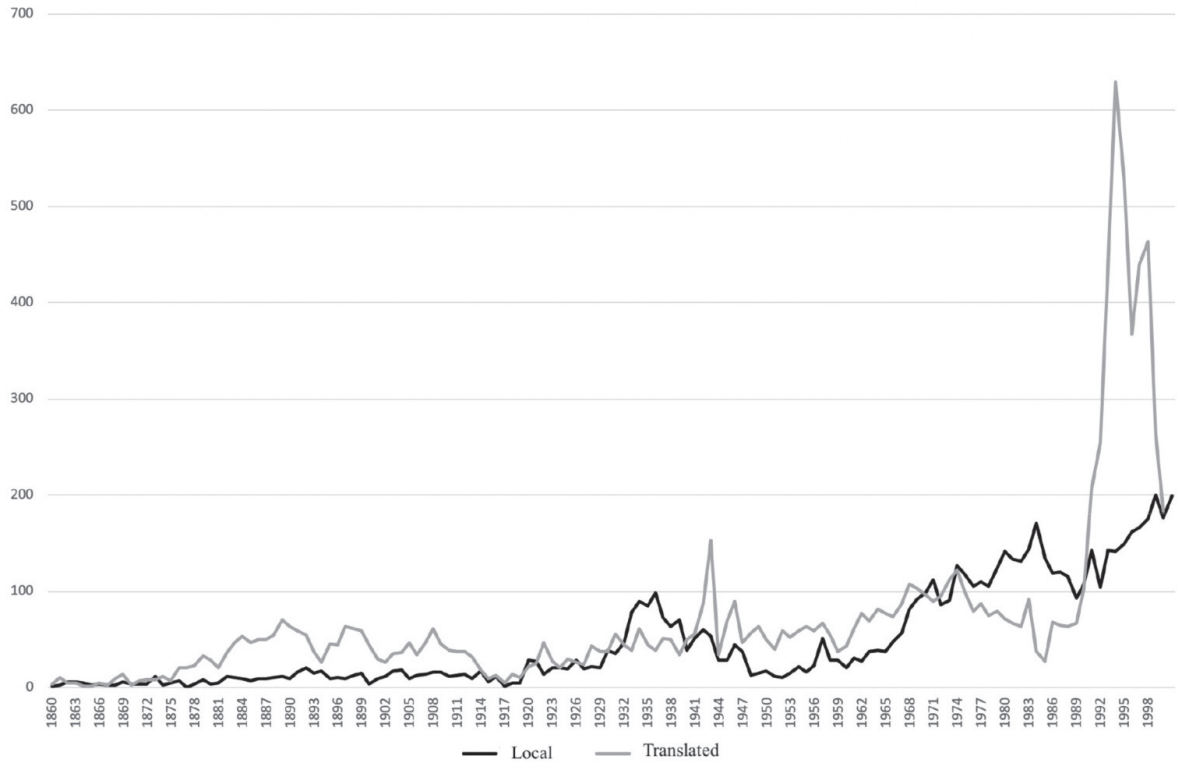
First, I have excluded from the category of the "Romanian" novel the translated literary works which had previously been published in other languages and other countries. I have, however, kept what one could term "original doublets," i.e. texts in Romanian which either chronologically precede equivalent versions in foreign languages, or which

are the result of auto-translation. Second, I always took into account the publication date of the novels, because up to their publication, those texts did not exist *qua* literary works. A manuscript can be significant for a certain artistic vision related to a certain historical moment, but it only becomes relevant for a quantitative approach the moment it appears on the market. Thus, although finalized in 1705, Dimitrie Cantemir's *Istoria ieroglifică* (The hieroglyphic history) was only published in 1883 and, for a quantitative literary history, this is the only date that matters. Third, I deemed it too little relevant whether a novel is first published in a magazine or in a volume. Although *DCRR* prefers to index novels in their year of publication in volume form, this is not necessarily the most inspired choice, because the novel could have had considerable effects on the literary system between its serial publication in installments and its publication in a volume. Moreover, as the two dictionaries themselves show, there are numerous cases of domestic and translated novels which, after being published in magazines, have never been published in book format. In these cases, the editors of the dictionaries have no choice but to index those titles with their serial publication dates. Why should we not generalize the procedure and thus gain in consistency? Fourth, I also included the unfinished novels in my calculations, because some of these at least—*Geniu pustiu* (Barren genius), *Un om între oameni* (A man among men), *Delirul* (Delirium), etc.—have been important models for the evolution of the novel in Romania. Nonetheless, how do we differentiate between "unfinished" novels and mere novelistic fragments published in periodicals? In this case, I chose to benefit from the advantages of distant reading: I left *DCRR* and *DCRT* to their own devices and I appropriated their allocations. Fifth, my statistics are solely based on first editions, not on subsequent or later ones. It is not hard to understand why: the two dictionaries were projects carried out in several stages, a fact that caused a series of discontinuities within them. For instance, *DCRR* as well as *DCRT* record later editions of pre–1989 novels only up to 1989, while ignoring them in the volumes concerning the 1990–2000 period. Sixth, I took into consideration each of the distinct volumes of the same novel separately. On the one hand, the fact that the present analysis only regards first editions strengthens my conviction that, in most cases, the publication of a novel in one or several volumes is no mere accident, but an action performed with the authors' consent and which needs to be taken into account (particularly in an analysis regarding *quantity*). On the other hand, this option helped me avoid uncomfortable questions such as whether *Morometii I* and *II* form a "unitary" novel or a cycle of novels.

