

The Rise of Translations

Foreign Novels in Romania in 1877, 1945, and 1989

ȘTEFAN BAGHIU

WHEN ARE literary translations useful? Here's a question that received quite a lot of answers, both in World Literature studies and in contemporary national literary studies worldwide. In Russian culture and literature, the idea that translations should be considered part of any national literature goes back to

the Russian literary writer and critic Nikolai Chernyshchevsky [who] declared in the mid-nineteenth century that "literature in translation should be seen as an organic part of a national literature. The latter cannot be studied in its entirety, its social significance cannot be entirely understood, if the facts of literature in translation are ignored."¹

In Romania, the debate has a different origin, stemming from the desperate 1840 assertion of Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891), who told his contemporaries that “translations don't make for a literature!”² This assertion is still debated today, with a radical perspective on the urgency of literary translation provided by Bogdan Ghiu in his 2015 *Totul trebuie tradus* (Everything must be translated).³ Kogălniceanu was actually referring to *adaptions* when talking about *translations*, yet his plea for an original literary scene is more interesting when put in the context of the rise of the Romanian novel: Kogălniceanu went against *adaptions* five years before the publication of the first Romanian novel in 1845, and fifteen years before the publication of the fifth Romanian novel in 1855, so he was actually way too cautious. Of course, novellas and short stories had already been published, yet the age of the novel was severely delayed in Romanian culture. A most famous essay authored by the then young literary historian Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) in 1890 asked, through its title, “De ce n-avem roman?” (Why don't we have any novels?).⁴ The question was answered through exposing social conditionings: we have no novel, Iorga argues, because writers lack the time and resources to write. Magda Wächter recently described the development of this debate, observing that the interwar period saw a great deal of interventions on the topic in Romania, even if the number of Romanian novels grew considerably during the 1930s:

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N. Davidescu talked about the “agony” of a literary genre, Felix Aderca wondered about the novel’s “decline” or “decay,” Eugen Ionescu spoke about the “death” of the novel, Mihail Ralea wondered why Romanian literature did not have novels, and so did Nicolae Iorga in an article from 1890.⁵

Romanian literary critic Mihail Ralea (1896–1964) even decided to declare that the Romanian novel appeared only after WWI. Although factually false, his statement aims at considering the entire novelistic production before 1918 unimportant by the standards of the interwar period—when *having novels* meant, of course, something fundamentally different from Iorga’s conception. Yet, I will try to give another interpretation to this obsessive pre-WWII question. “Why don’t we have any novels?” actually means, in my reading, “why do we have so many translations?” In my reading, this cry was value-driven and has thus been the main drive of the omissions that literary histories have long practiced in local historiography. Although swimming in an ocean of literary translations, mainstream literary histories generally dismissed them in order to prove that “we have novels.”

National literary histories produced by (semi)peripheral countries are curious instruments. They often present national literatures by focusing mainly on highbrow local productions. Although there are several critics who acknowledge the importance of translations, nation-consolidating instruments such as national literary histories usually don’t. Chernyshevsky’s mid-nineteenth century claim that “translations should be part of any national literature” is way more up to date than—let’s say—Romanian critic G. Călinescu’s mid-twentieth century *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (History of Romanian literature from its origins to present, 1941). This does not mean that Călinescu (1899–1965)—often described as the most important Romanian literary critic—didn’t use foreign examples in his literary history. He did, but as Alex Goldiș shows, his history

epitomizes, in Romanian culture, a nationalist literary historiography whose comparative thrust appears bent, oddly enough, on playing down the amount and significance of external stimuli. Even when he is forced to admit that local writers have been heavily influenced by outside authors, Călinescu does his best to deemphasize the impact of those authors by putting in place what Andrei Terian calls a “policy of minimizing and, sometimes, even negating the external influences on modern Romanian literature.”⁶

Oftentimes patriotic, the discourse of national literary histories creates strange Darwinist situations: the developments of genres and literary currents are depicted as a constant evolution through canonical battles taking place between different epochs, yet all the old and new canonical works survive those battles as fundamental artefacts of the ecosystem. No one “wins” the evolutionary struggle in national literatures and, as David Damrosch pointed out in 2006, the “defeated” often becomes stronger—i.e., more canonical.⁷ National literary histories flood their contents with “good” and “aesthetically valid” local literary artefacts and often claim that *local authors* are responsible—or, better said, have the merit—for the consolidation of *the national*. Yet their untold merit really is, as Alex

