

# RSAA JOURNAL

Special Guest:

## Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu



Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu, Professor (University of Alicante), holds a BA in Spanish and English (1989) from the University of Bucharest and a Ph.D in Translation Studies (2002) on *Relevance Theory and theatrical translation* (UA). She is the author of “Introducción a la Interpretación. La modalidad consecutiva” (2001; reprinted 2004; Romanian version 2006) and the editor of *LAIC Special Issue* (2007, 7:2) *Intercultural Approaches to the Integration of Migrating Minorities* (Clevedon, UK.: Language and Intercultural Communication. ISSN: 1470-8477). She has supervised two Ph.D and several MA theses. Cătălina Iliescu is also a sworn translator and conference interpreter.

She has coordinated EU projects on Intercultural Communication, a machine translation project **TRAUTOROM** financed by the Romanian Government and she has organized the International Symposium on **UNIVERCITIES** together with Jose Lambert (2008) and

TID: Translation and Diasporic Identities (first edition 2009; second edition 2010) and co-organized the Literary Translation Conference “El ojo de Polisemo” (2011). She has published 3 books, over 15 articles in (international) journals, over 30 book chapters and has edited five international volumes. She chairs “ARIPi” (2005), a cultural association, and she is the Head of the Summer Courses at her university.

She has also published “Miniaturas de tiempos venideros” (Vaso Roto 2013) a bilingual anthology of contemporary Romanian poets; “En la cuerda de tender” (Linteo 2012) an anthology of poetry by Dinu Flămând; “Un árbol de sonidos” (Eikon 2011) a bilingual anthology of Transylvanian poets; “Chitaristul” (All 2012), a novel by Luis Landero among the most recent literary translations and collections.

Dr. Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu wrote a special feature article for the present issue: **“Narratives of Migration: the Image of Romanians in Spanish Contemporary Literature.”**



# Narratives of Migration: the Image of Romanians in Spanish Contemporary Literature

Cătălina Iliescu Gheorghiu (University of Alicante)

## Abstract

*In the present global landscape, migrants have become a major weight on the demographic scales in developed countries but also on the economic balance in those territories they left behind. Romanian migration in Spain is able to play the role of an “interface” between the post-communist Eastern European zone, nowadays one of the important emigration nuclei on the planet, and the “myth-generating west”, forbidden for decades, and very often revealing itself as full of imperfections and inequalities. In the early 90s, Spaniards knew little about Romania; now, however, Romanians are part of contemporary Spanish society and almost 10% of the population of this former exporter of migration is now made up of newcomers. Romanians have acquired new life-styles in Spain, new attitudes and they have accessed new value standards, different from those which they had brought from their homeland. Antohi (2008: 293) suggests the consequences of this re-socialization are not unnoticeable, while he wonders what kind of collective identity the Romanian communities residing in countries like Spain will develop or how this new collective identity will interact with the new “narratives” (in the sociological acceptation/sense of the word) describing the Romanian experience beyond their country’s borders. The position of Romanian communities as ethno-political groups within Spanish civil society (with its patent or underlying prejudice or xenophobic impulses) has much to do with the image Spaniards have of the Romanian community and literature is one way of expressing this image.*

*In this paper I will try to pinpoint some relevant aspects regarding the presence of Romanian elements in fifteen literary works by contemporary Spanish authors.*

## Romanian migrants in Spain

Romanian migration to Spain began in the mid-nineties but registered a dramatic growth in the new millennium as a consequence, among other factors, of

the Spanish government removing the requirement for a visa in 2002. Presently, there are 940 252 (1) Romanians officially registered in Spain; the largest migrant population (followed by Moroccans and Ecuadorians). Almost half of them are women (439 119) who, under crisis conditions, provide the main support for their families. Employed in housework or caring for children and the aged, they ensure the continuity of the migration project if men attempt a return plan. The Spanish province of Alicante, on the Mediterranean Coast (with 1 945 642 inhabitants of whom 30 312 are Romanians) belongs to the Valencia Community, which has the second highest number of Romanians (143 874) after Madrid (the capital and its surrounding areas).

The main professional sectors occupied by Romanians used to be: building, agriculture (seasonal jobs) and housework (including care of the aged). The reasons why Romanians preferred Spain were: job opportunities, the real estate boom, the aging population, high living standards, a more relaxed control of the black job market, linguistic and cultural similarity and the mild climate. Thus, immigrants chose areas round large urban centres and the Mediterranean Coast. The view of Romanians was more “sympathetic” or “tolerant” than the feeling that certain sections of the receiving society had towards immigrants from other parts of the globe, such as the Maghreb. Viruela suggests (2006) this might be explained on religious grounds and because Romanian workers were associated with such features as responsibility, punctuality, discipline and over qualification for the jobs they were being offered. This idea of overqualified Romanians is recurrent in the literary works analyzed, even to an obsessive extent. Characters have exquisite tastes in reading, are all university graduates and descendants of intellectuals when in fact the migration reality shows a variety of educational levels as one would

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expect in economic migration (unlike exiled or refugee diasporas). However, in recent years, we have witnessed a growth in xenophobia in the host society in the context of a global crisis and high criminality rates, often attached to “otherness”. Ferrero (2008) explains the Romanians’ current negative image as a consequence of their stereotyping as prone to organized crime, corruption, violent burglary, begging and child trafficking.