## Methodology

From a methodological point of view, the present study comprises an analysis of the variations of data which represent the two "lines" of the novel published in Romania—produced vs. translated—, as well as a comparison between these lines and, occasionally, references to developments in other literatures. With regard to the first aspect, the one of the lines per se, I operate (though perhaps less systematically than would have been appropriate) with concepts stemming from statistics, such as

Fig. 1. The evolution of the Romanian novel between 1860 and 2000




the average number of novels published within a certain period (a certain "epoch"), the (multi)annual increase rate of the production of novels, the standard deviation of the data sample, etc. These indicators will then be set against the established spatial metaphors employed in the study of the novel—e.g. the "rise" and the "fall" of the genre—, as well as various series of political and economic events which I suspect have influenced the development of the novel in Romania.

In addition to these instruments, in the following I propose two self-devised concepts, which might prove useful for a more precise radiography of the dynamic of the Romanian novel—and not only for it. The first is the *index of literary originality (ILO)*, which refers to the ratio between the number of new literary works and the re-printed ones (later editions) within a certain literature throughout a calendar year. For instance, if in a certain country 200 new literary works are published and 100 are re-printed throughout the current year, then $ILO_{(2019)}=200:100=2$. As, for the reasons elaborated on above, I do not deal with later editions in the present study, I will only observe that a very low ILO is indicative of a literary system threatened by epigonism and auto-pastiche, whereas a very high ILO might indicate the risks a system incurs of losing its ties to the past and consequently of endangering its own cultural identity. The other parameter is the *index of literary autonomy (ILA)*, which refers to the ratio between the produced and the translated works within a literature. Excesses are telling in this case as well: a very low ILA is a symptom of (auto)colonialism, whereas a very high one is a sign of cultural self-sufficiency and isolationism. At any rate, the important thing is that

the two indicators are independent from each other, and the fact that they can be isolated, but also combined, is proof to this effect. For instance, I will mostly refer to the $ILA_{(nn)}$ in the present study, i.e. to the index of literary autonomy calculated based on *n*(ew) *n*(ovels).

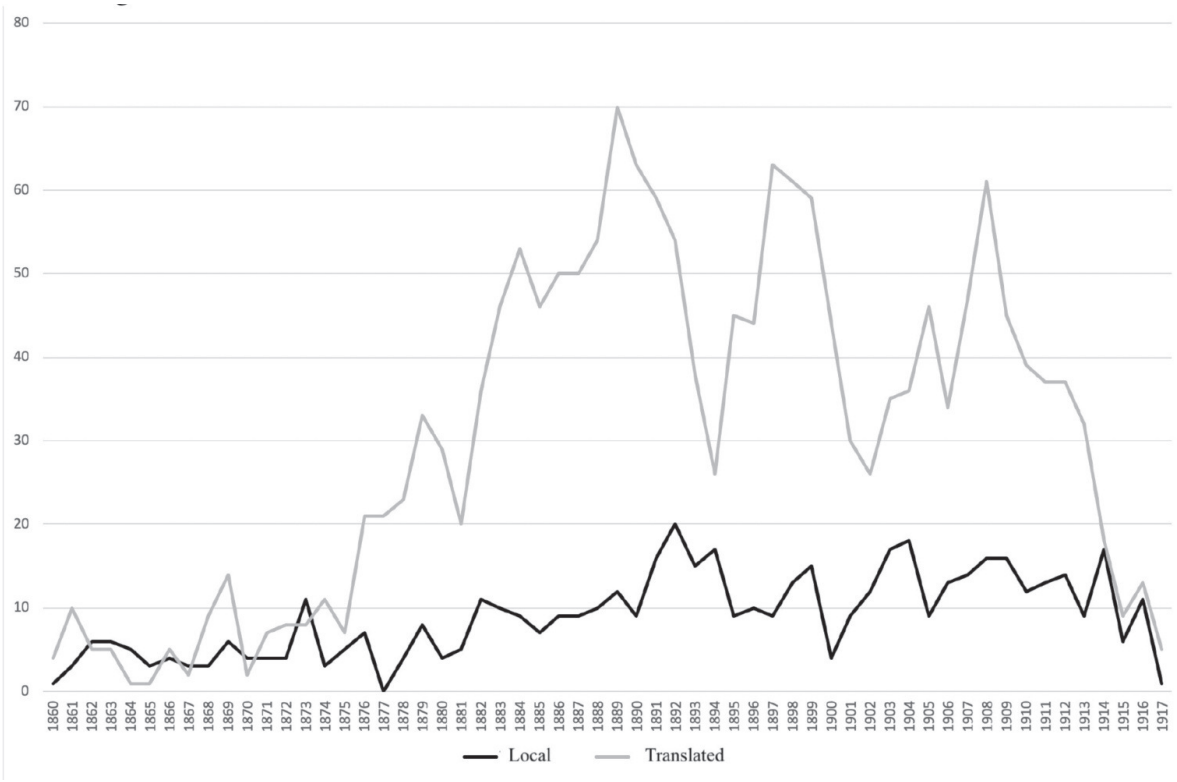
Before moving on to the actual analysis, one more aspect needs to be mentioned: my investigation, based on the systematization and corroboration of the *DCRR* and *DCRT* databases, covers more than 150 years in the development of the Romanian novel (1845–2000). How can one break down this vast period? The chart in Fig. 1, on which I focus and which I explore in detail in the following, offers a few clues to this effect, allowing us to perceive and delimit three major falls of the Romanian novel: one during World War I (1917), another after World War II (1948) and the third at the fall of communism (1989). Relying on these, we can identify four epochs in the development of the local novel, which I analyze below.