Goldiș recently showed, to *fill in* the place of a foreign author. The Darwinist battle for survival is thus *staged* in the small culture only because it had been *experienced* by the greater culture it looks up to. Paradoxically, the predetermined shape of the literary system in small cultures is stronger than its possible evolution, since through the “synchronist” drive, every small culture reserves a seat for corresponding canonical figures in greater literatures due to center-periphery pressures. While literary histories play a great role in hiding those transnational and foreign interactions, they also enhance the role of the local:

In the system's outlying stretches this reinstantiation of French or German classics, styles, and trends has had at times a cheerfully intentional dimension to it, and quite a few literary historians have assumed that genres and schools naturally—and purposefully—reproduce Western prototypes. Since the effectiveness of this reenactment has been held in high esteem across the region throughout modernity, identifying native representatives of Classicism, the Baroque, Romanticism, modernism, and even postmodernism has been tantamount to issuing a certificate of value.⁸

National literary histories present world literature through interactions taking place between local actors. That is—I would add—through local writers that perform the role of world literature authors that are usually not yet translated. The most important canonical international authors were not translated in Romania before they received their local lookalike. Eugène Sue's mystery novels were translated into Romanian long after Romanian writers imitated—faithfully to the point of plagiarism—his style and plot. Balzac was consistently translated in Romania long after the birth of local realism and even after the spur of Balzacian authors.⁹ Proust was translated long after Proustian literature became the obsession of the Romanian literary scene during the 1920s and the 1930s. However, I will address this strategy of “avoiding translation” of works by specific authors—a symptomatic behavior for small cultures—on another occasion. What I aim to show here is that, while national writers hold great responsibility for the birth of national literatures specifically because they *fill in* for a foreign author, what I discovered along the lines of recent quantitative approaches to the development of the novel in Romania is that the numbers of translated novels grow in state-building and state-rebuilding instances throughout the 19th and 20th century in Romania. Strange and unexpected, since it would be rather more intuitive to think, along the lines of literary histories, that moments of great importance for the configuration of the national socio-economic model have always been accompanied by the consistent growth of local narratives. Yet, my observation here is that Romanian literature went through *several* state-building and rebuilding processes or “situations” and that each of them was followed by an increased effort of translating foreign novels. These “situations” occurred when the nation shifted its administrative orientation towards a new center within the many configurations of the world system. In this respect, I will explain why the three Romanian transformations occasioned by the change of its *belonging* to a new center within the world-system—1877, 1945, and 1989—produced more translated novels than local ones.

Translations and Small Literatures

STARTING FROM the case of Ukrainian culture, Vitaly Chernetsky has convincingly argued a decade ago that “the national cultures of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have so far received relatively limited attention”¹⁰ in respect to translation studies in connection to postcolonial criticism. He points out the special case of the Ukrainian literary translation field, where translated literature “played a pivotal role in shaping its modern national identity,”¹¹ mainly because of the Ukrainian “lengthy colonial status and the long-standing policy of bans and restrictions against the use of the Ukrainian language promulgated by Russian imperial authorities.”¹² The Polish case, as Marta A. Skwara states, is even harder to explain, since “Polish literature was able to preserve the language, culture, and spirit of Poland through 123 years of political non-existence (1795–1918), and through the long years of Soviet dominance in the second half of the twentieth century.”¹³ In the Romanian case, however, Russian administration was both responsible for the import of French culture during the 19th century and for Sovietizing and foreignizing the local production in the second half of the 20th century. And this is an interesting fact: in both the 19th and 20th century state rebuilding process in Romania—1877 and 1945—the Russian culture played a crucial role. Alex Drace-Francis shows that

*It was primarily from Russia that French cultural models reached Romanians, who subsequently struggled against Russia to make them Romanian. Actors described these processes as “Europeanization” and sought to rebut the justified or unjustified critiques of foreigners. What was new about the nineteenth century, then, was not the idea that the Romanian nation needed books and education, but the idea that without such things it could not even be said to exist.*¹⁴