In a survey carried out in 2006, I asked members of the Romanian community living in Alicante if they felt integrated in the Spanish society, and 60.4% (of the 53 interviewees) answered “yes, in great measure but not immediately after arrival” 26.4% said “so so” and 13.2% stated “a hundred per cent since the very beginning”. Nobody opted for “no” or “very little”. When asked how Spaniards treated them, 37.7% said “in a friendly way from the very beginning”; 58.5% “in a friendly way but after a period of reserved behavior” and only 3.8% felt “lack of confidence” on behalf of Spanish society. In 2010 I carried out a new survey to which I referred elsewhere (Iliescu, 2010). Among the questions posed (2), there are two which I would like to discuss here:

### *1. Do you feel integrated in Spanish society?*

The options were NO (which received zero answers), YES, “totally” (which received 21), or “partially” (which received 20).

### *2. Are Spanish people more intolerant now than before?*

“Yes, because of the crisis” (8 subjects), “because of some Romanians’ behavior” (11 subjects), “because of immigrants’ behavior” (11 subjects), and “not really” (11 subjects).

As we can see, half of the people surveyed feel quite integrated in Spanish society, but one aspect needs to be nuanced in their answers to the second question: 22 informants think that Spaniards have become less tolerant because of Romanians’ or immigrants’ behavior, so migrants themselves tend to put the blame on the migrant community for conflicts

that have to do with either poverty and socio-economic conditions, or education, thus justifying stereotyping tendencies and drawing a dangerous border between “good” and “bad” migrants, an idea which clearly appears in the teenager committed literature analyzed, as we shall see below.

### **Narratives under migration. An illustration**

The concept of “narrative” is a complex one which has been defined by many scholars in terms of a dynamic entity (i.e. it changes with exposure to new experience) on people’s behavior, guided by stories they believe on certain events and defined on the grounds of social and communication theory as “a context for interpreting and assessing all communication” (Fisher, 1987), or a “way of constituting social identities” (Somers, 1992), or a “sequence of statements connected by both temporal and moral ordering” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995), or a “modality of shaping people’s views of rationality, objectivity, morality, of themselves and others” (Bennett & Edelman, 1985), or an “instrument of mind” operating in the construction of reality (Bruner, 1991). In turn, Baker shows (2006:9) that a narrative is not a genre, but rather a meta-code that underpins all modes of communication and categorizes worlds into types of characters, types of events and bounded communities. It also systematizes experience by ordering events in relation to each other temporally, spatially and socially. Human behavior is dichotomized by narratives into such pairs as valued/non-valued; normal/eccentric; rational/irrational; legitimate/non-legitimate or legal/criminal. Narratives are based on a selection process, since any story has many versions which are in competition with one another. Thus, individuals and communities continuously draw on past narratives in order to construct present ones. Narratives also imply tension, since they reproduce power structures while at the same time providing means of contesting those structures.

The **ontological narratives** are stories we tell ourselves about our place in the world and our own

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history; they are focused on the self, but a situated self, that depends on a community. Conflicts may arise between our stories and ontological narratives of others who share the same social space, as well as incompatibilities with collective narratives. In our case, ontological narratives can either be those each individual develops on his/her migrant status or those an individual belonging to the host society constructs on the migrant. Such is the case of Spanish authors who write on Romanian characters/realities. **Public narratives** are stories elaborated and circulated at social and institutional level on such issues as family, religion, educational institutions, among others. In our case, those labels authors attach to diaspora, including generalizations and stereotyping, belong to such public narratives. **Conceptual narratives** embody a series of concepts and explanations that scholars construct for themselves and others about their object of study. In other words, this kind of narrative is not the subject of this study, although they constitute an interesting field for further research in order to see how scientific discourse in the host country emits diagnoses on diaspora habits, political and civil implication, etc. **Meta-narratives** work as “epic dramas” of our times. Political and economic dominance plays an essential role in the survival of a meta-narrative and media or film industries are the perfect means to spread them as well as literature. Both vampire myth based novels and documented stories in my corpus are good candidates to illustrate meta-narratives.

In this paper, I argue that in the case of diaspora communities, identities are being permanently negotiated, either between migrants who interact within their spaces (often these are spaces of exclusion), or between them and host societies (that integrate, assimilate or segregate them). The concept of “narratives” helps us to describe how identity signs are perceived from inside and outside a group. Thus, an external narrative would comprise those images, perceptions, stereotypes that host societies develop on a certain cohabiting community as reflected in

media releases, artistic productions (film, fine arts, literature) or personal declarations (politicians, opinion makers). On the other hand, internal narratives would focus on migrants’ way of seeing themselves, either individually or collectively, as emerging from: artistic production (made by diaspora creators, e.g. ectopic writers), social network interaction and life stories narrated in private interviews, conversations, while they account for their migration experience and motivations. My intention is to focus on those external narratives that can be drawn from literary productions (fictional portraits of migrants) by writers who belong to the host society. More exactly, I will analyze Spanish prose written in the last two decades, that is the period since the phenomenon of Romanian migration into Spain has increased in number and visibility and certain curiosity has arisen among the host society towards this relatively close culture. After a general browsing of the Spanish contemporary literature, I found that fifteen prose writers had introduced in their works elements such as: main or secondary characters, realities, cultural aspects, stereotypes, or recent historic data. According to the subject and plot of the novels, a four type classification of these literary pieces emerged (see Iliescu, 2014), namely: (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 and (4) the eternal seduction of vampires and the Stoker revival.

