

Romanian Characters and Cultural Elements in Spanish Contemporary Literature

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*“Spain is my second
country.”*

Introduction

THE ACCULTURATION models, as seen by social psychologists, comprise: *assimilation* (adoption only of habits belonging to the host society); *integration* (adoption of these habits and equal preservation of those brought from the home society); *separation* or *segregation* (preservation of the latter without adopting any habit of the host society); and *marginalization* or *exclusion* (neither preservation nor adoption). Acculturation is often analysed on two levels: the *real* level (strategies referring to the options implemented by migrants) and the *ideal* level (attitudes envisaging the options preferred by both populations—host and migrant—should they be able to choose). According to Rojas, Sayans-Jiménez, and Navas Luque (2012), the degree of acculturation is measured in the public environment (economic and labour welfare) and in the private one (social, religious, family relations and values). These authors analyse host and migrant

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opinions on acculturation in the case of Romanian residents in Spain. A total of 500 people of each group from four regions took part. In the public context, Romanians opt for integration (44.4%) while Spanish people clearly prefer assimilation (77.3%), whereas in the private context, Romanians choose separation (63%) while Spaniards prefer integration (46.6%). As we can see, the hard core of each culture, which defines its identity, is the private context of shared values and social, family or religious relations. Therefore, Romanian migrants would rather both preserve and adopt habits in public contexts (political life, education, health, work or consumption), but in private contexts they retain their traditions, which does not always please the host society, and clashes might arise.

Since they opted for an integration model in the public context, Romanians were seen favourably by Spanish society during the first stage of their migration (which started in the second half of the '90s but increased considerably in 2002) and lasted till EU accession (when record figures of 800,000 were reached), but in the second stage (2007–2013), the Spanish perception changed radically. According to sociologists, this is mainly due to negative media campaigns. Thus, authors like Viruela (Viruela 2006; Viruela 2008) underline the good image Romanian workers used to have in the Spanish entrepreneurs' eyes, on the grounds of their dedication, efficiency, discipline, initiative or adaptability. In fact, the survey conducted by the Romanian Government's Agency for Governmental Strategies in 2008 on 1,207 Romanian residents in Spain shows that 65% of the interviewees considered that their greatest quality, according to Spaniards, was their industriousness, while 40% thought Romanians enjoyed the most favourable opinion of the Spanish society on migrant groups, followed by South Americans, although 55% believed the worst opinion of the host society was focused on Romanian gypsies.

Other researchers (Alonso 2008) focus on the type of networks Romanians build, which are weak and restricted to family members and close friends, a fact confirmed by Marcu (Marcu 2010) when describing new values in the Romanian society nowadays such as material wealth and individualistic success. In turn, Ruth Ferrero Turrión (2008) considers mistrust in peers, unsupportive attitudes and lack of mobilization as relics of the communist regime. She explains the negative image Romanians have had in Spain since they became EU citizens as a consequence of stereotyping the whole group as being prone to organized crime, corruption, violent burglary, begging, child trafficking. And the delay in confirming EU membership for Romania and Bulgaria might be used as an argument in favour of these perceptions. However, Ferrero Turrión also points at the media as the agent mainly responsible (*ibid.*, 57) for the demonization of certain groups, by associating them with robbery, murder and extortion. This opinion is shared by Mercedes Gordo Márquez (2008, 163) who finds

disproportionate the attention paid by news reports which encourage prejudices and generalizations. Rejection of the Romanian segment, and especially of Romanian gypsies, called “a plague” by the Popular Party leader in Badalona (Jesús García, *El País*, 16/04/2010), is clearly gauged and illustrated by interviews in the third chapter of the 2011 Report on “Racism and Xenophobia Evolution in Spain.”

In 2008, aware of this drastic change in perceptions, the Romanian Government launched a multimedia campaign in Spain entitled “Hola, soy rumano, juntos hacemos un buen equipo” (Hello, I’m Romanian, we make a great team together), which doesn’t seem to have been particularly successful, since in 2011, the study “Attitudes Towards Immigration” conducted by the CIS (Spanish Sociological Research Center) on 2,838 respondents shows through its question no. 31 (Is there any immigrant group you dislike?) that 16.5% of the Spanish surveyed spotted Romanians as the most disliked group and, when asked why, the three principal reasons were: they are involved in crime, they do not integrate, they are aggressive and violent.