In 19th century Europe, only small cultures filled their literary markets with translated novels during the nation- and state-building process. And by “small” I am not necessarily referring to the size of the territorial nation, but to the dimensions of cultural production. And, of course, in Theo D’haen’s terms, to the complex structure of the speaking populations of said language.¹⁵ Benedict Anderson saw the translation phenomenon as a main difference between Europe and the Americas at the birth of 19th century “new nationalism” in Europe and Latin America. It was specifically the need of enforcing “national print-languages” in Europe that created a trend of translations in the nation-building process, whereas “Spanish and English were never issues in the revolutionary Americas.”¹⁶ Simply put, the fragmentation of European languages decided on the urgency of translation, while Latin America based its nation-building processes on already existing Spanish and English narratives—the reason why D’haen discusses their position as being “between major and minor status.”¹⁷ Moreover, Anderson sets out to explain in his chapter dedicated to East European nation-building processes how “the ‘nation’ proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent. It became available for pirating by widely different, and sometimes unexpected, hands.”¹⁸ Forg-

ing the nation-state required proper instruments, so that translation and imitation were generally at the forefront of literary activity in European countries. The novel, a popular genre at first, and already a vital nation-building instrument by the 1830s, shares this story of “patent” dismantling. An experiment conducted at Columbia in 1992 by Franco Moretti showed that the more peripheral a culture is during the 19th century, the more it relies on imports. While the French and English markets had less than 10 to 30% foreign novels in their libraries between 1750 and 1850, Russia and Denmark had more than 80% imported novels in theirs:

As you can see, most European countries import from abroad a large portion of their novels (40, 50, 60, 80 percent, if not more), whereas France and Britain form a group to themselves, that imports very little from the rest of the European continent: a fact which has a very simple explanation—these two countries produce a lot of novels (and good novels, too), so they don't need to buy them abroad.¹⁹

Moretti points out to a vital fact for the present analysis. The fact that there are countries that “produce a lot of novels” and, as he emphasizes “good novels too,” “so they don’t need to buy them abroad” means that there are also countries that don’t, countries that need to “buy them from abroad.” This was the Danish and Russian case, as Moretti shows, and this was also the Ukrainian and Romanian case—but for different reasons. As Sean Cotter argues, “The minor is not a failed state or potentially great one, but a translated nation.”²⁰ The minor is, I would add, determined by the state-building and rebuilding phases of the nation-building and consolidation processes. When a culture changes its orientation from one center to another—in the Romanian case between Istanbul, Paris, Moscow, and New York—, it automatically goes through a state-rebuilding phase. It is what Peter Hill recently demonstrated drawing on the study of diffusion patterns both in 19th century European and world scales of translation, specifically that

the emergence of individual ‘national’ literary languages on the one hand, and of the notion of comparability and translation between languages within a kind of ‘world literature’ on the other, were not separate phenomena: rather they should be seen as intimately joined, each the conditions of the other’s existence.²¹

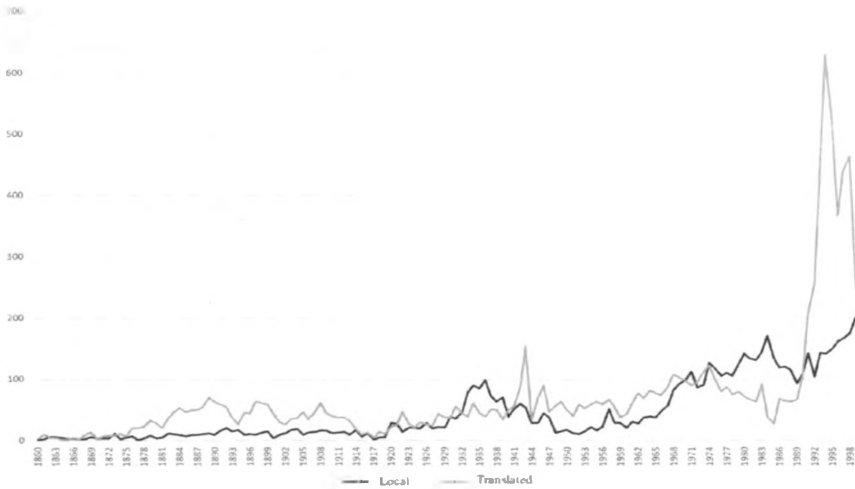
In Romania, those phases are defined by a foreignizing tendency, visible through the growth of translations of foreign novels. New institutions, new political directions for cultural agents, new capital flow structures that impose new rules for the novel—new demands and new strategies. This always happened when changing the world system orientation. And this massive translation tendency doesn’t come alone, but it is doubled in the Romanian case by a diversification of genre or geographical provenience. As Drace-Francis shows,

The publication of “literary” (by late twentieth-century criteria) fictions was far outstripped by that of sensational narratives. Also interesting is that in the total literary fictional output from 1831 to 1918, works by named Romanian authors amounted to less than a quarter,

those by foreigners nearly half, and a remarkable 28.6% anonymous works (most of these were published after 1890).²²

This is the paradox: while they play almost no role in literary histories, those translated novels are the sign of the development of the market (or state-planned culture).²³ They emerge when the administrative subaltern position shifts in Romanian history, a fact that I should further explain.