## The First Stage (1845–1917): Why We Have No Novels

Perhaps translations do not "make" a literature, but they certainly do create a literary market. Thus, in 1845, when the first attempt at an autochthonous novel was made, almost 50 translated novels had already been published in Romania. It is hard to imagine the emergence of the Romanian novel in the absence of these translations. As a matter of fact, by 1860, when domestic novels started being published regularly, i.e. annually, the number of translated novels had already exceeded 200 titles! It is no wonder therefore that, under these circumstances, the domestic Romanian novel will be overshadowed by the translated novel until World War I, with an average $ILA_{(nn)}$ of 0.57 for the 1860–1917 period. In other words, each domestic novel is accompanied by around two translated novels, at an annual average of 9.12 autochthonous novels and a standard deviation of 4.87. The ratio between the last two figures suggests that, for the period between 1860 and 1917, the production of autochthonous novels varies, on average, with more than 50% from one year to the next. It is also no wonder that this *apparently spectacular variation* bears upon the ratio between the domestic and the translated novel. For instance, in 1864 and 1865, the $ILA_{(nn)}$ equals 5 and 3, respectively. These are some of the highest values in the entire history of the Romanian novel; however, they may not seem that relevant when one considers that in those years just one translated novel was published, and 5 and 3 local ones, respectively.

As a matter of fact, the main problem of the epoch is its *small numbers*: as one can observe in Fig. 2, the number of domestic novels varies between zero—in 1877, the last year in which no local novel is published, due to the war—and 20 per year—in 1892, a year without a special significance. Yet more frustrating is the absence of a major rise; there is an increase, of course, but it is very slow. From the annual average of 4.3 novels in the 1861–1870 decade until the first decade of the 20th century, when the number of published Romanian novels rarely drops—and by very little—below 10, an undeniable increase occurs. It is, nevertheless, too little, given that the two periods lie 30 years apart. This is why Nicolae Iorga's[13] notorious lament expresses not only a painful

Fig. 2. The evolution of the Romanian novel between 1860 and 1917




truth, but also a *particularity of Romanian literature*. If, in general, in any literature, regardless of time or space, a rise of the novel is registered within the first 20–30 years after the appearance of the genre,[14] in Romanian literature *such a rise does not take place within the first 70 years of the existence of the autochthonous novel*. Perhaps, however, the problem here is not duration, but quantity: analyses of other cultures show that the rise of the novel occurs the moment we deal with "one new novel per week," which means approximately 50 novels per year, thus consecrating "the great capitalist oxymoron of the *regular novelty.*"[15] Within the first 70 years of the genre's existence, the annual production of the Romanian novel does not manage to reach even half this number. Why have we no novels? Because the *Romanian novel does not manage to reach the critical mass which would enable it to rise*.

How is the great number of translations recorded for the aforementioned period to be explained then, especially between 1882 and 1913, when imported novels reach an annual average of 45.8 titles? The lack of professional Romanian novelists and the public's preference for foreign novels which Iorga invokes can serve as points of departure for an explanation, regardless of which one of the two we deem to be the cause and which one the effect of the other. However, such conditions would not have generated this radical a break between the two lines of the novel in the absence of a catalyst: *the unprecedented development of the "yellow press"*—whose defining metonymy is the establishment of the *Universul* (The Universe, 1884) newspaper—*and, with it, of the serial novel*. Although this phenomenon affected the entire Romanian editorial system at the end of

the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, it had different consequences on the two lines of the novel published in Romania. Thus, if for the domestic novel, the serial novel accounts for only 56.6% of the titles published between 1882 and 1913 (i.e. 218 out of 386), for the translated novel, its share is 71% (1,042 out of 1,466 titles). It is easy to understand why: whereas many Romanian writers still nourished the ambition of being published in book format and thereby increase their symbolic capital, the majority of foreign authors probably had no inkling they were going to be published in a regional language, which means that for them the issue of choosing between book and magazine did not even exist. As for the newspaper owners, they treated novels as mere collections of trivialities and it is therefore not to be wondered that they preferred working with unassuming translators rather than with authors with potential "artistic" pretentions. At any rate, by correlating the respective percentages with the already existing difference in favor of the translated novel, we can better understand why and how *the institution of the feuilleton deepened the gap between the local and the imported novel in Romania.*