Apart from the media which plays, as we have seen, a decisive role in constructing or de-constructing the collective identity imaginary on its three axes (departure society, arrival society, diaspora self-mirrored), there are two other essential indicators which can help us appreciate both the mutual and self-reflected gaze prompted by migration. One is social networks as spaces for daily, permanent interaction; the other is the artistic production in general, and literature in particular. Diasporic identities are being permanently re-constructed in literary works written by diaspora authors, but also in texts written by classic or contemporary authors in the country of origin and translated by diaspora translators, and finally, in those texts written by authors belonging to the receiving society, who portray both migrants in the receiving country and their background or historical evolution of the departure context. In this paper, I will focus only on the latter. In other words, I will analyse Spanish prose tackling Romanian issues (most of them related to migration) published in the last two decades, i.e. since the phenomenon registered a significant growth. I intend to revise the way Romanian characters, generally migrants, are fictionally described/invoked by fifteen contemporary Spanish prose writers. On the other hand, I hope to open a discussion on whether these descriptions coincide with the perceptions of the Spanish society or they exert any influence on Romanian diaspora readership in their (re)construction of an identity. Once I had approached the fifteen literary works likely to contain Romanian elements (characters, realities, cultural aspects) a four-type classification emerged:

1. the recent history of Romania, the fall of the dictatorship, Romanian society;
2. the underworld of prostitution, procurement, begging and crime;
3. the Romanian community in Spain: integration, difficulties, daily coexistence;
4. the eternal seduction of vampires and Stoker's revival.

1. The Recent History of Romania, the Fall of the Dictatorship, Romanian Society

THREE WORKS fall into this category on the grounds of their common field of interests, although tackled from different perspectives. Quim Monzó's *Hotel Intercontinental* (1991) includes several stories of which only one is devoted to a Romanian theme (i.e. "La facultat de ciències de la informació"/The faculty of information sciences), namely the post revolutionary atmosphere in Bucharest, represented in its utmost authenticity by the Intercontinental Hotel, transformed into a press center with its throng of journalists waiting for the National Salvation Front to become a party and run in the elections. Ignacio Vidal Folch's *La libertad* (Freedom) (1996) is a novel which, under the pretext of describing the life of the Spanish colony in Bucharest at the end of the eighties, in fact draws a detailed picture of the Romanian society in an agonizing system and immediately after its collapse. On the other hand, Miguel Sánchez Ostiz's *Cornejas de Bucarest* (Crows of Bucharest) (2010) is a document of a different nature, presumably containing biographical elements, written in the first person, in which the protagonist narrates parts of his life starting from cues provided by Bucharest life in the nineties (after the fall of the dictatorship).

Quim Monzó's four-page story is set in the Intercontinental Hotel, also present in Vidal Folch's novel, called "Inter" by the Romanians, a symbol of Western style, a threshold they didn't even dream of crossing. The hotel was transformed into headquarters for journalists from all over the world, watching the clashes between a single-party leadership disguised as a democratic force and a divided society oscillating between nostalgia and resentment.

Vidal Folch's *La libertad* (1996) is a veracious piece of prose, well narrated and documented, based on the experience gathered by the author while living in Bucharest (as a news correspondent) and on a profound insight into Romanian life and society during the final years of the dictatorship. Names and quotes, communist slogans (p. 81) political jokes (p. 58) and cultural hints are dealt with faithfully, using the exact spelling (except for the diacritical symbols) and a pre-

cision of detail including the mention (pp. 11, 87, 165) of the protest letter signed by six Communist Party veterans against the regime and read out by the Free Europe Radio, or of the controversial poem by Dan Deșliu “Minerii din Maramureș” (The coalminers of Maramureș).¹ The main female character emigrates to the USA before the fall of the regime and since she refuses to distort her past into a best-selling traumatizing story of an ill-treated gymnast (similar to Nadia), she ends up in a sex-shop (Pink Pussycat) performing contortions on a round, red mattress surrounded by unseen men (p. 216).