FIG. 1. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROMANIAN NOVEL BETWEEN 1860 AND 2000



SOURCE: Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania,” *Transylvanian Review* 28, Suppl. 1 (2019): 59.

Milestones in the Translation of Novels in Romania: 1877, 1945, 1989

I SHOULD begin by introducing the data: Andrei Terian proposed this graph in his 2019 article, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”—the author kindly agreed that I should publish it in this article for explanatory reasons. The graph shows the “numbers” of the novel in Romania through a dichotomy between the local and the translated. What he stressed out is how

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 1877.²⁴

He thus interpreted as a “fall of the Romanian novel” each moment when the local novelistic output went below the translated output. But does being overrun by translated novels mean that the Romanian novel falls? Not necessarily. The only times it actually “falls” is right *during* events that *cancel* writing and book publishing or, for a longer period, after WWII, when the high ideological demands and the Party censorship of socialist realism made it very difficult for local writers to blend in and publish. Seeing in the 1989 moment, for instance, a “fall” is quite exaggerated, since the events in 1989 only take place in December, whereas there are close to 100 novels published during that year—a good proportion for that period. What Terian described as a “fall” for the Romanian novel can be more accurately depicted as an impressive rise in translations, at least in the case of 1877, 1945, and the 1989 Revolution. And this is why I choose to focus more on translated novels in my interpretation of his data: those are all moments indicating a shift in macro geopolitical strategies and orientation.

If one can witness a domination of translations and a timid increase in the number of Romanian novels published before 1918, the period between 1918 and 1944 shows the steady growth of local production and a stagnation in the number of translated novels. In my reading, this points to a strong dependence of translations on radical shifts in political administration. The number of translated novels is growing consistently in the 19th century especially after 1877, the year when the Romanian Principalities—Moldavia and Wallachia, soon to be Kingdom of Romania after 1881—freed themselves from the Ottoman rule as a result of the Russian-Turkish War (1877–1878). This event is followed by three successive increases in the translation of novels that significantly accelerate the import of the genre in Romanian culture,²⁵ tempered only in 1914–1918, when the First World War causes the reorganization of the Romanian territory—the Kingdom of Romania is expanded to include Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina after the war. The country’s growth is pivotal for balancing imports and local production, and between 1918 and 1932 the literary system displays the same numbers for each category. Yet, between 1932 and 1940, the number of Romanian novels reaches unprecedented heights, marking a true “golden age” of the local novelistic production to that moment.²⁶ This dominance rapidly changes during WWII, when the local novel loses its position and the translated novel grows in numbers, mainly through American and English literature.²⁷ This domination of translated fiction reaches a plateau in 1947 and remains so until the 1970s, when the translated novel will end its dominance and, in the context of several global and local crises, will amass fewer titles than those of the Romanian novels. A new change of direction within the world systems in 1989 will further decide on the rise of translations until the early 2000s.

Of course, two questions arise from this overview. First, what about 1918? Why is there no significant growth in translations in the most important moment of the 20th century for Romania? Second, why did I use “1945” in this article’s title and not 1940, since the 1940–1945 period in fig 1. is clearly another moment in which translations dominate the field?

First, I shall address the 1914–1918 period. Although 1918 marks the beginning of a state-building process through the enlargement of the Romanian territory, it comes with no shift of position within the world system—Romania simply perpetuates its

Western-orientated administration. Therefore, one finds no significant change in respect to the translation of novels because the literary system simply continues its pre-wwi life, while the Romanian novel slowly reaches *big numbers*. More interested in explaining the rises in the Romanian novel in 1932 and 1968, Terian explains the growth of the local production in the 1930s in economic terms, following Moretti's arguments:

*We have all learned from Franco Moretti that the development of the novel does not agree with political changes. 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.*²⁸

The observations are fascinating, and they point to some sort of weird materialistic rule: crisis stems local outputs. This means that, in a truly deterministic perspective, this could be the nationalists' nightmare, for if you want your nation to have a productive literary activity, you have to hinder its economic development. Katherine Verdery also analyzed the ratio between local production and translations as a result of economic measures during the economic crises of late communist policies. In short, it was cheaper to use local literature than import foreign writings. Verdery explained through this the birth of "protochronism" and late Ceaușescu era nationalism.²⁹ Crises, as Terian once again shows, determine the growth of local cultural outputs. The increase of imports—I would add—is a direct result of a new positioning within the world system.