## The Second Stage (1918–1947): The Crisis and the Boom

Surprisingly, the difficulties faced by the Romanian novel in its rise extend to the interwar period as well. If the small number of titles between 1918 and 1919 (5 per year) is explicable, given that Romania was still at war, it is odd that the large number of novels published in 1920 (28!) does not necessarily foreshadow a sustainable growth rate. It is true that the average number of novels in the third decade (21.8) is evidently superior not only to the averages of any of the preceding decades, but also to the number of autochthonous novels published in any of the prewar years. However, this average is still relatively small if we take into account the fact that, after the war, Romania had doubled its population and territory. The rise in the 1920s is still anemic: it is not until 1926 that novelistic production reaches the 1920 "record" and it still does not manage to surpass it by the end of the decade. Given these facts, the new laments concerning "why we have no novels" are also justified,[16] despite the publication of such valuable works as *Ion*, *Pădurea spânzuraţilor* (Forest of the hanged) or *Concert din muzică de Bach* (A concert of music by Bach). It is true that a visible change still takes place in the first interwar decade: a drop in the number of imported novels, which, between 1920 and 1929, reach an annual average of 30.1 titles (a decrease of over a third related to the annual average of the last three prewar decades, which, as we have seen, equaled 45.8 titles). The drop is most probably explained by the steep decline of the serial novel, but also by a host of adjacent factors, such as the pervasive spread of the cinema and radio, which pose considerable competitive challenges to foreign popular fiction. All these circumstances determine the significant increase of the $ILA_{(nn)}$ compared to the previous epoch and even its reaching values above one in certain years (1920—1.27; 1921—1.08; 1926—1.08). Consequently, after the war, the domestic novel begins to compete with the translated one, even if not necessarily due to the rise of the former, but rather due to the fall of the latter.

Fig. 3. The evolution of the Romanian novel between 1918 and 1947


In a seemingly paradoxical manner, the beginning of the boom of the Romanian novel coincides with the beginning of the economic depression: starting with 1930, the former evinces a spectacular growth rate, with percentages that reach 70%–80% in certain years, and with numbers which peak in 1936, when 99 titles are published (see Fig. 3). Taking a step back, we can see that, within only 7 years (1929—21 titles vs. 1936—99 titles), the domestic novel displays a growth of 371%! Consequently, the early 1930s mark *the rise of the Romanian novel*, whose peak ("the golden year of the interwar Romanian novel," as Cornea calls it) is to be found in 1933. Not only are 31 "notable" novels published then, judging by the calculations of Cornea,[17] but at least two further remarkable phenomena take place. On the one hand, we deal with a growth rate of almost 70% vs. the previous year, given by the rise from 46 to 78 titles; it is the highest numerical increase theretofore registered by the Romanian novel. On the other hand, the high value of that year's $ILA_{(nn)}$ (2!) derives in its turn from the greatest gap between the number of domestic novels and that of translated ones registered up to that point (78 as opposed to 39). Based on these facts, we can now come back to Cornea's key question ("why did the hegemony of the novel peak and become evident in 1933, *precisely* in 1933?") and to do away with the hypothesis that this temporal circumscription is an "arbitrary" one.[18] No, it is not arbitrary at all: 1933 is the "golden year of the Romanian novel" *precisely* because it is *the year of the highest rise in Romanian novelistic history*; for, even if we can disagree with the Marxist dictum according to which quantity eventually morphs into quality, we can nonetheless concede that quality is unthinkable in the absence of quantity.

As mentioned above, the rise of the domestic novel goes on until 1936, when a new record is reached, which Romanian literature will manage to surpass only 35 years later. After 1936, a slight decline occurs, with the stabilization of autochthonous production around an annual average of 70 titles, and that of translations around 50. However, this time of stability does not last too long, due to the outbreak of war in Europe and to Romania's subsequent territorial losses, which determine a steep decline in autochthonous novelistic production, decreasing in 1940 to 39 titles, while the $ILA_{(nn)}$ again drops to a level below one (0.78). Unexpectedly, the production of domestic novels again rises during the war, reaching 60 titles in 1942, whereas the number of translated novels virtually explodes in 1943, with a new record of 153 titles, which will not be surpassed until almost 50 years later. Nevertheless, the turn of events on the Eastern Front and Romania's subsequent turn against its former allies will cause the irremediable collapse of the market, with only 28 local novels and 38 translated titles in 1944. It was already evident that the Golden Age of the Romanian novel had come to an end; the dawn of what Sean Cotter termed, "with moderate irony," "a golden age of Romanian translation,"[19] was in sight.

