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Semi-peripheral Nodes and the Circulation of Political Ideas.

The Case of a Romanian Novel

This study is based on the observation that political ideas circulating in Romanian society are reflected in Romanian literature, offering a critical analysis that contributes to a more documentary understanding of the current situation. Furthermore, spatial representations have established a coherent framework for the development and explanation of the ideology that has shaped literary characters, presenting subtle, and at times grotesque or caricatured, masks of political figures from the era. For this research, we propose a brief analysis based on the Warwick Research Collective's theory of "Combined and Uneven Development," (WRS 2015, 32) highlighting the evident relationships within the Romanian context that have shaped the literature of the early century and beyond.

Thus, we will consider the Romanian space as a semi-periphery, as understood by Stephen Shapiro, with our analysis aiming to extract a possible functional model from the general theoretical scheme through a discussion of the political novel. As stated, "[u]nlike many models that describe and evaluate culture in the binary terms of a host metropolis and target colonial hinterland, a world-systems understanding looks to the semi-peripheries as the locales wherein combined and uneven development occurs in ways

that are more complex and explanatory than can be provided with only a simple core-periphery framework” (Shapiro 2024, 46).

This excerpt discusses the concept of semi-peripheries in world-systems analysis, highlighting their role in combined and uneven development, compared to a simplistic core-periphery analysis. Therefore, the aim is to discuss how the center-periphery relationship coalesces, going beyond the binary power dynamics and highlighting various other connections that can be observed through the study of literature, particularly the novel, which reflects social changes. Applying this perspective to the situation in Transylvania and Bucharest at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries reveals several relevant aspects. Transylvania, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before 1918, intersected diverse imperial and ethnic influences, acting as an area of influence for both Vienna and Budapest and as a semi-periphery economically and socially, with varied levels of industrial and infrastructural development. In this situation, we can identify what is named “the mixture or collision of residual (latent, potential, seemingly virtual, or pneumatic) with emergent elements, or what we will explore as the dynamics of combined and uneven development” (Shapiro 2024, 20).

Romania’s interwar period was marked by significant economic growth, leading to the formation of a wealthy class of industrialists who played a crucial role in the country’s economic modernization. These individuals invested in factories and infrastructure, facilitating the transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy. The “urban villagers”¹ category represented a large part of the urban workforce, consisting of migrants who moved from rural areas to cities in search of better living conditions. This group was

¹ For a discussion on the “urban villagers”, see Bako 2024.

essential not only for supporting the urban economy but also for maintaining the link between rural and urban culture, creating a symbiosis between tradition and modernity. The Romanian novels of the early century abound with such characters that reflect inevitable social changes.

In a country where traditional elements (agriculture and rural society) coexist with modern influences (industry and urbanization), one can observe a dynamic interplay between the old and the new that is mirrored in the evolution of the Romanian novel. The residual influences of traditional society manifest in economic modernization, which retains characteristics of rural life and cultural-agrarian customs. These elements not only shape the personal identities of characters within the novels but also contribute to broader themes of national and regional identity. In many narratives, authors explore the tension between the nostalgia for a simpler, agrarian past and the rapid changes brought about by urbanization and industrial growth. The process of *combined and uneven development* highlighted in the socio-economic context resonates within the Romanian novel, as it creates both tensions and opportunities for character development, narrative innovation, and thematic exploration.

Although elements are integrated into modern discourse, they are not merely revived in their authentic form; rather, they are adapted and reinterpreted to fit new social and economic contexts, demonstrating a process of cultural recycling. This concept is particularly evident in the works of Romanian author Liviu Rebreanu, whose novels explore the complexities of modernity while deeply rooted in rural traditions. The assertion that “this cultural recycling is a secondary processing of the archaic in a modern form by a semiperipheral faction” (Shapiro 2017, 37) emphasizes that this process of integrating

traditions into modern discourse is not accidental but conducted by semiperipheral groups – those communities at the intersection of global influences and local traditions. This brings into discussion the connection with the novel, which, as a literary form, can explore these themes of cultural interaction.