Second, the 1940–1945 situation. Here we have a very interesting case, in which the French novel collapses and English and American novels grow to unprecedented numbers. The explanations I can provide for now are related to the replacement of Paris as center of the World Republic of Letters with New York, since the French culture itself goes through an Americanizing process (the so-called *New York crystallization*). The 1940–1945 tendency is, however, firmly shut down after 1946, when the Soviet translation program in Romania cuts English language translations and the fascination exerted by American and English translations ends.

Conclusions

THIS IS what we know, in numbers: translations of novels outpace Romanian novels when the state-building process is oriented towards a new center in the world system. To be more specific, translations of novels are a more useful mass in *state-building* processes than the local production. As *accommodators* with the new *core* culture, translations play the vital role of delivering the *mass* of the novel, while local productions grow only after the accommodation has taken place. Simply put, when part

of a new administration, the Romanian novel doesn't know how to grow in number—or isn't allowed to do it, in the case of the Soviet occupation. After 1877, the Romanian administration shifts from Ottoman occupation to a Western-oriented monarchy, and translations of novels are mainly driven by desires to *become* a Western culture—aspiring towards French and German literature, mainly. After 1947, the Romanian administration shifts from Western-oriented monarchy to East-oriented communist state, as a satellite of the Soviet Union. Translations from this time perform the role of securing Soviet ideology and planetary communist connections. After 1989, the Romanian administration shifts from communism to Western-oriented capitalist democracy. The numbers of translated novels are huge in this case and point to the fact that the state-building effort was made possible by an opening in the international market. On all three occasions, the number of translations of novels is greater than the number of Romanian novels for approximately two decades, showing that the shift of the administrative *paradigm* and the change of geopolitical orientation determines a new *need of translations*. In response, after this period ends and the literary system stabilizes, the local production of novels increases—as Terian's study shows. Thus, 1932–1940 and 1968–1989 are periods with more published Romanian novels than translated foreign novels. Yet one more thing needs special explanation: each rise of translations is characterized by a new different approach to translations. After 1877, translations are mainly decentralizing the canonical figures present to that date, and even the French monopoly in the field, during the early 20th century. During the interwar period, between 1939 and 1947, the French novel is superseded by English and American novels, a first in Romanian culture. After 1947, a second approach can be identified in the translation program: the rise of translations from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, showing a new interest in the novel as a *global* phenomenon. Although ideologically driven and paling in comparison to the massive scale of the Soviet novel, this opening is once again a first in Romanian culture. After 1989, translations enter a new era of *market-oriented* publications and shift from the French model to the American one while sparking heated debates on local postmodernism. □

Notes

1. Brian James Baer, "Introduction: Cultures of Translation," in *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, edited by Brian James Baer (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011), 5. Baer quotes Nikolai Chernyshevsky through Efim Etkind, Introduction to *Mastera russkogo stikhotvornogo perevoda* (in Russian) (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1968), 5.
2. Mihail Kogălniceanu, "Introducție," *Dacia literară* (Iași) 1, 1 (1840): 1–2.
3. Bogdan Ghiu, *Totul trebuie tradus: Noua paradigmă* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2015).
4. Nicolae Iorga, "De ce n-avem roman?" *Lupta* (Iași) 7, 1090 (1890): 13.
5. Magda Wächter, "The Romanian Interwar Novel: Definitional Attempts and Controversies," *Dacoromania Litteraria* 7 (2020): 182–193.