## The Third Stage (1948–1989): Inflationary Processes

It is peculiar that the establishment of the communist regime in Romania does not put an end to, but rather accelerates the fall of postwar Romanian novelistic production; in other words, the true fall of the Romanian novel takes place not *during*, but *after* World War II. To talk numbers, we now witness a drastic contraction of local productivity, from an annual average of 42.6 titles between 1940 and 1947, to 15 titles between 1948 and 1955. It is symptomatic that translations do not fare much better, as their annual average also drops from 73.1 between 1940 and 1947, to 55.6 titles between 1948 and 1955. Both trends are explicable, though by different causes. Thus, the decrease in the number of domestic novels is explained by the impossibility of finding a sufficient number of prose writers (both well trained and willing to write realist-socialist novels) to compete with the numbers of the interwar period, whereas in the case of translated novels clearly superior qualitative expectations were added requirements. While a Romanian author or one from the "friendly states" might be allowed to make mistakes (out of inexperience or too much enthusiasm), one from Soviet literature—which authoritatively dominates the Romanian translation "market" at the beginning of the communist age[20]—could only be translated if they had produced a "masterpiece" which would serve fresh or potential converts as models of creation. Correlating these parameters, we understand better why the growth of both lines throughout the age of realist socialism (1948–1964) is far from being steep or substantial; it is rather reminiscent of the failed attempts of the 19th century or of the blunders of the 1920s.

Nonetheless, this provisional situation does not last forever: the *second rise of the Romanian novel* takes place in the late 1960s, during a period of "liberalization." As a matter of fact, starting with 1965, the domestic novel experiences a relative stabilization of its annual growth rate at 15–20%. Translations also increase, though at a slow-

Fig. 4. The evolution of the Romanian novel between 1948 and 1989


er and less constant rate. The effects of both trends are felt more strongly with the dawn of the next decade: in 1970, the $ILA_{(nn)}$ again rises above one (1.02), after a break of three decades, and in 1971—the fatidic year of the July Theses—the local novel manages to establish a new record by surpassing the interwar peak. The growth does not stop here. After a relative regress recorded throughout the following years—with a decent annual average throughout the 1970s of 107.7 titles—, the domestic novel experiences another rise at the start of the next decade, reaching the unfathomable figure of 171 titles in 1984.

At this point, three observations emerge. First, a few brief corrections of the data (and implicitly of the interpretations) provided by Macrea-Toma, who is quick to identify "the first symptom of crisis" on the Romanian editorial market in 1975: "The translated prose registers a steep decline (63 titles in 1981 vs. 158 in 1974), while national poetry in particular and autochthonous prose still keep up, only to drop in their turn after 1981."[21] On the one hand, one can observe that, although real, the decline of translated prose is by no means as "steep" as the author makes it out to be, since *DCRT-1* indexes 67 *new* translated novels in 1981 (not to mention short prose or later editions). On the other hand, as Fig. 4 shows, the autochthonous novel is far from "succumbing" after 1981, when, on the contrary, it goes through a genuine boom. Its decline and that of the translated novel rather occurs after the mid–1980s, though in an unpredictable way: in a first step, the collapse of the translated novel parallels the boom of the domestic novel—for instance, in 1984 and 1985, when the $ILA_{(nn)}$ reaches record values: 4.4 and 5, respec-

tively; however, the translated novel then tends to stabilize, whereas the domestic novel seems to free-fall and the $ILA_{(nn)}$ decreases again, nearing its early 1970s values.

What has determined this apparently chaotic dynamic? Before answering this question, I will make a small detour which includes the second observation mentioned above. My point of departure is once again a question: is there a "golden year" of the communist Romanian novel, comparable to 1933, the golden year of the interwar period? The most likely candidate seems to be 1984, the record year of domestic fiction under communism. It is the year of the publication of, among others, *Drumul la zid* (Journey to the wall) by Nicolae Breban, *Refugii* (Refuges) by Augustin Buzura, *Un Burgtheater provincial* (A provincial Burgtheater) by Livius Ciocârlie, *Hărţuiala* (The harrassment) by Virgil Duda, *Caiet pentru...* (Notebook for…) by Alexandru George, *Mai mult ca perfectul* (More than perfect) by Paul Georgescu, *Intermezzo (I)* by Marin Mincu, *Zmeura de câmpie* (Meadow strawberries) by Mircea Nedelciu, *Cvintetul melancoliei* (The melancholia quintet) by Costache Olăreanu, *Redingota* (The riding coat) by Mircea Horia Simionescu, *Obligado* by Constantin Ţoiu. All of these are remarkable novels, though by no means "masterpieces"—either because they are not these writers' best works, or because these writers' creative resources are themselves limited. The same happened in 1971, another year which registered a considerable quantitative "leap," though not a qualitative one. Nonetheless, the reverse of this phenomenon can certainly be identified—years like 1977 or 1980, which comprise the publication of a few undisputable "masterpieces," but in which the "ballast" tips the balance of the overall image towards an unfavorable angle.