The choice of the political novel as a case study for our discussion is based on two arguments: One is related to the fact that the Romanian novel has sparked numerous theoretical discussions, with critics like Ibrăileanu, Ralea, Lovinescu, and Călinescu highlighting how the necessity of the Romanian epic genre was formed.² Meanwhile, the way society receives its reflection in literature recalls Honoré de Balzac's famous assertion in 1842, at the opening of *La Comédie humaine*: “French society was to be the historian, I had only to be the secretary.” (Balzac 1968, 6) But society is also a cultural construct that emerges from literature, which becomes a reflection of reality: “On one hand, the novel has become a manifest tool for constructing a nationalist “imagined community” (Anderson 2016, 45). On the other, the novel, often consumed in intimate spaces and modes of undress, was used to decipher interiority and personal development” (Shapiro 2024, 43).

Thus, we can observe that the nation emerges as a cultural product, much like religion, rather than merely a political construct. This perspective emphasizes the idea that national identity is shaped by cultural narratives, shared values, and collective experiences, rather than being solely defined by political boundaries or governance. Nonetheless, the nationalist narrative corresponds to what Anderson, in his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2016),

² For a possible model, see Bako 2023.

termed “imagined communities” (Anderson 2016, 12). In his view, nationalism has become a powerful force in recent centuries, contributing to the formation of modern nation-states. Anderson suggests that nationalism was a solution to the decline of other forms of social association, such as large universal religions and loyalty to multinational empires. The spread of print capitalism, which enabled the mass production of written texts (books, newspapers), played a crucial role in creating these imagined communities. Through access to the same news and ideas, individuals began to share a collective consciousness, even without direct interaction. The novel contributed to this complex cultural construct, especially considering the literary reflection of political configurations throughout the 20th century.

Our choice of Liviu Rebreanu’s novel *Răscoala (The Uprising)*³ is motivated by such assertions, elaborating a strong and impactful relationship between a semi-peripheral space and the central European one. The excerpt, taken from the final part of the novel, condenses the importance of this type of analysis, highlighting a global network with subsequent discontinuities:

My boy, what you saw in Argeş was a parlour joke compared to the orgy of cruelty and barbarity that has befallen all the villages in the country since they took over!... Those shot or generally killed by the repressive expeditions are the happy and fortunate ones, because they have escaped the dreadful crushing. In the end it was a colossal bloodbath, the like of which has not been seen anywhere else in the world in the last century, not even in the colonies or with the savage tribes. And all quietly, lest Europe and the world should know (Rebreanu 1975, 405).

³ Unless stated otherwise, translations are by the author. For a translation, see Rebreanu 1964. Although this translation was completed in 1964, I preferred the updated translation of the excerpts. See Rebreanu 1965.

The excerpt highlights the intensity and brutality of the repression associated with the uprising, using terms such as “orgy of cruelty and barbarity” and “colossal bloodbath” (Rebreanu 1975, 405). It addresses the violence and oppression imposed by the authorities, even comparing them to colonial atrocities to implicitly criticize the landowners and authorities who allowed such acts to suppress the uprising. Presenting this violence as unprecedented, even in the context of “savage” colonies and tribes (Rebreanu 1975, 405), amplifies the negative perception of the Romanian authorities. The reference to concealing this violence from the eyes of Europe and the world suggests a critique of the propaganda and censorship used by oppressive regimes to maintain control and avoid international criticism.

Another aspect of this discussion is that *The Uprising* was considered by Romanian critics to be a social novel, within a typology where Rebreanu's only political novel is *The Gorilla*. However, the loose definition of the epic genre allows us to classify *The Uprising* also as a political novel, particularly because of the ideological cores that could be discussed. There has been much discussion, especially about the postwar Romanian novel concerning totalitarian regimes, but a discussion has been omitted that could also clarify the evolution of the narrative.