6. Alex Goldiș, "Beyond Nation Building: Literary History As Transnational Geolocation," in *Romanian Literature As World Literature*, edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian (New York–London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 101. Goldiș quotes Andrei Terian, *G. Călinescu: A cincea esență* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2009), 290.
7. David Damrosch, "World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age," *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Haun Saussy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 43–53.
8. Goldiș, "Beyond Nation Building," 101.
9. As I have argued elsewhere, "in terms of translation into Romanian, Balzac is a cultural product of the early twentieth century (especially after 1908, his literature is constantly reedited)." Ștefan Baghiu, "Translations of Novels in the Romanian Culture during the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective," *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 6, 2 (2020): 87–106.
10. Vitaly Chernetsky, "Nation and Translation: Literary Translation and the Shaping of Modern Ukrainian Culture," in *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts*, 33–34.
11. Chernetsky, 34.
12. Chernetsky, 34.
13. Marta A. Skwara, "Between 'Minor' and 'Major': The Case of Polish Literature," in *Major versus Minor? Languages and Literatures in a Globalized World*, edited by Theo D'haen, Iannis Goerlandt, and Roger D. Sell (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2015), 221–232.
14. Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture: Literacy and the Development of National Identity* (London–New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 197. Drace-Francis mentions that this control ends after the end of the Russian protectorate in 1856.
15. Theo D'haen proposes the criteria of the users of said language since Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari themselves used the minoritarian language as criterion of the minor condition. See Theo D'haen, "Major/Minor in World Literature," *Journal of World Literature* 1, 1 (2016): 29–38.
16. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edition (London–New York: Verso, 2006), 67.
17. D'haen, 34.
18. D'haen, 34.
19. Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London–New York: Verso, 1998), 151–152.
20. Sean Cotter, *Literary Translation and the Idea of a Minor Romania* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 2.
21. Peter Hill, "Translation and the Globalisation of the Novel: Relevance and Limits of a Diffusionist Model," in *Migrating Texts: Circulating Translations Around the Ottoman Mediterranean*, edited by Marilyn Booth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 113.
22. Drace-Francis, 165.
23. In the case of translations during communism, I have provided data on several occasions for the diversity of source-cultures. See Ștefan Baghiu, "Translating Hemispheres: Eastern Europe and the Global South Connection through Translationscapes of Poverty," *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, 3 (2019): 487–503; 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*, edited by Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (Berlin etc.: Peter Lang, 2018), 63–84. For a detailed approach to translations of Global South novels during communism see also Alex Goldiș, “The Functionality of Literatures Translated within the Romanian Thaw Polysystem,” in *Beyond the Iron Curtain: Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania*, edited by Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, and Andrei Terian (Berlin etc.: Peter Lang, 2021), 235–250. See also the effects of these translated novels in Alex Goldiș, “The Pressure of Eurochronology and the Romanian Rural Prose,” *Transilvania* 11–12 (2021): 45–48.
24. Terian, “Big Numbers,” 68–69.
25. Terian, “Big Numbers,” 61 (fig. 2). See also Baghiu, “Translations,” 96 (graph 1).
26. It also has the biggest canonical concentration of all time and has been labeled by Paul Cornea “the golden year of the Romanian novel.” See Paul Cornea, “Anul de aur al romanului românesc interbelic,” in *Aproapele și departele* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1990), 375–384.
27. See Baghiu, “Strong Domination.”
28. Terian, “Big Numbers,” 69.
29. See Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1991), 142. See also Ioana Macrea Toma, *Privileghiul: Instituții literare în comunismul românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009), 167.

Abstract

The Rise of Translations: Foreign Novels in Romania in 1877, 1945, and 1989

This article analyzes the growth of translations of novels in Romania in relation to historical events that changed the administrative orientation of Romanian Principalities and the Romanian state within the world system. The data used is an exhaustive account of the ratio of local productions to translations provided by Andrei Terian in 2019. Shifting from Ottoman to Western influence, from Western to Soviet, and from Soviet to Western again, the Romanian administration also ensured the growth of literary translations—at least in respect to novels. This points out to a complex system of legitimation, through which state-building processes are followed by periods of translation growth in order to secure the alignment to the new center of influence. Translations of novels are thus *accommodators* for new dependencies within the world system. The article also depicts the situation of *small cultures* and their specific behavior towards translations. Following Franco Moretti’s observation regarding the ratios between translations and local production and Sean Cotter’s definition of minor cultures as “translated nations,” this research arrives to the conclusion that the “translated nation” is a *stage* within semi-peripheral and peripheral literatures when shifting their orientation within the world system.

Keywords

Romanian literature, World Literature, literary translations, theory of the novel, peripheral literature, world system, quantitative analysis