Other authors, as we shall see, share with Vidal Folch an unusual literary device, namely the introduction of significant historic names (Nicolae Bălcescu, Ion Antonescu) highly relevant for Romanians (pp. 48, 80) which are given to everyday, even mischievous characters. It is probably shocking for the Romanian reader to come across characters’ names like George Enescu (Javier Alfaya) or Ferdinand—a King’s name, together with Toma Caragiu or Octavian Cotescu, both prominent actors (Miguel Sánchez Ostiz), transferred into daily routine.

Whereas the first part of the novel (narrating the agony of the dictatorship) is vividly experienced by the authorial voice, the second part (the collapse and aftermath of its fall) seem to be described more externally and stands closer to the news report. In any case, this is a piece of prose worth reading and a veracious document of those events, watched objectively enough by Ignacio Vidal Folch.

In *Crows of Bucharest*, defined by Ostiz himself as a “novel of novels, multi-cultural, pluri-ethnic, and meta-literary” (p. 32) he entangles pieces of reality, semi-veracious facts, memories, readings and fiction. He plays with a metatext in which he highlights the presence of the author and the creation process; by breaking the literary convention, he addresses the readers offering real facts and names, making them believe they deal with a documentary, but then provides invented characters and semi-fictionalized facts, difficult to decode; see for instance the references to the head of the Cervantes Institute of Bucharest re-named Bonica Saltea, or to a famous translator of Romanian literature into Spanish.

The first and last picture of Bucharest constitute the leitmotif of the book: the crows, birds of ill omen, covering Romanian skies, premonitory for the rest of the story, which is full of dark figures, superstitions, inept professors, “insolent disinterested, non-receptive and arrogant university students” (p. 170) living in a city not at all “exotic and cosmopolitan” (a label only for travel-guides) but rather filthy and unsafe, full of stray dogs, prostitutes and thugs in uniform (p. 14). Gypsies wash their condoms (?) and roar with black, toothless laughter (p. 30); the whole country is “for sale” (p. 146), Romanians never like what foreigners write about them (p. 17), and Bucharest people lack any sense of humour (p. 66) and cultivate rudeness (p. 29).

Regarding migration, as a phenomenon that nobody had predicted (p. 178), Ostiz describes the Romanians' three day bus trips into the Western world, ill treatment, aggressions suffered by those moving without documents and the settlements improvised on vacant grounds or even garbage dumps (p. 526). Mihai, a Romanian businessman in Spain (making money in the building sector) is the image of a winner; he considers blacks and south-Americans to be inferior races and he is a client of prostitution establishments (p. 58). Another successful businessman is a tailor who makes Orthodox Church chasubles; the exports to the USA, UK and other countries have increased amazingly due to the expansion of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the world (more exactly in those numerous diaspora communities of Romanians). Full of sarcasm is also the cliché of the Romanian bricklayer (like the Polish plumber) who offers a "good deal for his odd jobs," a stereotype reinforced by publicity campaigns, like the one financed by the Romanian government (see the famous spot "Hola, soy rumano"/Hello, I'm Romanian) intended to fight against rejection (p. 527).

2. The Underworld of Prostitution, Procurement and Crime

THIS CATEGORY comprises the most numerous examples of Romanian characters, either main or secondary, and belongs to the genre of black fiction, the majority of the novels being detective stories. Some of them, like the Planeta Prize *La vida invisible* (The invisible life) (2003) by Juan Manuel de Prada or *La Reina sin espejo* (The queen without a looking glass) (2005) by the Planeta award-winner Lorenzo Silva go far beyond the investigative plot. In the case of the former, the investigation is the pretext to reveal a piece of history of the USA and some facts about pin-ups, while in the case of the latter the detective story is only the core of a much more general picture of Spanish society (frustrations and contradictions included) and a beautiful foregrounding of the city of Barcelona. Of the six novels included in this category, only Carme Riera's *Natura quasi morta* (Almost still life) (2011) is a traditional detective story, in which several murders occur and are investigated in search of links that might lead to a serial killer. Ramón Usall y Santa's *Tots els camins porten a Romania* (All roads lead to Romania) (2008) poses social questions and obliges readers to reflect on migration, coexistence and prejudices. Javier Alfaya's *El chico rumano* (The Romanian boy) (2007) presents a childish plot, built on antagonistic schemes and on primary feelings like pity. Finally, Luis Sanz Álvarez's (himself a retired officer of the Guardia Civil) *La joven llegada del frío* (The girl coming in from

the cold) (2012) couldn't even be considered a piece of literature. Containing huge numbers of misspellings, inexplicably overlooked by the publisher, this story's only strength is its value as a testimony of someone who has seen, or shared the tragedy of "many women trapped within mafias and networks, without being able to shout for freedom," as the author states in his dedication. He tries to introduce Romanian cultural elements but he fails in capturing them correctly.