In the preface to the *Dictionary of the Central-European Novel of the 20th Century*, Adriana Babeți notes an important aspect, directing the discussion towards politics: “[I]n Central European countries — between the consolidation of national identities in the 19th century and the emergence of national literatures, there is a fundamental connection (...) these literatures served as support in emancipatory political battles and were often used

as tools of ‘nation pedagogy’ (Babeți 2022, 52), linking early-century narratives to historical and implicitly political pressure.

Liviu Rebreanu – Ideologies: The “Peasant Problem” and the Voice of the “Subaltern”

Rebreanu’s novel *Uprising* published in 1932, reflects the social tensions and political ideologies in Romania against the backdrop of Europe’s last peasant uprising. Part of the interwar series of novels, it explores Romanian and international political realities, from observing political contexts to parliamentary discussions and strategies to suppress the uprising. The novel is notable for its documentary realism and narrative innovations, structured in two parts with the titles: “The Country is Moving!” (“Se mișcă țara!”) and “The Fires!” (“Focurile!”), each containing twelve chapters.

The central social conflict pits peasants, living in precarious conditions due to land scarcity, against landowners and leaseholders, reflecting tensions between the rural population and the ruling class. This conflict extends to the whole society, raising issues of social crisis and the search for political solutions. The parallelism between rural and urban environments is emphasized by the contrasts between urban “luxury and joy” (Rebreanu 1975, 75) and rural “fears” and “unrest” (Rebreanu 1975, 75).

At the heart of the political debates in *Uprising* is the “peasant problem”, a syntagma that marked the ideology of the beginning of the twentieth century and a topic of discussion among the political parties of the time, reflecting the agrarian reality of Romania where peasants owned insufficient land for survival. This situation was exacerbated by the

drought of 1887 and subsequent famine, the authorities' inaction, and massive grain exports. The novel's realism is supported by historical documents, including gendarmerie reports on the movements and events of 1907, providing an accurate picture of the social, economic, and political context of those times. The "peasant issue", crucial for Romania's future, is highlighted through the character of Miron Iuga, a landowner sensitive to the peasants' needs. The voice of the peasants is the voice of the subaltern, previously a "vox clamantis in deserto," unable to be heard by the "center".

In the political context of the period, the novel notes that conservatives supported maintaining the agrarian economy, while the national-liberals promoted a system of loans to assist the peasants. Rebreanu introduces characters such as lawyer Baloleanu, who becomes prefect and justifies harsh repression in the name of order.

Titu Herdelea, a character who came from Transylvania to Bucharest, symbolizes the idea of national unity and expresses solidarity with the peasants, questioning why they have not been granted the lands they cultivate. Rebreanu depicts the peasant uprising as driven by the desire for land, with peasants, in their fury, burning crops and manors, symbols of oppressive power.

The fluctuating political life is illustrated through the party conflicts, with the government accused of exterminating peasants. Political changes are portrayed as being dictated by momentary interests, and demagoguery becomes a tool for accessing power without attention to the true needs of the peasants. Rebreanu portrays the state as ensnared in a cycle of interests, threatening its very existence. King Carol I, in his speeches, seems detached from the population's real sufferings, while the novel, in its documentary dimension, suggests a lack of vision by the authorities in the face of a major

agrarian crisis. The uprising preceding World War I anticipates an escalation in the agrarian conflict, with scenarios of violent repression proposed as solutions.

Discussing this novel emphasizes that political and cultural ideologies are not just abstract theories, but are used strategically to support and legitimize existing practices and structures. Thus, ideologies become tools through which power relations are maintained and consolidated. From this perspective, the novel *Uprising* is an exploration of how political and cultural ideologies are used to support and legitimize social structures. Rebreanu depicts these ideologies not just as abstract theories but as tangible instruments in the hands of the political and economic elite. Thus, conservatives support maintaining the traditional agrarian economy, while liberals promise reform through credit systems, with both positions essentially trying to preserve or modify power structures for their benefit.

The peasant uprising in the novel thus becomes a manifestation of the conflict between these ideologies and the social realities of the peasants. The violent actions of the peasants — burning manors and destroying crops — are a direct challenge to the oppressive structures supported by political ideologies. Through his characters, Rebreanu highlights how ideologies are instrumentalized to control and exploit the agrarian workforce, reducing their needs and demands to mere issues of public order.