Other possible classifications take into account the centrality or subsidiarity of the Romanian elements within the development of the narration. Thus, the Romanian element is the axis around which the action takes place in: Ignacio Vidal Folch’s “La libertad”-1996, Miguel Sánchez Ostiz’s “Cornejas de Bucarest”-2010, Jaume Benavente’s “La il-lusió”-2008, Víctor Batalle’s “Els trafecs d’en Ton”-2011, Luis García Montero’s “No me cuentes tu vida”-2012, Javier Alfaya’s “El chico rumano”-2007, Luis Sanz Álvarez “La joven

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llegada del frío"-2012 and Ramón Usall i Santa's "Tots els camins porten a Romania"-2008. On the other hand, it is only secondary in Quim Monzó's "Hotel Intercontinental"-1991, Juan Manuel de Prada's "La vida invisible"-2003, Lorenzo Silva's "La reina sin espejo"-2005, Carme Riera's "Natura quasi morta"-2011, Lucía Etxebarria's "Un milagro en equilibrio"-2004, Joan Perucho's "Historias naturales"-1960; 2003 and Enrique Vila Mata's "Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil"-1985/2005.

Finally, a clear distinction should be drawn in terms of genre and target audience between (1) **teenager short novels** with a strong educational commitment, which seek to instill tolerance and reinforce diversity, (2) **adult detective stories** (ranging from mastery of the genre – Silva, Riera- to diletantism – Sanz Álvarez), (3) **novels of certain length based on historic and social documentation** – García Montero, Sánchez Ostiz, Vidal Folch, and (4) **fantasy stories** in which the Romanian element is almost anecdotic – Perujo, Vila Mata.

### Teenager short novels with educational purposes

In the following pages, I will try to outline the presence and significance of the Romanian element in these fifteen literary works. According to my classification in terms of genre and type of audience, the first category would include moralising fables intended for a teenage readership, who need to become aware, through these texts, of the socio-political realities behind migration and of the cultural particularities shared by a numerous and visible community in Spain such as the Romanian one, in the media spotlight for news related to violence, robbery, procurement or human trafficking. In this sense the titles in this category: Javier Alfaya's *El chico rumano* (2007); Ramón Usall i Santa's *Tots el camins porten a Romania* (2008); Jaume Benavente's *La il·lusió* (2008); and Victor Batallé's *El strafecs d'en Ton* (2011), play a

social rather than a literary role in the educational process of Spanish adolescents.

Narrated in the first person by a 50-year-old translator from Galicia, *El chico rumano* (*The Romanian Boy*) reveals a charitable attitude towards the Romanian boy selling newspapers, trembling with cold, exploited but honest (he insists on giving back a customer a few cents). The boy disappears (Sergiu is his name – we find out on page 56) when the neighborhood becomes the scene of racist disturbances and the narrator finds him, cures his pneumonia and takes him to school from where he is kidnapped by a pedophile network and organ traffic network. This time the search goes as far as Romania, introducing characters like the boy's grand-uncle, Mr. Enescu. Finally the boy is rescued from the hands of the organ traffic mafia and he tells the story of how he fled Romania. His narration is adult, by the terms and style employed, so conflict arises between his narrative voice and story tenor. The plot is childish and Manichean, with a child victim at the centre and the surrounding characters are either good or evil.

*Tots el camins porten a Romania* (*All roads lead to Romania*) is a well-documented novel in which we find such varied references as those to a historic football match (Steaua-Barça, 1986) or to classical Marxist texts, to songs during the communist regime, the lyrics of which are reproduced exactly, or to the episode of the execution of the Ceaușescu couple. But we also find a cliché present in several others of these 15 novels, namely one character's confession about his negative memory of the police in his country (p. 13) apparently a recurrent idea in Spanish contemporary authors. The main character is Ioana Lupescu, a maid who helps in the investigation of a murder: the victim, Florian Grigore is an educated, discreet, kind man, but also a former secret police agent. A third Romanian character is an angelically beautiful prostitute, Constantina Dumitru, and a fourth is the corpse of another former secret-police agent killed in Spain, Ilie Stroia. The investigation

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requires a trip to Romania that allows the author to introduce notions of Transylvania and Dracula (p. 74), Bucharest (nicknamed 'little Paris' - p. 75), Tarom Airlines and Henri Coandă (pp. 78-79), and Dacia cars (p. 81), to mention a few. Other characters in the story are the taxi-driver cum procurer, the food industry tycoon and sponsor of a sinister nationalistic party – Ioan Grigore, and the Commissar of Romanian Police, depicted in a very favorable light as a learned, elegant, reasonable person.

A new incursion into the recent history of Romania gives details on the life in the 80s ("era un miracle poder endur-se un tros de carn a la boca si no s'era un aparatnik") or on the episode of the fall of the dictatorship, with the riots, the death of the journalists, or the speech given by a despairing Ceaușescu, followed by the crowds marching through the capital with a holed flag singing "oe, oe, oe, Ceaușescu nu mai e!".

Obviously, there are odd-sounding expressions in Romanian like the exclamation "Ficioara Maria" (p. 13) (instead of the more natural: "Doamne, Maica Domnului"), or misspellings like "septamana" (p. 11), "clatitet" (p. 112) or incomplete vocatives like "Pleacă de aici, nenorocit" (p. 134).

There are even non veridic assertions such as: "la dona de Nicolae havia aconseguit fer-se passer per una eminent científica" which any Romanian of that time, would recognize as farcical as neither society nor the scientist community doubted her ignorance of chemistry, or any other field. In the end, detective Rovira manages to reveal the murderer, Adrian Bărbulescu, a hired assassin, and his boss, Ioan Grigore who had ordered his own brother's death out of vengeance. The way the case is solved seems infantile and implausible, as do certain flashes, such as the protagonists listening to songs like "Partidul, Ceaușescu, România" at home, or having a library full of books signed personally by Ceaușescu, details which are hard to believe and should have been

counter checked with Romanian advisors.