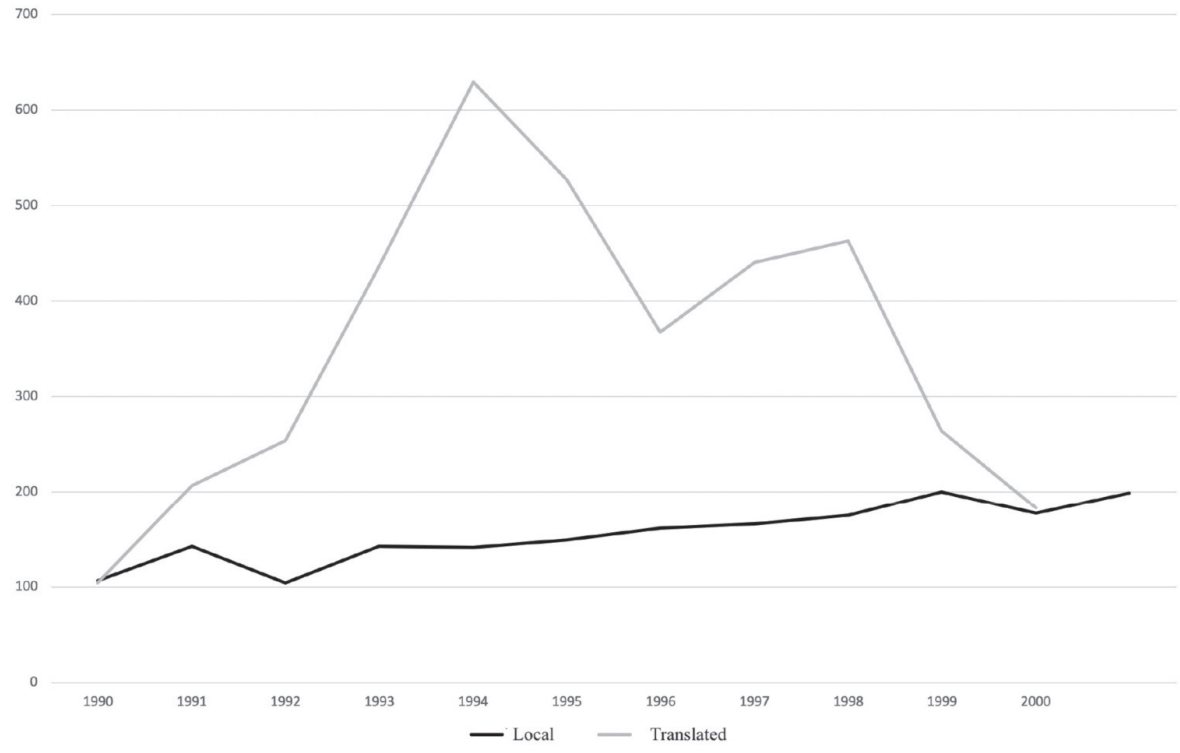
As a matter of fact—and with this I get to the last of my aforementioned observations—, this is the reason for which there is no "golden year" of the communist Romanian novel: *the degree of dispersal of valuable works is now much higher than in the interwar period* (either in the sense of a small number of "masterpieces" per year, or in the sense of their being leveled by ballast). In these cases, quantity has not engendered quality. On the contrary, my hypothesis is that during this epoch, the former deliberately subverted the latter. After all, what is it that determined the continuous increase of the regime's investment in autochthonous fiction, amid a worsening economic situation and, moreover, a policy of ideological "freeze"? The most likely answer seems to be nationalism (and its correlative—cultural protectionism), yet that is not all. If, for instance, we compare the number of domestic novels, which sparked no critical response whatsoever, published in the years 1970 and 1980 respectively, we can see that their share has risen, throughout the decade, from 25.5% to 34%. Consequently, Romanian communism encouraged the publication of novels, if not downright poor and propagandist, at the very least harmless, mediocre, and comfortable. Under the pretext of the "diversification" of subgenres and of types of reading, Romanian communism practiced an *inflationary strategy* meant to drown reflexive-subversive works in a sea of conformism. However, sometime around the mid–1980s—perhaps not unrelated to the writings of Marin Preda or Augustin Buzura—this strategy lost its efficiency. Consequently, the regime changed its policy and resorted to the already tested solution of tightening the censorship and reducing the number of published works.

## The Fourth Stage (1990–2000/2013/2019): Whither the Romanian Novel?

What is happening to the novel published in Romania after 1990? In the first decade after December 1989, a slow but constant increase in the production of local novels occurs, with an annual average of 10% (see Fig. 5). Thus, as early as 1993, their number equals the level reached in the early 1980s, and 1999 marks, through its 200 domestic novels published, not only the establishment of a new record, but also the attainment of a landmark. Consequently, the development of local novelistic production seems to be more stable as compared to the fluctuations of the previous period. Conversely, the increase in translated novels is much more steep, varying between annual growth rates of 22.7% in 1992 and 99% in 1991. Starting with 1990, the number of translations almost equals that of autochthonous novels (104 vs. 107 titles), reaching within just four years an unfathomable peak of 629 titles! In these circumstances, the $ILA_{(nn)}$ plummets dramatically, reaching a value of 0.22 in 1994, a level below which it has only descended four more times throughout the 20th century.