The novel also observes how political ideologies are used by elites to maintain unequal power relations, contributing to uneven and combined development. *The Uprising* becomes a commentary on how hegemonic discourses legitimize not only economic systems but also the fundamental asymmetries in the social structure of a

nation caught between tradition and modernity, turning culture into a battlefield for domination and social supremacy.

The narrator's eye, functioning as a cinematic lens, captures the contrasts on the journey: "Then came the dirty suburbs, ramshackle houses, potholed streets, violently contrasting with the splendors that heralded palaces farther away" (Rebreanu 1975, 13). This is a clear representation of the social and economic contrast between rural and urban settings, a central aspect of uneven and combined capitalist development often found in semi-peripheries. This literary representation highlights class discrepancies and how modernity and tradition coexist tensely. Spaces are thus landmarks of clashes between social classes, with major discrepancies. Architectural descriptions serve as background for this idea: "The building itself, a multi-story structure, attractively ornate, commanded attention mostly due to its red marble staircase guarded above by a giant gleaming glass shell" (Rebreanu 1975, 18). Grigore Iuga's house, with its ostentatious decorations, symbolizes the prosperity and power of the dominant social class. Details like the red marble staircase and the giant glass shell emphasize the privilege and resources available to the elite, representing those who economically and symbolically dominate the urban landscape.

"And nobody can protest, nobody dares to shout because at stake are the interests of the country and because the interests of the country demand that so many millions of peasants work hungry and naked to procure a few thousand thieves the wealth to be squandered in luxury and lust!" (Rebreanu 1975, 19). This statement suggests the existence of a system where the wealthy elite exploit peasant labor to sustain their extravagant lifestyle. The use of the term "thieves" to describe the privileged implies a

moral condemnation of their actions, highlighting the perceived immorality and corruption inherent in the system. The reference to the interests of the country underscores the ideological manipulation of nationalist sentiments to maintain the status quo and justify the exploitation of the lower classes.

In the context of nationalism and imagined communities, this manipulation transforms the idea of the nation into an instrument of control. The ruling elite uses nationalism to build an “imagined community” as defined by Anderson (2016, 12), where their interests are presented as synonymous with those of the nation. Thus, opposition is suppressed and labeled as unpatriotic or harmful to the entire country. By presenting exploitation as a national necessity, the elite legitimizes its power and discourages any form of resistance, thus consolidating its position and control over society.

The passage from *The Uprising* discussing the citizenship of the character Titu Herdelea reflects the shaping of communities formed at the intersection of various empires, as analyzed through the concept of ‘inter-imperiality’⁴ by Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă. Titu, coming from the region of Transylvania, which joined Romania only in 1918, finds himself in a transitional space, caught between Romanian cultural identity and an unclear legal status. National identities and loyalty to the state are often influenced and manipulated by the socio-political conditions of imperial borders. In this context, nationalism acts as a tool for creating imagined communities, where belonging and identity are dictated not only by culture but also by the political structures that govern these border territories.

⁴ See the study regarding inter-imperial statement in Parvulescu and Boatcă 2022.

Nationalism becomes a force of both unification and exclusion, as individuals like Titu are characterized as potential threats if perceived as falling outside official definitions of the nation. Also, in semi-peripheral societies, such as pre-1918 Romania, these tensions between rural and urban areas deepen, influencing and reinforcing developmental disparities. Urban areas tend to more rapidly adopt modernizing and nationalist influences, while rural areas often remain anchored in traditions and are more directly affected by inter-imperial policies: “Don’t forget, dear, that you are not a Romanian citizen, no matter how much more Romanian you think you are! So as soon as you become a danger to public order, you will no longer be a brother, but an enemy and then...” (Rebreanu 1975, 302) is the main discourse that characterizes the border situation for Titu.

