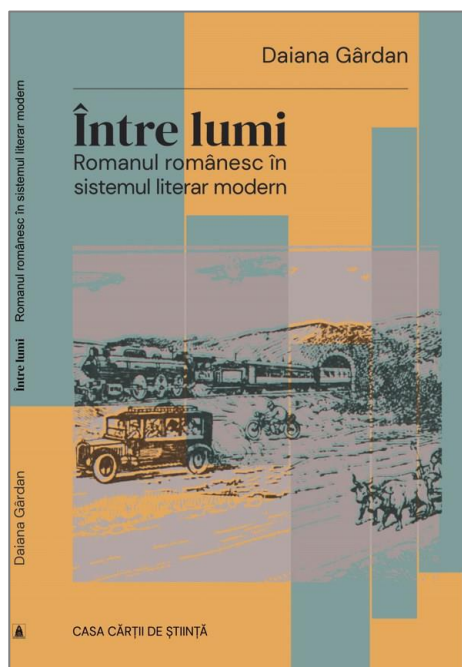


BOOKS

Daiana Gârdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, 259 p.



Daiana Gârdan's 2023 volume *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern* is a methodologically heteroclitic reappraisal of the Romanian novel between 1845 and 1939, with the focus on the first four decades of the twentieth century, prompted by the sustained relevance of the novels published in this period in the Romanian literary canon. The volume has a macroscopical approach, informed by the instruments subsumed under Moretti's distant reading paradigm and the most recent frameworks within World Literature scholarship. In this sense, the author reveals the gap between what has canonically been described in literary scholarship as the two poles of power in the literary field at the beginning of the twentieth century, the "modernists" and the "traditionalists", and their various forms of rhetoric with regards to the novel on the one side, and literary production brought to light by Gârdan's

distant readings on the other. As the author demonstrates, the gap between the clear-cut and often unequivocal appraisals of the Romanian novel that literary historiography and contemporary literary scholarship are tributary to and the reality of literary production is seldom made visible through traditional heuristic instruments. Her analysis is focused on the reevaluation of the two most prominent genres of the period, the rural novel and the urban novel, to which she adds a third category, the *interstitial* novel. Her reassessment of each of these categories brings to the fore the tensions and complexities of this division and questions the many presumptions that literary historiography operates with, focusing on the interrelated dynamics between genre



production and the production of social space. As such, the author reevaluates how the transfigurations brought about by the establishment of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century are metabolized in the Romanian novel. Predicated upon the conceptualizations of Fredric Jameson and the Warwick Research Collective, while reexamining the development of the Romanian novel from a transnational and global perspective, the volume connects contemporary literary studies to the more extensive and capacious frameworks of world-systems, integrating the Romanian novel into the circuits of World Literature.

The first chapter explores the methodological tools and heuristic instruments that the author operationalizes in the chapters dedicated to the three subgenres of the novel. In particular, Gârdan traces back the underlying assumptions that contemporary paradigms like digital formalism and World Literature hinge upon and shows how they are connected to the aims of Mikhail Bakhtin, among others. She explores the affordances and limitations of the methodologies upon which her analysis is predicated, accounting for the challenges of operationalizing research hinging on Digital Humanities tools in the context of the Romanian novel, with regards to existing archives and available infrastructure. An important point explored in the first chapter, which will accompany her analysis in the following chapters, is that methodologies based on Digital Humanities, including her own, do not aim to replace close reading and traditional hermeneutical approaches in their entirety, but rather to become symbiotic with these approaches and account for their blind spots. The second chapter is dedicated to the study of the genres and subgenres that are relevant to her argument, opening up a discussion about the functionality of different taxonomic systems in the case of the Romanian novel. Her metacritical investigation and her thematic analysis of various Romanian literary genres brings to the fore the complexity and the ambiguity behind these labels and operationalizes a taxonomy that is suitable to the analyses which follows this chapter.

The last three chapters are dedicated to each of the subgenres that the author explores, namely, the urban novel, the rural novel, and the interstitial novel. The chapter dedicated to the urban novel explores the most salient examples of the genre in order to highlight the tensions surrounding this notion. The synthesis between digital instruments and a sociological approach predicated on the issue of spatiality brings to the fore the two directions that Gârdan identifies within the urban novel - what she calls the *modern modern novel* and the *antimodern modern novel*. While the former is symptomatic for a prevalent attitude amongst Romanian writers at the beginning of the twentieth century, which aimed to calibrate the Romanian novel to what they perceived to be the most outstanding and consequential influences of the time, the other is more skeptical toward the notion of modernity, representing modernity as dispossession and depletion. The comparative dimension of this chapter highlights, from a transnational framework, the correlations between the Romanian modern novel and the North American novel in the first half of the twentieth century.

The chapter dedicated to the rural novel begins by demystifying various notions about the rural novel in Romanian literature, for example by highlighting the minor number of rural novels that were published in the first part of the twentieth century relative to the total number of published novels. This data, coupled with other findings

and assertions, highlight the ways in which many issues about the rural novel which were previously considered resolute are in fact more complex and deserving of reconsideration. By comparing one of the seminal rural novels in Romanian literature, Rebreanu's *Ion* with Euclides da Cunha's *Rebellion in the Backlands* and utilizing a transnational framework, the author advances important considerations about naturalism in Romanian literature and how it is metabolized on the one hand, and how the image of the Romanian peasant is constructed in the novel of the first half of the twentieth century on the other hand, to name just a few of her considerations in this chapter.

The last chapter, dedicated to the interstitial novel, explores the effects of the insertion of capitalism and its subsequent new social configurations in the peripheries of Romania. This type of novel, predicated on (semi)peripheral and transitory forms of spatiality, metabolizes *the unequal and combined effects* (to use WREC's Trotskyist formula) of the injection of global capitalism into archaic forms of life. By connecting her observations on the Romanian literary production with literatures from other (semi)peripheral spaces, in this case South America, the author demonstrates the global relevance of her arguments.

By engaging with digital instruments and contemporary scholarship within World Literature, the author undoes many commonplace and cliché-ridden assumptions about the Romanian modern(ist) novel. As her findings on the metabolization of the social transformations in (semi)peripheral spaces at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century demonstrate, many of her assertions are not only relevant to literary studies on a local level, but also to World Literature studies focused on the peripheries on a global level. The importance of this volume to contemporary literary studies is related not only to the author's theoretical acquisitions, but also to her advancement of pioneering hermeneutical instruments in contemporary Romanian literary scholarship.

Alexandra BRICI

MA Student, Babeş-Bolyai University

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: alexandra.brici@stud.ubbcluj.ro