The explanation behind this asymmetrical development is easy to infer: it is a thoroughly predictable manifestation of the "return of the repressed" after four decades of communist censorship. All the subgenres of the international novel which had, for one reason or another, been banned by the former regime, are now to be found in the

Fig. 5. The evolution of the Romanian novel between 1990 and 2000



explosion of translations which dominate Romanian literature in the mid–1990s. Equally predictable is the subsequent sudden decline of novelistic translations, once this phenomenon came full circle and the market reached a certain degree of *saturation*. This occurs in the second half of the decade, when there are years in which the number of translations drops to half its mid-decade level—in 1998/1999 for instance, when the values drop from 463 to 264—so that the last year of the previous millennium witnesses an $ILA_{(nn)}$ of 0.97, i.e. an approximately equal number of translations and autochthonous novels.

Even if the data provided by *DCRR* and *DCRT* stop in 2000, the story of the novel published in Romania goes on for another two decades. What happens during this time? The fragmentary data I have been able to collect until now do not evince spectacular variations of the $ILA_{(nn)}$. However, an unexpected phenomenon, which I hesitate to explain for now, due to the lack of a wider context, is *the third rise of the Romanian novel*, which seems to occur around 2010—against the backdrop of a global economic recession—so that the year 2013 boasts the publication of no less than *537 new domestic novels.*[22] Is this value to be the record reached by the Romanian novel in the third millennium and, implicitly, throughout its entire history? It seems beyond belief that such a value could be surpassed; on the other hand, who would have thought it could ever be reached? This is why, perhaps instead of speculating, it would be more appropriate to draw some conclusions.

## Reflections and Conclusions

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the analysis above could or rather should be complemented by observations regarding the dynamic of the (sub)genres or even by close reading. Such an undertaking would, however, have exceeded the dimensions of a mere article. What is, then, the purpose of the present research? In my view, it can help us put a few issues into perspective:

1. First, the dimensions reached by the novel published in Romania throughout its evolution, which allow for comparisons to other cultures, but also between the different segments of its own history. *Big numbers*. Yet how big? According to my estimates, approximately 14,000 autochthonous novels have been published in Romania until now, and the current annual average revolves around 500 new titles. On the one hand, this means that every year a number of novels amounting to approximately 1% of the U.S.'s annual production is published in Romania and that *all domestic novels published so far in Romania* cover around *25% of the annual production* of the most powerful book industry on the planet.[23] On the other hand, we should also observe that the annual number of novels published in contemporary Romania equals the *sum total of all the autochthonous novels published during the first phase of the Romanian novel's development*, which comprised more than 70 years (1845–1917).

2. Second, what kind of phenomena have influenced the development of the Romanian novel and, more importantly, *how*? As can be observed in Fig. 1, the major falls of the Romanian novel coincide with various *political crises* (wars or revolutions): World War

I, World War II, the 1989 Revolution and, to a certain extent, even the War for Independence in 1877. However, we have all learned from Franco Moretti that the development of the novel does not agree with political changes.[24] How about economic ones? Well, this is where things get really interesting, since at least two of the Romanian novel's three rises occurred against the backdrop of *economic crises*: the Great Depression of 1929–1933 and the Great Recession of 2008–2012. Besides, the peak of the second rise of the Romanian novel is reached within the context of the implementation of inflationary policies by the communist regime during the period between 1978 and 1982. In conclusion, are economic crises conducive to novelistic development? This is one question which ought to be explored in detail in the future.

3. Third, does our approach entail a normative component as well? In other words: is there a "lesson" we should learn from studying the charts above? Rather than risk a purely speculative answer to this thorny question, I prefer to reduce it to a most concrete issue: what is the optimal ILA for a literary system? Naturally, a preliminary answer would be that the "optimal" ILA depends on the size and position of each culture. For instance, in contrast to the common knowledge according to which translations of fiction only amount up to 3% of the U.S. book market, the reality is even more dramatic: compared to approximately 50,000 domestic fiction titles, only 495 translated fiction titles (less than 1%!) were published in 2018 in the U.S.[25] Consequently, we can estimate here an $ILA_{(tf)}$—i.e., an ILA for "total fiction"—of over 100 and the $ILA_{(nn)}$ will probably not look very differently. Nonetheless, the American book market does not seem to fare badly at the moment. As for Romanian literature, what is crucial for it—as it is for other semiperiheral literatures—seems to be the balance between domestic and translated novels. In other words, the "optimal" ILA for Romanian literature would be an ILA situated *slightly above one*. In this regard, maybe it would not hurt remembering that the Golden Age of the Romanian novel was the age when the domestic novel "defeated", *on its own* (i.e. without state intervention), the translated novel. Thus, as we can see in Fig. 4 and 5, in the economy of the novel, as in any other economy based on free trade, any attempt to trick the market ultimately turns against the trickster.

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## Notes

1. Gh. Adamescu, "Bibliografia romanului românesc," *Cele Trei Crişuri* (Oradea) 18, 11–12 (Nov.–Dec. 1937): 209–215; id., "Romanul românesc," *Cele Trei Crişuri* 18, 11–12 (Nov.–Dec. 1937): 208–209.
2. Adamescu, "Romanul românesc," 209.
3. Ibid., 208.
4. Dinu Pillat, "Romanul de senzaţie în literatura română din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea," in *Spectacolul rezonanţei: Eseuri, evocări, sinteze*, eds. Monica Pillat and George Ardeleanu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 235–271.
5. Ibid., 246.
6. Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23.