The peasant class is seen as a manipulable entity, capable of being used as a tool to gain advantages. Negotiations were conducted in ordinary terms, but when political factors intervene, an imbalance occurs.

What he told me the poor man couldn't believe. With the peasants, he would have got along as he did before. But at the closing of the covenants he mentioned with the prefect, who told them not to give up to be deceived by the Jewish tenant and better to let him to run away. Listen, prefect, you urge the peasants to run away from the tenant! People so much so that they started to set fire to the manor, to kill the cattle and all the other bastards... And why do you think the prefect weaned them? Out of hatred against the Jews? I would! A brother-in-law of his was going around renting out the estate and couldn't. Now, if he drove out the Jew, he thought they'd take advantage of his kindness property. Only the reckoning was the other way round, that the peasants then rose up to divide between the land (Rebreanu 1975, 9).

Although the prefect attempts to manipulate them by exploiting ethnic conflicts and antisemitism to achieve personal and class interests, the peasants' response — burning the manor and sacrificing livestock — demonstrates a form of collective resistance against exploitation and injustice, reflecting an increasing class awareness and an aspiration for social justice. The prefect's intervention serves as an example of manipulating *cultural hegemony* to maintain the power of the elite. While the official presents himself as a defender of peasant interests, his motivations are deeply rooted in class interests. Simultaneously, an analysis of the depiction of the peasants reveals the presence of residual elements that can create a potential for local counter-hegemony or alternative hegemony. Thus, the uprising can be viewed as part of a broader movement for social transformation, exploring and developing cultural elements that could be utilized for a viable local counter-hegemony.

Conflict between generations: theories, methods, new education

The conflict between generations, between Miron Iuga and his son Grigore illustrates an ideological struggle between conservatism and progressivism. Miron, as a representative of the older generation, is deeply rooted in traditional methods and the experiences accumulated over decades, possessing a strong confidence in practical knowledge and time-tested approaches. He views change as a threat to existing social structures and considers alternative approaches to be “feminine” (Rebreanu 1975, 14) and ineffective. This conservative viewpoint is grounded in the belief that authority and traditional methods are the most effective means of governance and social organization.

The young man is scared. He understood that his father is living in another world or doesn't want to give to realize the reality. He told him everything he had he had only had time to find out what he had learned. Who knows how to read some of the grievances that threaten to turn into a fire. He asked to let him try to find his own way out of it, to try to come to terms with the peasants. The old man refuses. He was convinced that Grigore, with his feminine methods, would make things worse. He was so confident in his own experience and knowledge of people, that he would have considered himself demeaned if, in the very days of trouble, he had disavowed his means of experienced efficacy in three decades, and had passed on to a young man with a head full of theories (Rebreanu 1975, 14).

On the other hand, Miron's son, educated abroad, has been exposed to modern ideas of tolerance and freedom. His European education emphasizes dialogue, negotiation, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, contrasting sharply with the authoritative approaches of the previous generation. The son advocates for an approach based on understanding and reconciliation with the peasants, reflecting the influences of his modern education. He believes that resolutions lie in efforts to address conflicts through dialogue and compromise.

This clash of ideas and methods not only provokes familial and social tensions but also serves as a driving force for change. The influence of European education leads the youth to adopt perspectives and methods that differ from those of their parents, aiming to innovate and improve social relationships through more humane and democratic practices.

Another character embodying such attitudes is Stelian Halunga: "He was a nice young man, lively, intelligent and handsome, with several years of agricultural practice in Germany and several years of successful management of a large state model farm. – There he is! His name is Stelian Halunga..." (Rebreanu 1975, 306) Stelian Halunga is described like the ideal candidate to take on an important position in the agricultural sector

in Romania. His education and experience in Germany provide him with the necessary skills to implement modern agricultural techniques and management practices in Romania. This reflects the desire to adopt Western innovations to improve productivity and efficiency in the agricultural field. The decision to return to Romania after studying and working abroad shows a commitment to his home country and a desire to contribute to its development. It is an example of brain gain, where young people educated abroad return to apply their knowledge for the benefit of their nation. Halunga's choice symbolizes modernization and progress. His presence brings a breath of fresh air and a new perspective, essential for the evolution of the agricultural sector. He is seen as an agent of change who can positively influence the community by applying the modern methods learned abroad.