Javier Alfaya's *El chico rumano* is a story for teenagers (judging by metatexts and the publishing house/collection), narrated in the first person by a 50-year-old translator living in Galicia. This narrator focuses on a 10 year old Romanian boy, Sergiu, who disappears one day. In the end, the boy is rescued from the paedophile network and goes to school, where his results are excellent. The plot, incessantly revisited since Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, reminds us of a Disney production whose main character is in danger and surrounded by very good and very wicked humans. The utility of this prose for Spanish adolescents trying to better know their Romanian classmates (through cultural and idiosyncratic aspects) remains to be proven.

The same flaws (childish plot, implausibility of facts and reactions) can be found in *Tots els camins porten a Romania*, undertitled: *Un cas del detectiu Rafel Rovira* (A case of Detective Rafel Rovira), by Ramón Usall y Santa, although this novel (unlike the previous one), has a great merit: preparatory research work. Regarding the image of migrants, the author draws a gender difference. While men can be former Securitate agents (like the victim Florian Grigore, a learned, polite, discreet man, whose death prompts the plot, or his peer in profession and fate Ilie Stroia, the second corpse), women are either prostitutes (Constantina) or cleaners (Ioana, a graduate in Latin and Greek in Romania), in both cases illegal residents likely to be humiliatingly expelled (p. 13). However, Ioana stresses the status difference presupposing a generalized prejudice in Spanish society: "Don't misinterpret things, I am no tart'—fed up with the immediate link between her national condition as a Romanian and professional prostitution."

If we move further into the crime fiction genre, we must refer to Carme Riera's *Natura quasi morta* in which a series of murders occur on the campus of the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona involving professors, students and staff in the police investigations. The first victim is an Erasmus student and the main suspect is her boyfriend Constantinu Ilescu, a tall and robust 21 year old Romanian student living in a van, who disappears almost at the same time. In the course of the novel three more murders take place. The presence of the Romanian Consul Dimitri Vasilescu (p. 193) in the investigation and of other Romanian characters (an ophthalmologist, a nurse, p. 194) prompts a number of insertions referring to the "Securitate" (p. 28) or to the "Casa Poporului" again called "Palau" (Palace) (not very appropriate for the story, not to mention the ghosts haunt-

ing it). Dimitri Vasilescu is not especially keen on talking to the police, since he is aware of his compatriot's intense criminal activity and of fraudulent Romanian Associations existing in Badalona or elsewhere, chaired by doubtful figures with fake identities (p. 193). When Iliescu disappears, xenophobic phone calls cheering "one immigrant less" (p. 13) are received.

La vida invisible by J. M. de Prada is a particular case in which two stories with two pivotal cities, Chicago and Madrid, are embedded and overlap. One is the story of Fanny Riffel, a famous pin-up of the '50s, whose life and ordeals are told naturally, the plot is well developed and resolved. Beyond the facts, there is a solid documentation, the argument progresses smoothly up to a determinist end, closing the circle. On the other hand, we follow the first person love story told by the narrator in which a very sinuous plot, full of inexplicable obscure corners unfolds, with an unlikely denouement, extreme characters reacting strangely and a moralistic condescending tone surfacing every now and then.