7. Paul Cornea, "Traduceri şi traducători în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea," in *De la Alecsandrescu la Eminescu* (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1966), 38–76; id., "Constituirea unui gen: Între 'romance' şi 'novel': romanul românesc în secolul al XIX-lea," in *Regula jocului: Versantul colectiv al literaturii: concepte, convenţii, modele* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1980), 263–285; id., "Anul de aur al romanului românesc interbelic," in *Aproapele şi departele* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1990), 375–384.
8. The abbreviations employed in this article refer to the following works: *DCRR-1 = Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2004); *DCRR-2 = Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului românesc 1990–2000* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2011); *DCRT-1 = Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România de la origini până la 1989* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2005); *DCRT-2 = Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România 1990–2000* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2017).
9. See the chapter "Reţeaua editorială: infrastructură şi producţie," in Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Priviligheţia: instituţii literare în comunismul românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2009), 158–173. Several quantitative analyses useful for understanding the dynamics of the Romanian novel in the 19th century are to be found in Ioana Drăgan, *Romanul popular în România: Literar şi paraliterar*, 2nd edition (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2006), 99–140. Unfortunately, the book was available to me only after the finalization of the present paper.
10. Ştefan Baghiu, "Translating Novels in Romania: The Age of Socialist Realism: From an Ideological Center to Geographical Margins," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai: Philologia* 41, 1 (2016): 5–18; id., "Strong Domination and Subtle Dispersion: A Distant Reading of Novel Translation in Communist Romania (1944–1989)," in *The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, eds. Maria Sass, Ştefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 63–84.
11. Daiana Gârdan, "Evoluţia romanului erotic românesc din prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea: Între exerciţiu şi canonizare," *Transilvania* (Sibiu) 46, 7 (2018): 23–28; id., "The Great Female Unread: Romanian Women Novelists in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: A Quantitative Approach," *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 4, 1 (2018): 109–124.
12. DCRR-1, 5.
13. Nicolae Iorga, "De ce n-avem roman?," in *Pagini de tinereţe*, vol. 2, ed. Barbu Theodorescu (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1968), 24–28.
14. See Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London–New York: Verso, 2005), 6–7. This principle can be extended to the "cycles" of production: as the development of the Romanian novel shows, it takes one to three decades for novelistic production to rise again after a major fall.
15. Ibid., 5. Moretti provides comparative data for Great Britain, Japan, Italy, Spain, and Nigeria.
16. See Mihai Ralea, "De ce nu avem roman?," in *Scrieri*, vol. 2, ed. N. Tertulian (Bucharest: Minerva, 1977), 82–91, and Camil Petrescu, "De ce nu avem roman," in *Teze şi antiteze*, ed. Aurel Petrescu (Bucharest: Minerva, 1971), 235–238.
17. Cornea, "Anul de aur," 380.
18. Ibid., 382.
19. Sean Cotter, *Literary Translation and the Idea of a Minor Romania* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 28.
20. Baghiu, "Strong Domination," 68–72.
21. Macrea-Toma, 169.
22. See Andrei Terian, "Istoria literară şi analiza cantitativă: Un studiu al pieţei de carte actuale din România," in *Exploring the Digital Turn*, eds. Anca-Diana Bibiri, Camelia Grădinaru,

Emanuel Grosu, Andreea Mironescu, and Roxana Patraş (Iaşi: Editura Universităţii "Al. I. Cuza", 2019), 33–43.

23. The American book industry estimates are based on *Bowker ISBN Output Report 2002–2013*, http://media.bowker.com/documents/isbn_output_2002_2013.pdf.
24. Moretti, 9–12.
25. Chad Post, "The Plight of Translation in America," *Publishers Weekly*, 1 March 2019, https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/79407-the-plight-of-translation-in-america.html.

**Abstract**

Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania

The present article proposes a quantitative analysis of the evolution of the novel in Romania. The study de facto compares, based on the data provided by *Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului românesc* (Chronological dictionary of the Romanian novel, abbr. *DCRR*) and by *Dicţionarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România* (Chronological dictionary of the translated novel in Romania, abbr. *DCRT*) for the period between 1845 and 2000, the evolution of the number of domestic novels and that of the number of translated novels in Romania, as well as the ratio between these values, which, dubbed the "index of literary autonomy" (ILA), serves as a measure of the degree of (in)dependence of the Romanian literary system. Starting from the aforementioned data and concepts, the present research delimits four phases in the development of the novel in Romania (1845–1917; 1918–1947; 1948–1989; 1990–2019) and attempts explanations of the diverse variations in novelistic production—especially its "rises" and "falls"—based on the various political, economic and cultural factors which caused them.

**Keywords**

Romanian literary system, domestic novel, translated novel, index of literary autonomy (ILA), rise of the novel