Suppression of the revolt. The foreign king

When it comes to the repression of peasant revolts, the Romanian government expresses distrust toward the peasant soldiers, indicating a crisis of loyalty that suggests a distancing between the rulers and the ruled. This phenomenon is common in times of unrest and social upheaval, reflecting the characteristic tensions of a semi-periphery where internal authorities fail to inspire trust and stability. The situation described reveals the role of the army and the influence of foreign powers in maintaining order, emphasizing the elite's dependence on external interventions to manage internal crises.

The idea of appealing to the Austrians for pacification highlights the internal political weakness and dependence on foreign powers, showcasing a crisis of sovereignty.

The situation is further complicated by the presence of a foreign monarch, perceived both as a neutral mediator and as a symbol of external influence that limits national autonomy: “Around Bucharest, there was a secret rumor that the army was no longer safe and that, eventually, the Austrians would have to be called in for true pacification. It was said that even the new government did not trust the peasant soldiers, but it doesn’t want to call for help before making a supreme attempt” (Rebreanu 1975, 214).

The government’s decision to make a “supreme attempt” (Rebreanu 1975, 214) before seeking external help illustrates an effort to assert its authority and sovereignty, even while likely recognizing the chances of failure given the prevailing mindset of the army and the population. This hesitation reflects a desire to demonstrate the capacity to resolve conflicts internally; however, the dependence on an external solution remains a necessary option.

Paris and Berlin, visions of semi-periphery

The novel emphasizes how liberal or subcultural currents from major centers like Paris or Berlin often influenced by social and class liberation movements, have the potential to challenge and modify existing conservative cultural, social and economic norms.

The Parisian capital is referenced in Rebreanu’s novel, highlighting the influence of the arts in shaping social life and entertainment, particularly through the character of Nadina, the wife of Grigore Iuga. “It had, only for November, the opening of the Parliament, the performances of Eleonora Duse and Feraudy, in addition to the Paderewsky concert.

He'd brought a little something from Paris when he returned ... but he noted with horror that, in the face of the multitude of events that had claimed him, she was in fact undressed” (Rebreanu 1975, 185). Nadina is captivated by the luxurious atmosphere of Paris, and her attitude serves as a pretext to observe how international influences, such as those from French capital, infiltrate local culture and shape behaviors.

The owner, a man from a distinguished noble family who squandered a vast fortune in Paris and has recently cobbled together the establishment from the remnants to occupy himself, receives his clients personally and ceremoniously, much like a lord welcoming guest to an exclusive reception. (...) Nadina smiles with delight and repeatedly exclaims:
— *Ah, oui, c'est vraiment très chic, très parisien!* A Spanish dancer, in a reserved area, accompanied by a special ensemble of Spanish guitarists, spins with a temperament that resonates with the piercing vibrations of castanets. The orchestra continues for a while with melodies from Madrid and Seville and then fades away in the wake of the dancer, making way for a pianist who preludes sleepily and nonchalantly, preparing for the entrance of a French chanson singer: charming, elegant, and very pampered, who is received with frenzied applause by the discerning audience (Rebreanu 1975, 203).

These excerpts illustrate an interconnected European cultural network that emphasizes themes such as cosmopolitanism, cultural consumption, and the influence of European capitals on the intellectual and artistic lives of the characters. The character of the owner, who once spent his fortune in Paris and now manages an establishment, reflects the cultural and social mobility within the European elite. Paris is seen as a cultural and financial center that influences lifestyles and social structures far beyond its borders. Nadina's appreciation for Parisian chic underscores the widespread admiration for French culture and fashion, with Paris depicted as the epitome of elegance and style — a benchmark for sophistication.