The two Romanian characters in this novel are Michalela (a young gypsy girl carrying an infant) who is selling a newspaper called *La Farola*² in underground stations, and Vasile Morcea, a dangerous criminal, a procurer whose "girls" are forced into prostitution at the infamous "Casa de Campo" in Madrid, which de Prada describes in detail (p. 503). Michalela (p. 428) is presented in a positive light (she takes risks to help the narrator find his girlfriend), as a victim of the communist regime, who spent her life on "rough roads through Moldavia and Bukovina" hungry, stealing honey from hives, and "running from Ceaușescu's soldiers" who "tried to exclude gypsies from the demographic census" (p. 496). The other Romanian character, Vasile Morcea (p. 505), at the opposite pole, is "worse than a demon" (p. 446) and his voice is "icy and warning" denoting "an inscrutable radiation of malignity" (p. 514). The Romanian migration in Spain as well as the society they belong to is depicted rather superficially, through these two representatives, referred to in lapidary sentences, awkward localization landmarks and strange names (Michalela?). Selling newspapers with newborns is shown almost as a heroic act, whereas the gypsy's counterpart, the procurer, who is a beast and torturer, has an amazing knowledge of authentic Spanish traditional proverbs and sayings.

A carefully built detective story with a leitmotif borrowed from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass* is the novel *La reina sin espejo* which belongs to a series of criminal cases solved by Sergeant Bevilaqua, the narrator, and Caporal Violeta Chamorro, both of the Guardia Civil (the Spanish equivalent of the French Gendarmerie or Italian Carabinieri). Neus Barutell, a famous Catalan TV presenter is brutally murdered and suspicions surround her much younger lover until the investigation reveals a thread which is much more plausible in terms of a motive for the assassination, which is the information provided by a Romanian

interviewee, Cata Iliescu in a show led by Neus Barutell on prostitution networks. Although her face and voice are distorted on TV, Cata Iliescu is recognized by mafia boss Nicolae, and her (sort of a) boyfriend, Ștefan Gheorghiu, whom she asks for help, fails to prevent her death. Her interviewer, Neus Barutell, who was digging into the organization's dark business is also murdered. The only Romanian character who is portrayed in depth is Gheorghe Radoveanu, the petrol station employee and key witness in the case, "a clever young man, with a natural aspect" who was expecting his residence papers to be renewed. In spite of his irregular administrative situation, he is calm and he expresses himself in "fluent Spanish almost lacking any foreign accent, as most Romanians do" (p. 63). He is well built with green penetrating eyes and a harmonious face (p. 65). He prefers reading rather than watching TV, in order to improve his Spanish and he borrows classics from the village library (Cervantes, Galdós, Baroja, Machado, Unamuno). He has a helpful attitude since he considers that: "Spain is my second country; you have given me a job and a home. And I am a grateful person. If I can help you, I'll be pleased to do so" (p. 65).

3. The Romanian Community in Spain: Integration, Difficulties, Daily Coexistence

THIS CATEGORY is illustrated by the novels: *La illusió* (The illusion) (2008) by Jaume Benavente, *Els trafecs d'en Ton* (Ton's bustle) (2011) by Víctor Batallé, both in Catalan, *Un milagro en equilibrio* (A miracle in equilibrium) (2004) by Lucía Etxebarria and *No me cuentes tu vida* (Don't tell me about your life) (2012) by Luis García Montero.

The first two seem to belong to this new type of "committed literature," created to comply with certain educational purposes and containing a series of commonplace elements, presumably to be exploited by literature teachers in class when talking about immigration, tolerance and other values. Benavente introduces Gavril and his sister Vera, under-aged, who are on their own in Spain and speak perfect Catalan. Their parents are both teachers. The episode of how they fled Romania in a three-day journey on a bus driven by a compulsive smoker joined by a gypsy who carried a pistol (pp. 61–62) and the death threats suffered by their father when trying to criticize the poor management of the college where he taught (p. 86) all reflect the usual stereotypes. This novel, intended to give Spanish readers an idea of the migratory phenomenon, fails to show the complexity of human relationships when it comes to coexistence. In exchange, it has an embedded detective story: the disappearance of Vera, Gavril's sister

and her rescue from a prostitution network which had kidnapped her (p. 138). The story has a happy ending when brother and sister emigrate to a better place (Holland) to join their mother (pp. 141–142). Regarding the Romanian theme, it lacks research and is based on the Romanian immigrants' image in the media, rather than on a concern for the intercultural dimension. A paternalistic voice (sometimes betraying a feeling of pity) enumerates problems (such as poverty, corruption, injustice) in the country of origin, somehow trying to justify these people's choice to emigrate.