In spite of the simplicity of the plot, the unconvincing situations described and the simplistic resolution of the murders, the book is valuable for its documentation work and the author's efforts in talking to Romanians and traveling to Bucharest. Although the stereotype cannot be avoided (the maid is in fact a graduate in Greek and Latin philology, who introduces herself from the very beginning in these terms: "Però no pensi vosté malament, eh, no sòc cap fulana..." (p. 13) and the brothel has as an advertising slogan: "Perlas jovencitas del Este. Las mejores y más calientes") an effort is made to introduce a more complex color range in the painting, not just black and white, good and evil. That is how the reader can sympathize with the victim, former Securitate agent, but not with his racist fratricidal brother.

Within the same category, Jaume Benavente's *La il·lusió* (*The Illusion*) and Victor Batallé's *Els trafecs d'en Ton* (*Ton's Bustle*) are two moralizing stories seeking to show that things and people should not be judged on appearance and that readers should not be tempted to give in to generalizations and stereotyping, but try to understand people's backgrounds and motivations. With a clear educational aim, both stories show extreme situations, in which citizens' security is threatened and children are the heroes who re-establish order/logic. In *La il·lusió*, Cezar Bostan, a house painter and his apprentice Gavril come into the plot on page 27 as mysterious characters who address each other 'aggressively'. The boy refuses to talk about his parents (a father who is a professor at the Polytechnic in Bucharest, punished by the system for complaining, and a mother – a philosophy teacher - who emigrates to Holland to work as a cook). The boy lives alone in Barcelona with his sister Vera who is a talented skater, although both siblings are under age. Descriptions of characters and the development of dramatic tension are based on a succession of

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clichés and stereotypes: violent Romanians causing altercations (p. 85); Romanian police always bringing trouble, unlike the Spanish police “which is here to help” (p. 82); the mother’s photograph ten years before with a scarf on her head (p. 63), (a feature of folklore rather than an intellectual’s garment in the 80s); a bus driver who takes them to Spain and his assistant depicted as “a threatening gypsy” (p. 62) who carries a pistol. Vera is kidnapped by prostitution mafias and a series of actions are triggered to save her before it is too late. Everything ends well with the help of Bostan who turns out to be a former police agent who could not save his own daughter (whose name, by the way, was also Vera) from a similar tragic situation (p. 139). The two siblings leave for Amsterdam to join their mother, hence a second migration destination described as a happy choice in a period when the Spanish government is encouraging migrants to return to their countries.

This novel is not based on solid research of Romanian culture or history. Instead, it indulges in the media reports on Romanians in Spain which is why its tenor is paternalistic and the authorial voice often denotes pity for the protagonists (reminding the reader of the hardships, sorrows, poverty in the home country). The plot is predictable, the style is dynamic, the structure of short chapters with suggestive titles makes it suitable as teenager, committed literature to be used in class when discussing issues of migration, tolerance, or stereotyping, although the documentation leaves a lot to be desired.

In the same line, *Els trafecs d'en Ton* describes the friendship between two 12-year-old boys, Ton and Dorinel (whose father is a chemistry engineer, their mother a pediatrician, and their grandmother an artist) and their adventures on several levels: at school, at home and in the neighborhood, helping the police to catch an Albano-Kosovar gang of dangerous criminals. Dorinel, the Romanian boy, seems to be a pretext rather than an action exponent, except for

the end of the story when he dresses up as a girl (p. 170) to find out which part of the body Ton’s girlfriend has had pierced. Dorinel disapproves of piercings and tattoos since he finds them “frivolous” (p. 146), and he has never had a girlfriend, but only some “infatuations” (p. 145); the choice of vocabulary is striking. Dorinel is also able to judge a painting (p. 76) like an educated adult, which turns him into an implausible character whose words are hardly those of a 12-year-old boy and this creative device, I believe, might be due to a desire to present Romanian characters as cultivated, polite and of exquisite breeding, even if this implies exaggerations (for instance the obsession that Romanian adolescents’ parents should all be intellectuals. The purpose of the authors is to raise respect in Spanish young readers’ eyes towards migrants, since the generalized tendency is to confound poverty or economic scarcity with low social/educational level. As a matter of fact, these authors generate an opposite, positive stereotype which is in turn yet another distortion of reality.

### Adult detective stories

The second category in my classification is the one labelled “adult detective stories” in which Romanian characters, either victims or perpetrators of evil, are more or less realistically depicted and play sometimes a central role in the crime plot development (Luis Sanz Álvarez’s *La joven llegada del frío* [2012], Lorenzo Silva’s *La reina sin espejo* (2005), Carme Riera’s *Natura quasi morta* [2010]). In other cases, they play a secondary role, and have an almost chimeric presence (Juan Manuel de Prada’s *La vida invisible (The invisible life)* [2003]). Here, the two exponents of Romanian society are a young gypsy, Michalela, who first appears on page 428 (bearing this strange name for a Romanian) who begs or sells newspapers on the underground platforms in Madrid. She is presented almost as a heroine, in idealized colors, a victim of the communist regime which chased gypsies through muddy roads in Bukovina [p. 496] who were in turn

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forced to steal honey from hives to survive; a description not devoid of condescension and moralistic attitude. As an anti-hero we discover the beast, Vasile Morcea, who (p. 446) “is worse than the devil”, a procurer who tortures his prostitutes, whose icy voice has an “unimaginable radiation of malignity” (p. 514), but who, with a rather implausible command of popular culture, is able to recite the most unexpected authentic Spanish sayings and proverbs.