The inclusion of a Spanish dancer accompanied by Spanish guitarists, followed by a performance from a French songwriter showcases the cultural exchange and fusion that are characteristic of the broader European cultural network. Frequent references to Paris and detailed descriptions of cultural events and performances highlight the interconnectedness of Europe's cultural capitals.

Another space that constitutes a form of hegemony is Berlin, the city where Grigore Iuga completed his studies: “He returned from abroad with a head full of bold plans and sure solutions for all difficulties. The old man listened to him a few times without getting angry, as Grigore expected. He told himself that such generosities were the stuff of youth and that the boy would be content when he bumped his head against the threshold. Instead of fighting his ‘theories,’ one day he told him that he would be happy if he liked Tudor Ionescu's daughter” (Rebreanu 1975, 50).

Amara is the space where the character returns from the center to the periphery. This transition reflects the movement from an urban environment, often associated with progress and modernity, back to a rural or semi-peripheral space imbued with traditional values and struggles. “Then back to Amara with the rest of the money, which will be enough for current needs until the corn is sold. He was tidy and meticulous. That's all he had made of his two years in Germany. He had drawn up his home program in every detail. He had his grain policy in his pocket, due tomorrow. He considered it pure gold. The signature of Romania's most important grain exporter was respected throughout Europe” (Rebreanu 1975, 83).

Analyzing this passage from the perspective of combined and uneven development theory highlights not only the outcome of a professional training journey but

also the complexity of economic and social relationships between different regions and actors in Romania and Europe. Grigore returns to Amara with a detailed plan for managing agricultural products, after spending two years in Germany that allowed him to refine his skills and develop a “grain policy” that both reflects the technical and strategic knowledge he acquired and suggests an aspiration towards modernization, characteristic of a development regime aligned with European norms and standards.

The idea of combined and uneven development is evident in the fact that, while the young man has had opportunities for training in Germany, many agricultural communities in Romania, such as Amara, continue to be influenced by limiting economic and social conditions. Although he can benefit from the knowledge gained and the reputation of Romania’s leading grain exporter, there exists a broader reality of the Romanian economy that may be vulnerable to market fluctuations and external policies. The reference to “the signature of the most important grain exporter in Romania,” (Rebreanu 1975, 83) respected throughout Europe, suggests a relationship of interdependence among the various economies in Europe, as well as an asymmetry in the bargaining power of local actors in the face of the global market.

Explanations and considerations followed. Exceptional times. Prices fell sharply on foreign markets in recent weeks, almost collapsing. Unexpected Russian competition fell into the balance; the muscatel harvest, from where it had looked compromised, suddenly came up archaic. Russia is always full of surprises. He wouldn't have minded that. He, a far-sighted merchant, made all the arrangements in good time. But it was the railways that made him miserable, as they could not carry out the transports when they had to (Rebreanu 1975, 46).

The mention of these exceptional times and the collapse of prices in external markets suggests significant volatility affecting traders, particularly in the agricultural industries, which are sensitive to supply and demand. The merchant's frustration with the railway infrastructure failing to fulfill its critical transport duties on time underscores the importance of infrastructure in the economic development process. When such infrastructures are inefficient or insufficient, economic efficiency is compromised, and traders face significant losses.

This situation reflects an uneven development within the country, where certain regions or sectors benefit from better-developed infrastructure while others are left behind, thereby impacting overall competitiveness. The disparities in infrastructure quality can exacerbate inequalities, making it difficult for less developed areas to compete effectively in both domestic and international markets. Consequently, this not only highlights the need for improved infrastructure investment but also emphasizes the broader implications of uneven development on economic resilience and growth.