Unlike this plot, the one sustaining another juvenile novel, *Els trafecs d'en Ton* by Víctor Batallé, focuses on a 12-year-old Catalan boy, Ton, who has a Romanian friend, Dorinel (p. 11) whose father is a chemist, the mother a paediatrician and the grandmother a painter (p. 69). Again, the stereotype of the Romanian migrants as either evildoers or extremely educated leaves out the great majority of the Romanian community in Spain (working class with an average educational level).

Lucía Etxebarría's *Un milagro en equilibrio* proposes us a realistic story, beautifully narrated (in the first person) and perfectly plausible, in which readers identify with characters' behaviour in many situations and recognize themselves in more than one reaction of the protagonist, a pregnant woman addressing her unborn child. The Romanian character, a Ph.D. student in biology, is introduced quite late (p. 195) and his first description is, as in other authors' cases, done in terms of linguistic accuracy: "I thought he was from Alabama, by his impeccable English." One of first qualities is his skill in curing hangovers (p. 199), due to a sad expertise gathered with his alcoholic mother in childhood (p. 370), but he is also discreet and obliging (p. 202). He is not idealised: "too thin, too taciturn, too slattern . . . too insipid perhaps" (p. 404) and he is described as "predictable in his punctuality" and "exact as a Swiss watch" (p. 399), which sounds more like a defect than a virtue. Lucía Etxebarría does not indulge in poverty, corruption, trafficking. She lets her character speak by himself through his attitudes, behaviour and gestures. Although his childhood story is a sordid one (by the way, not necessarily a typically Romanian one) Etxebarría doesn't make it a cosmic tragedy. She narrates life, feelings, and helplessness easily assumable by the reader, with a fresh style, fine humour, and subtle irony. She practises a valiant criticism of Spanish society, customs and prejudices in a book one can't put down.

The last novel in this category is Luis García Montero's *No me cuentes tu vida*, a well-documented text which combines truthful information of both pre and post-communist regimes in Romania as well as a complete, non-biased non-paternalistic view of Romanian migrants in Spain. The plot develops on two levels: the present love story lived by Ramón and Mariana in Spain and the past love

and activist resistance stories lived by their respective families (parents and grandparents) in Romania and Spain. As in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the progressive couple (Ramón's parents) who had been activists in their youth and fought for communist ideals just as their own parents had in turn, offer Mariana, the Romanian maid, an equalitarian treatment and show her respect and warmth until they realise she is their son's girlfriend. This disclosure, by means of an unexpected erotic scene, unleashes a series of worries, questions and doubts in their minds. Mariana is Valentin Petroianu's daughter (an engineer at a gas factory in Sibiu) and her mother Ina is suffering from cancer. The girl emigrates to help her family out of financial difficulties, while her brother Norman is still in school (p. 11).

García Montero seems to have carried out thorough research (both through bibliographic sources and interviews with Romanian intellectuals), apart from his visit to the country where he met poets, professors and significant representatives of Romanian culture. He uses diacritical signs correctly (with few exceptions), he reproduces names accurately and he gives realism to his text by inserting expressions like "Pușca și cureaua lată," or names of newspapers aimed at the Romanian community in Spain (*Român în lume*), of dishes (*sarmale*) (p. 21), the famous "Eugenia" biscuits (p. 29), or the Orthodox fast and the importance of such feasts as St. Mary's Day (p. 433). However, he does not overindulge in such information, since his book does not offer an exotic view of Romanian migrants, stressing differences, but rather an integrative perspective, based on similarities, on the normality of everyday life and coexistence. When the author describes crime and violence in the slums of Madrid ("Cañada Real," in p. 392), gypsies are also present, Spanish and Romanian, the latter with their distinctive sign (a golden tooth) (p. 395) and the stigma from their own country transferred to migrating situations: "Those who hate gypsies the most are the Romanian immigrants. They feel ashamed. They don't want to be mistaken [for gypsies]" (p. 397) says one of his characters. This is corroborated by one of the wedding guests, uncle Sergiu: "Bad people, thieves; they should be kicked out of Spain and Romania" (p. 436).