Apart from these two characters, from the underworld, other references to Romanian migration come in descriptions of the *modus operandi* of prostitution networks (buses full of Romanians girls arriving in Spain) and the sordid area of “Casa de Campo”, a terrain of drug dealing, prostitution and outcast refuge in peripheral Madrid. References to Romanian society are made superficially, in lapidarian sentences and clumsy local details, betraying little or no research. The migration phenomenon is not dealt with in depth, unlike prostitution and human trafficking which seem to have been studied more thoroughly. As a general impression, this epic novel with a promising beginning fails to solve one of the two conflicts at the end of the 500 pages which tell a double story, and contain parallel plots and winding descriptions of the characters’ lives. One is the story of a pin-up girl, Fanny Riffel, which seems to be more accomplished and better documented and resolved. The other, a detective story embedded in the Chicago-Madrid axis, leaves the reader with a feeling of frustration and a bizarre taste of a nineteenth century pre-deterministic novel in which the author overwhelms us with his bookish style and classical references as well as an extremely cult language.

The other three novels in this category are more traditional detective stories. Silva’s and Riera’s are beautifully constructed exponents of the genre, while Sanz Álvarez’s is more amateurish. The location for *Natura quasi morta* (*Almost Still Nature*) is not frequent in Spanish literature and is reminiscent of David

Lodge’s university campus novels. Riera sets her series of murders on the campus of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and involves professors, students and staff in the police investigations. The first victim, Laura Carmona, is murdered and at the same time, Constantinu Iliescu, a tall and robust 21-year-old Romanian student, disappears without trace, which makes him a suspect, together with Marcel Bru, the last person to see Laura alive and who also dies. Another victim (Domenica, Laura’s friend) displaces suspicion towards a professor with whom she had had an affair but he too is killed by an apparently a psychopathic serial killer.

Apart from Constantinu (whose name’s final vowel is inexplicable), formerly a child abandoned in a container, three other Romanians appear: Dimitri Vasilescu (again, a strange first name for a Romanian), the Consul of traditional convictions who refuses to talk to the police, Gheorge Cercel who chairs an association and has falsified his own documents, and Vasile Samoila who lives in London and confirms Constantinu’s alibi. None of these characters raise any interest in the author and are not treated in depth. They only serve as pretexts for the introduction of information on Romania which is neither accurate nor interesting: the Secret Police “Securitate” is called “Seguritate” (p. 28); the “People’s House” (Parliament) is called “Palace” and is haunted by the ghosts of late builders; descriptions of Bucharest remain on a superficial level and evasive assertions such as Constantinu’s lodger, “things have always been difficult” do not contribute any worthwhile information. Although the detective story is well structured and the suspense appropriately dosified, the Romanian element seems to be there only for the sake of colorfulness with Wikipedia-type data and a paternalistic view of poor Romanians who seem to have “sarmale” and “mititei” for lunch each time they meet.

At the opposite pole we find Lorenzo Silva’s *La reina sin espejo* (*The queen without a looking glass*)

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which belongs to a criminal saga featuring Sergeant Bevilaqua and Caporal Chamorro, of the Guardia Civil. The police solve yet another complex murder case, in which Neus Barutell, a famous TV show leader discovers a prostitution network following the information leaked by a Romanian girl who is also assassinated. Both mafia members, Nicolae and Stefan, are briefly described, but the character that retains the author's attention is Gheorghe Radoveanu, a petrol station employee who helps in the investigation, whose Spanish is fluent and almost lacking any accent, and who is a reliable "clever young man, with a natural aspect" (p. 63). He borrows classics from the public library because he prefers reading rather than watching TV. Silva depicts him in a favourable light as a collaborative, responsible and courageous man who wants to be helpful to his "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).

As in the rest of the novels discussed so far, we see a tendency of Spanish authors towards compensation. For every evil character of Romanian origin, for every exponent of the underworld of crime and procurement, there is a positive one to guarantee the equilibrium of an ambivalent migrant segment.

Finally, this category is completed by a text, *La joven llegada del frío* (*The Girl Coming in from the Cold*) which can hardly be considered as literary since, not only does it contain spelling mistakes but also expression and concept incongruities in relation to Romanian culture. Thus, starting with the protagonist and her sister, the names 'Stevlevania' and 'Aliankasia' are not at all familiar to a native speaker, the names of secondary characters follow the same scheme, for instance, 'Sergio Radavitch', who is a mafia controller (the man in charge of checking the women work 12 hours a day and earn 40€ of which he keeps half), or Mr. 'Rutack' who is a businessman who comes from Bucharest to take over the drug from Colombia and to whom girls must be "kind."

Other supposedly Romanian elements are: dishes such as "sarmulate con mamaliga"; false traditions like families gathering on the 1st of December (which is the official National Day but not the people's feast); or the protagonist trekking on Transylvanian hills with a volume of Eminescu under her arm and "reading from Mihai", which sounds altogether farfetched and unnatural to a Romanian reader.

The protagonist (Stevlevania) is caught by a gang, she is forced into prostitution, she suffers mistreatment (p. 130), all kinds of aggressions (p. 165) and rape (p. 187), until the brothel in which she ends up, Kamasutra, is raided by the police, drugs are found, bosses are arrested and forty captive women are released. The book ends with a declaration of the author's intentions: "to reveal the gravity of some facts to which our society remains blind, facts which although fictitious, could have happened in real life." (p. 167).

### Documented novels

The third category in my classification includes "novels of a certain length based on social/historic documentation" in which the Romanian element is either central to the plot (Vidal Folch, Sánchez Ostiz, García Montero) or marginal, but still significant (Etxebarria or Monzó).

In *La libertad* (*Freedom*) Vidal Folch describes the last years of the dictatorship, its fall and aftermath. Well narrated and documented, the novel is veracious and based on experiences gathered by the author while he lived in Bucharest as a press correspondent. Names and quotations are correct and information seems to have been checked by well-informed Romanians, judging by the presence of such elements as the quotation of a poem by Deșliu or the names of the six intellectuals who signed a protest letter read out on the Radio Free Europe broadcast. Apart from these, Vidal Folch introduces customs, traditions, iconic places for Romanians and a detailed and expert architectural description of famous corners in Bucharest.

Vidal Folch is critical, both with bored Spanish

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diplomats who accumulate money, disregard the authorities and despise the local population, and with certain Romanians, like the “indigenous girls” that “take aim like remote controlled police torpedoes” (p. 14) or interpreters lacking minimum standards and always “expecting something from you... marriage, pure love or who knows what” (p. 15). He identifies the lingua franca of communist countries, the master key to open all doors which is nothing else but fear (p. 33) and he is aware of the 770 Decree against abortion and all its sinister consequences. He reproduces political jokes of the time and commonplace convictions circulating in Romanian society of the eighties (such as zodiac signs, positive energies, even healing by touch) or the absurd law forbidding Romanians any contact with foreigners and obliging them to inform authorities within forty-eight hours of any such encounter.

The main character is a young gymnast reminiscent of Nadia Comaneci who refuses to construct a story of traumatic events in order to be recognized as a refugee after her emigration to the USA, and thus, she ends up in a striptease club (Pink Pussycat) where she is a contortionist for anonymous men. Her story is an exponent of the hell sometimes lived by migrants, but this is told at the end, after the reader has the opportunity to explore the socio-historic background of the home country and has enough elements to judge the situation in some depth.

This preoccupation of Vidal Folch for veracity, documentation and in-depth analysis makes the novel worth considering as part of a selection of texts to define the identity of the current Romanian diaspora in Spain.

Not the same could be said about Sánchez Ostiz's *Cornejas de Bucarest (Crows of Bucharest)* which describes, over five hundred pages, feelings and perceptions of the author on his trips to Bucharest, seen as a totally unsafe dirty city, “full of prostitutes, thugs in uniform, and nobody's dogs” (p. 14) whose aura as an exotic, cosmopolite city between Orient

and Occident is false. Romanians are shown as superstitious and prone to magic; they indulge in cruel exorcisms even within the Orthodox Church, and they never like what foreigners write on them (p. 17).

This “novel of novels, multicultural, multi-ethnic and meta-literary” (p. 32) as he himself defines it, entangles reality, semi truthful facts, memoirs, readings and fictions. Thus, the reader does not know whether to take seriously the coincidence of names or positions when professors from the University of Bucharest, Press Agencies Journalists, or Cervantes Institute managers are criticized. According to Ostiz, Bucharest people are rude (p. 29) as a reminiscence of the “communist equalitarianism” and they lack any sense of humour (p. 66) while “the academic community are insolent, disinterested, non-receptive and proud” (p. 70). He uses the history of the fascist movement in Romania (the Iron Guard) as a pretext to tell a story in which we might find some autobiographic elements mixed with excerpts of Spanish history narrated in the first person (the release of his friend Fede, the tumultuous encounters with MaBelle and her corpse eaten by animals which he had to identify at the morgue).

He also mentions his trips to Paris and the Basque Country, his relations with Francoist authorities and the friendship between Traian Maniu involved in the Spanish Civil War and the narrator's grandfather who learns about the atrocities of the Iron Guard from a Jew, Elías Alcalay. Full of names, some of them real, some invented and some misspelled, this novel is built around the leitmotiv of the crows –as bad-omens– which are everywhere in Bucharest. It is difficult to read, with a clear lack of accuracy in Romanian names, quotes, and data, and a sensation of bitterness, destruction, in which neither Spanish nor Romanian characters are spared the author's sarcasm and acid criticism.

A completely different impression is given by the story told in *No me cuentes tu vida (Don't Tell me your Life Story)* by L. García Montero that takes place on

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two space/time levels: the love story of Ramón and Mariana in Spain in the present day and the story of love and activism lived in the past by the couple's respective families, parents and grandparents in Romania and Spain. García Montero uses diacritical signs correctly and if we judge by the details and documentary data provided in his prose he seems to have undertaken thorough research into Romanian history, as well as interviewing intellectuals. In any case, his intention, unlike that encountered in other titles discussed so far, is not to build a folkloric or colorful landscape to be used as a canvas on which to pinpoint a few facts or a few characters in order to give the impression that he understands the situation and motivations of Romanian migration in Spain. Instead, he is interested in a more integrative approach, bringing arguments in favor of similitudes, in history, mind, way of thinking and of overcoming hardships between the two nations; his analysis goes further, it does not focus on the exotic features, but on those which approach both societies and give normality to everyday coexistence. His novel is a constant shift of past and present consciousness combining perceptions and convictions, reminding us of the Civil War and resistance, of the fight against fascism and of the sacrifice and commitment of many men and women who believed in freedom, democracy and education. These issues enrich García Montero's text with a nostalgic touch but also with a dynamic unexpected plot development.

Lucía Etxebarria's *Un milagro en equilibrio* (*A Miracle in Equilibrium*) is a novel in which the Romanian element is adjacent but decisive in the development of the plot. Although it appears on the scene rather late (on page 195), it takes the form of a young scientist, a PhD. in biology, who plays a significant role in the protagonist's life. Like Lorenzo Silva, Etxebarria opts to start the description of her Romanian character by praising his command of English language and lack of an accent, together with his skill in curing hangovers (p. 199); later we discover he has an alcoholic mother. He is also punctual, discreet and obliging (p.