In this well-balanced prose in which Romanian perceptions intermingle with Spanish ones and both narrative spaces are equally represented, to the extent of drawing a deliberate parallelism between Luminița (Mariana's grandmother) and Ramón (Ramón's grandfather) who both gave up successful careers in favour of activism (pp. 409–412), there is a permanent succession of past and present streams combining facts, beliefs and sensations that succeed one another providing the narration with both vibrant dynamism and a nostalgic touch.

4. The Eternal Seduction of Vampires

THE LAST category in my classification is called “the eternal seduction of vampires” and it contains two titles: *Las historias naturales* (Natural stories) (1960 and 2003) by Juan Perucho and *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* (Abridged history of portable literature) (1985 and 2005) by Enrique Vilá-Matas. The former is a homage to nineteenth century travel literature, combined with realistic detailed descriptions of nature reminding us of the great writers of naturalism. Perucho’s story is based on the vampire myth and on a long literary (and filmic) tradition having this legendary supernatural entity at the centre of the plot. He starts by talking about the bat from the Balkans (p. 24) defined as “something evil and Balkanic which goes straight to your blood” (p. 40) attacking the village of Prat Dip, in Catalonia, where people attend a gathering with huge amounts of garlic. Although Perucho does not directly refer to Transylvania, his tribute to Bram Stoker is clear, and when locating the Castle of the Duchess who is the first link in a chain of vampires, the Carpathians relate the legend to Romania. His novel, written in a pure, elaborate style, rich in naturalistic details (botanical terms, toponyms and their history, etc.), pays tribute to the gothic genre, placed in a Catalan scenery, and draws a symmetry vampire-dip by portraying a tormented character, Onofre de Dip who reminds us of Coppola’s *Dracula*.

On the other hand, Enrique Vilá-Matas’ *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* is probably his most emblematic work, recognized as a document that describes the atmosphere and artistic circles of the early 20th century, providing data on writers and artists to help understand the European interwar literatures and revolutions. The novel deals with the “Shandy conspiracy” or the “secret society of the portables” which was created at the Nile’s mouth in 1924 and dissolved in 1927, after a spectacular scandal in Seville. People such as Duchamp, Scott Fitzgerald, César Vallejo, Rita Malu, García Lorca, Pola Negri among others are said to have belonged to this society which based membership acceptance on two conditions: 1) the artistic work had to be portable (i.e. easily transportable in a briefcase) and 2) members had to function as perfect “bachelor machines.” The presence of Romanian characters in this story is owed to a supernatural fantastic power exerted by the “odradek,” a kind of abominable muse. From this “sharp and creative” rape, the portable literature appears to have been born (p. 120). Odradeks move across the netherworld and the underground streets of Trieste (p. 95) and pose on the writers’ shoulder; they are strange bastard creatures (p. 96) which, under the name of “bucaresti,” of obvious resonance, are described for first time by the Satanist researcher Aleister Crowley in

his diary of Trieste, written while he was living in this restless city and titled “Os bucarestis.” An alleged quotation from Crowley explains their nature: “Trieste, a sad city in which I could have been happy if it hadn’t been for the fact that, unfortunately, I discovered that every odradek has a golem assigned and every golem has its own bucaresti, which is, I must insist, a Romanian creature, tiny and horrifying which never separates from his master, the golem” (p. 94).

There is no other Romanian presence in this book. In turn, the Eastern part of Europe is described as a mysterious and conspiracy-inviting territory.

Conclusions

AFTER HAVING approached fifteen literary works published in Spain in the last two decades, containing elements of Romanian culture, history and society, we can say that they all share such common elements as: a clear tendency towards plots within the crime fiction genre, in which Romanian characters are both the criminals (generally men) and the victims (women or children); a proclivity to justify the massive migration to Spain as a phenomenon caused by poverty and corruption in Romania or by generalized human trafficking; a Manichean view on Romanians as either evildoers or extremely educated and cultivated people; an exotic image based on religious, folkloric, idiosyncratic, gastronomic elements (often misspelled or misinterpreted) sometimes accompanied by proper names borrowed from the non-veracious level of famous artists or historic figures; insufficiently documented (with some exceptions like Luis García Montero or Ignacio Vidal-Folch) farfetched accounts of recent history, more often than not inspired by media reports rather than based on archives material or rigorous scrutiny.