202). This realistic story wonderfully narrated in the first person by a mother towards her unborn daughter, makes readers identify on many occasions with the protagonist and recognize themselves in more than one of the extreme situations she undergoes. Regarding the Romanian character, she does not idealize him, nor is he depicted in a paternalistic, patronizing light. Although his background is of a difficult childhood, his tragic dimension is not magnified by the author who leaves the character to speak for himself and the readers to draw their conclusions from this text which criticizes Spanish society, its false moral precepts and its prejudices (also towards migrants).

Quim Monzó's *Hotel Intercontinental* does not entirely fall into this category, since the volume gathers a series of short stories, of which only one is devoted to the Romanian element. The *Intercontinental Hotel* in Bucharest, an emblem of the western, capitalist atmosphere right in the heart of the communist capital during the cold war, has become, after the fall of the regime, a press center in the story titled "La facultat de Ciències de la Informació" (*The Faculty of Information Sciences*) in which Monzó describes with journalistic vividness and dynamism the life of press correspondents (Spanish and international) in those tumultuous days. The intrepid environment immediately after the announcement that the FSN (National Salvation Front) will run in the elections (p. 13) raises the alarm against a new single party regime in Romania. Some historic and social data are combined with some street or neighborhood names in order to provide local color, but in fact, the narration is a mirror for Spanish journalists rather than for the Romanian diaspora.

### Fantasy Tales

The fourth category in my classification based on the criterion of the genre-targeted readership is fantasy stories. The two texts illustrating it are Juan Perrucho's *Las historias naturales* (*Natural Stories*) and

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Enrique Vila Mata's *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* (*Abridged History of Portable Literature*).

The first one mentions (on page 24) the "bat from the Balkans" who has a suction capacity, something "evil going directly to your blood", but it is not until page 120 that the term "vampire" is uttered as a feature of the Balkanic people, against which the village of Dip in Catalonia defends itself by means of garlic, crucifixes and mirrors, as suggested by Montpalau, the scientist and leader of the community. To Montpalau's despair the woman he loves, Doña Inés, offers herself as bait (p. 125) in order to trap and destroy the monster. The vampire, disguised as a warrior, commits a series of atrocities and bites one of the army generals. Montpalau cures this bite (pp. 177-179) but the general's soul is still in danger. When chasing the warrior they find a coffin in his refuge, a letter in Hungarian and several human figures transformed into stones by a petrifying mineral music. Meanwhile, a hidden force bites two hundred warhorses that have to be sacrificed. This is a tale in which the history of Spain (the Carlist wars) intermingles with naturalistic elements (detailed descriptions of landscapes including information on botany and toponymy), narrated in a pure, elegant, meticulous nineteenth century style reminiscent of the great authors of the genre although Perujo created it in the 1960s. In chapter 10 (pp. 141-143) he pays homage to the gothic myth by recounting "a story of the Carpathians", thus linking the first generation of vampires with Romania. In fact his story is full of hints to Stoker, paying tribute to his tormented character, who in Catalonia receives the name of "dip".

On the other hand, Vila Mata's novel deals with the "Shandy conspiracy" or "the secret society of the portables" (a society of writers whose works could be easily transportable in a brief case), created at the mouth of the Nile in 1924 and dissolved precisely when the 1927 generation was inaugurated at the Athenaeum of Seville. A "Shandy" had an extreme sexuality, an innovating spirit, profound nomadism,

sympathy for blackness and cultivated the art of insolence (p. 13). Scott Fitzgerald, César Vallejo, García Lorca, Pola Negri, Duchamp, are said to have been members of this secret society. Vila Mata's book is valuable for the data offered on writers and artists of early twentieth century and the atmosphere in those circles which helps us explain the evolution of literature between the wars and the revolutionary art movements. Romanian features are totally absent except for a recurrent character like Tristan Tzara who occasionally comes onto the scene, and the isolated reference to the "bucarestis", minuscule and terrifying Romanian creatures, related to the "odradeks" (a kind of abominable muse participating in the creative rape out of which the portable literature is born). An "odradek" sits on the writer's shoulder (p. 96) always accompanied by a "golem" which in turn, has its own "bucaresti" (p. 94). The term was first employed by Satanist Aleister Crowley in *Os bucarestis, a tale of his stay in Trieste* (p. 92) in which, along with twenty-seven excerpts, he describes this intriguing secret society.

### Conclusions

As we have seen, through the fifteen literary works analyzed, the two main categories chosen by contemporary Spanish authors to tackle Romanian cultural elements are detective novels and juvenile stories for educational purposes. In the latter, the Romanian characters, based on antagonisms, appear as both victims and perpetrators of evil. The plot and style are kept simple, the resolution of conflict childish and the documentation work almost absent. Their value nonetheless resides in their social rather than literary intentionality, which is that of depicting this migrant group as highly educated, and worthy of respect, while admitting the existence of mafias that spoil this image and which are resisted by Spanish police forces in collaboration with the Romanian ones, aided by civil society.

The detective stories category is more complex, containing nuanced characters and more elaborate

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cultural elements. Some are supported by in-depth documentation, others remain on a superficial level, but their dramatic structure and style are of higher quality. Generally, they are interesting pieces of literature in which the Romanian element is, either naturally embedded in the plot development and artistic procedure, or an adjacent adornment that does not manage to convince (Romanian) readership of its authenticity and fails to overcome its anecdotic condition.