To conclude, I think these literary works do reflect (a part of) Spanish society’s fears and obsessions regarding otherness, and the evolving negative image of Romanian immigrants after they became EU citizens, based on stereotyping and reinforced by media campaigns. In particular, in those novels drawing on a crime fiction plot, very dangerous criminals emerge, but also victims, who are normally helped or earn the sympathy of Spanish characters. Romanian gypsies are hardly portrayed. Neither are the high-school graduates, lower-middle class workers in the building sector, in services, or nursing the elderly, who constitute the vast majority of the Romanian permanent community in Spain.

Regarding acculturation, some of these literary works confirm the Romanian first generation migrants’ preference for the integration model in the public sphere

and for the separation model in the private one, whereas the second generation seem to opt for assimilation in the public context and for integration in the private one.

As far as the Romanian diaspora readership (in Spain) is concerned, a survey would be needed in order to determine whether they a) are acquainted with these authors and literary works and b) whether they feel they might be influenced in any way, individually or collectively, (first and/or second generation of migrants), by the ideas and perceptions reflected in these texts. As a non-scientific observation, I can say that the small community living in Alicante, when approached, were not aware of the existence of such literary works and had read none of the titles mentioned in this paper.



Notes

1. Criticized for the pastiche in “Clipă, stai, oprește-ți zborul! / Se prăvale compresorul” of the Romantic poet Alphonse de Lamartine’s “Ô temps! Suspends ton vol, et vous, heures propices! Suspendez votre cours.”
2. *La Farola* was a newspaper sold in the early '90s in Spain by Romanian migrants, especially gypsy, meant to help them turn away from begging and crime by offering them a legal way of surviving.

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Abstract

Romanian Characters and Cultural Elements in Spanish Contemporary Literature

This paper's aim is twofold: on the one hand, I will try to tackle the issue of Romanian migration into Spain and the way it is understood and fictionally described/invoked by fifteen Spanish contemporary novelists. On the other hand, by providing a four-type classification of the perceptions they offer to readership, I hope to open further discussions on whether these perceptions may influence the Spanish society's expectations and perhaps even the Romanian diaspora's reactions. According to my classification, the perspectives on Romanian society and culture would fall into four categories: (1) the recent history of Romania, the fall of the communist dictatorship and Romanian society; (2) the underworld of prostitution, procurement, begging and crime; (3) the Romanian community in Spain: integration, difficulties, daily coexistence; (4) the eternal seduction of vampires and Bram Stoker's revival.

Keywords

Romanian characters in Spanish literature, crime fiction, Romanian recent history, Romanian diaspora

Kleine Geschichte der Ethnonyme *Rumäne (Rumänien)* und *Walache (Walachei)* (II)

IOAN-AUREL POP

*„Țara Românească einst
einen, schon vergessenen
oder, von manchen gar
nicht verstandenen, Sinn
hatte; sie bedeutet die
ganze, ethnographisch von
Rumänen bewohnte, Erde.“*

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Rumänen und Rumänien. Eine kurze
Geschichte** (Zweite, verbesserte
Auflage, 2007).

DER OFFIZIELLE Landesname – Rumänien (România) – ist modern als Form und Auszeichnung des gegenwärtigen Raumes, aber er hat, in leicht unterschiedlichen Darstellungen, einen beträchtlichen Alter. Der Name Rumânia/România – mit seinen mittelalterlichen Aussprachvarianten – soll gleichzeitig mit der Bezeichnung Vlachia/Valachia, als Symbol für Identität und Selbstbewusstsein der Bewohner eines bestimmten Raumes, im Gebrauch gewesen sein. Andernfalls, auch ohne die Existenz von Quellen in dieser Hinsicht, wenn sich das Volk selbst als *rumân* und ihre Sprache *rumânească/rumână*, nach der aus der Lateinischen ererbten Regel, bezeichnet, ist absurd zu glauben, dass die von diesem Volk und dessen unterschiedlichen Zweigen bewohnte Gebiete exklusiv regionale oder provinzielle Benennungen hatten. Aus alten Quellen aber weiß man sicher, dass die Moldau, Banat, Fogarasch, Maramuresch u.a. manchmal auch als