Regarding narratives, as we have observed, three of the four types described at the beginning of this paper are present. The ontological narratives, based on media reports, rather than serious research, are reflected in each author's views on Romanian culture and history, but especially on the diaspora living in Spain and it is most evidently patent in teenager literature. The meta-narratives (epic dramas) are more conspicuously visible in the fantasy stories (the vampire myth revisited from naturalistic and literary historiographic and biographical viewpoints) and in the documented novels based on in-depth accounts of events. Finally, the public narratives are present both in detective and teenager stories, since they reproduce institutionalized positions of the host country system regarding the most representative segment of the migrant population, which are, as we have seen, not free from generalizations and stereotypes.

### Notes:

(1) According to the INE (National Institute of Statistics, 30th of June, 2014) the number of EU citizens in Spain is 2 724 189 out of the total number of foreign citizens: 4 905 495.

(2) This new survey was conducted in February 2010, on 41 informants belonging to the Romanian community resident in Alicante.

### Corpus

Javier Alfaya, *El chico rumano* (Madrid: Anaya, 2007).

Víctor Batallé, *Els trafecs d'en Ton* (Tarragona: Arola Editors, 2011).

Jaume Benavente, *La il·lusió* (Barcelona: Columna Edicions,

2008).

Juan Manuel de Prada, *La vida invisible* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2003).

Lucía Etxebarria, *Un milagro en equilibrio* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2004).

Luis García Montero, *No me cuentes tu vida* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2012).

Quim Monzó, *Hotel Intercontinental* (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1991).

Joan Perucho, *Historias naturales* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1960/2003).

Carme Riera, *Natura quasi morta* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2011).

Miguel Sánchez Ostiz, *Cornejas de Bucarest* (Pamplona: Pamiela, 2010).

Luis Sanz Álvarez, *La joven llegada del frío* (Almería: Círculo Rojo, 2012).

Lorenzo Silva, *La reina sin espejo* (Barcelona: Destino, 2005).

Ramón Usall i Santa, *Tots els camins porten a Romania* (Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2008).

Ignacio Vidal Folch's, *La libertad* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1996).

Enrique Vila Mata, *Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1985/2005).

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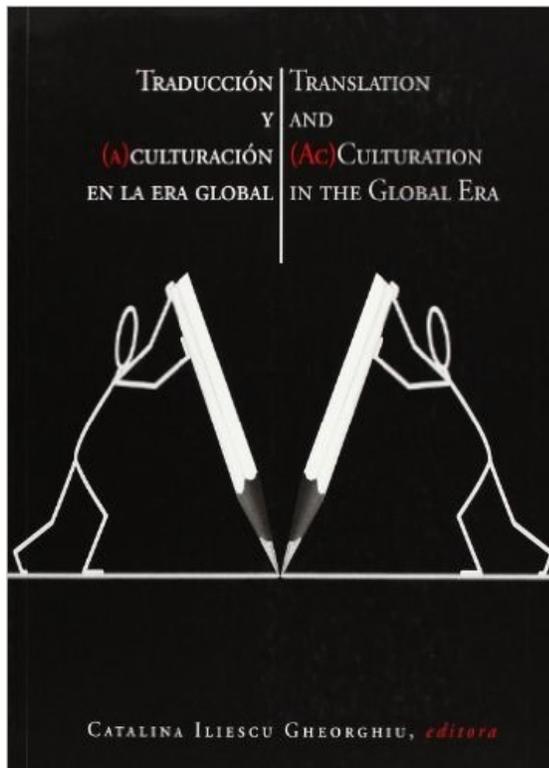
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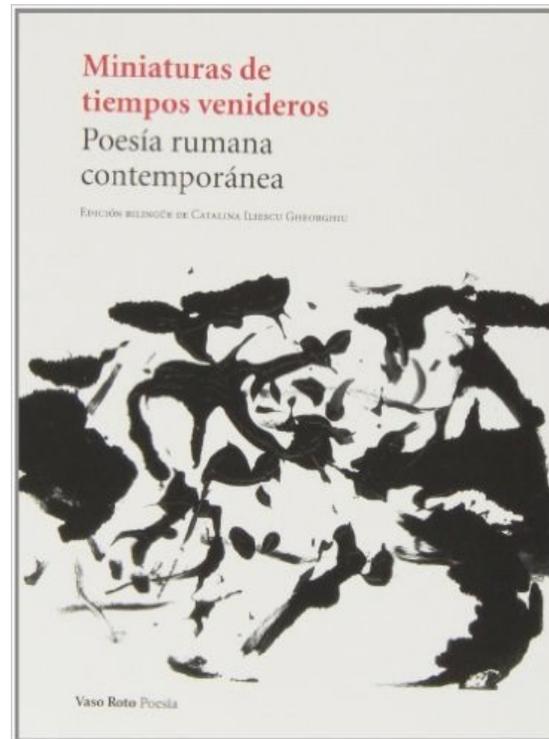
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<https://www.amazon.com/Traducci%C3%B3n-culturaci%C3%B3n-ILIESCU-GHEORGHIU-CATALINA/>



This collection from 20 authors offers the reader a comprehensive look at the Romanian poetic landscape, beginning with poets born in the postwar period, who wrote with impressive thematic and stylistic diversity during—and in spite of—the dictatorship. Together with this generation appear poets writing after the fall of totalitarianism, a period when the new permeability of borders offered new possibilities for notoriety and brought on a rush of cultural and artistic effervescence. The selected poems in this collection represent four crucial decades in Romanian history, reflecting tendencies in poetic discourse during the final period of the dictatorship, as well as the decades of unsteady democracy that followed.

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