The narrative explores themes such as the impact of foreign education, generational differences, economic challenges, and the integration of European markets. These themes are interwoven with personal relationships and the pragmatic concerns of managing estates and businesses. Grigore's son education in Germany fills him with modern ideas and confidence. This reflects the belief in the transformative power of Western education and its potential to modernize and improve traditional practices in Romania. The older generation, represented by Miron Iuga, views Grigore's ideas with a mix of skepticism and tolerance. This highlights the ideological clash between traditional wisdom and youthful optimism inspired by foreign education. The novel addresses the

volatility of agricultural markets and the impact of international competition on local economies, a documentary reality mirrored in literature. The reference to Russian competition and the fluctuating prices illustrates the challenges faced by Romanian grain exporters in a globalized economy. Inefficient infrastructure, such as unreliable railways, exacerbates economic difficulties, despite strategic planning and foresight. Miron Iuga's pragmatic approach to generational differences is evident in his suggestion that Grigore considers a marriage alliance. This reflects a traditional strategy of consolidating wealth and power through familial ties. The narrative juxtaposes the modernizing influences of foreign education and market integration with traditional practices and skepticism. This tension is emblematic of broader societal shifts occurring in Romania during this period, as the country grappled with modernization and its implications for social and economic structures.

The novel: circulating ideologies

The first conclusion that emerges is related to the circulating ideologies, including nationalism, which emerges as a fundamental mechanism for maintaining identity and cultural unity, a mark in *Uprising*. In this novel, nationalism plays a crucial role in shaping national consciousness, emphasizing the need for cohesion in the face of external oppression and difficult social conditions. This ideology serves as a binding agent that unites various social groups around a common ideal of self-determination and sovereignty. Through the characters who discuss identity and belonging, Rebreanu illustrates how national values become essential for preserving a sense of unity in the context of a society

fragmented by inequalities and conflicts. It reflects the aspirations of the marginalized and serves as a vehicle for articulating their struggles, reinforcing collective identity in environments characterized by economic and social disparities.

The critique of the “epidemic of balls and parties” (Rebreanu 1975, 257) in Bucharest reflects a detachment of the elite from social realities, becoming a destructive ingredient for national cohesion. This decadence is correlated with the bourgeois values that social critiques challenge, emphasizing the need for cultural unity to counterbalance political fragmentation. In this sense, nationalist ideology becomes a promoter of cultural unity, deemed vital for the collective identity of the Romanian people.

The idea is spreading more and more. I do not judge; I merely observe. Meanwhile, the agitation among the peasants is progressing in parallel... No, no, do not regard these matters with disdain. Perhaps it doesn't affect you, but the agitation is a reality. Maybe it is precisely this that has allowed the idea of expropriation to take root—I cannot say for certain. Nor do I assert that the danger is imminent. I don't know. But it exists. And in such moments, one can no longer think seriously about purchasing estates. The land has become a questionable asset until the situations are clarified. So... Do not be distracted by the perpetual feast-like atmosphere in Bucharest. This is a sign of illness (Rebreanu 1975, 257).

The passage highlights the growing awareness and acknowledgment of peasant agitation as a significant social reality, urging a consideration of its potential implications for landownership and societal stability. The contrast between the perceived superficiality of urban life in Bucharest and the underlying unrest serves as a warning that a façade of prosperity may conceal deeper issues.

The second aspect pertains to the collision between urban elites and rural communities in Rebreanu's narrative. In *Uprising*, the opposition between urban elites, who benefit from the modernization of the infrastructure and economic opportunities, and the rural peasants, who face poverty and social injustices, underscores the existing social and economic tensions within Romanian society. This dichotomy illuminates the disparities in power and resources, highlighting how the urban elite often lacks an understanding of the realities faced by the rural population. The urban elites are portrayed as somewhat detached from the struggles of the peasants, reflecting a broader pattern of inequality that compounds the challenges faced by those in rural areas.

Thirdly, the need for agrarian reform, as articulated in *The Uprising* underscores economic inequalities and the radical challenges posed to property structures. The demands for agrarian reform reflect a profound desire to correct existing economic and social imbalances, a movement arising from a semi-periphery that aspires to contest the existing social order.

The circulating ideologies and their impact on social movements, as evidenced by the discussed excerpts, underscore the critical role of the peasant revolt as a symptom of the struggle for social justice and agrarian reform. This movement is seen not only as a reaction to economic constraints but also as a manifestation of the desire for wealth redistribution, which can provoke a radical change in land ownership. The populist or socialist ideologies that influence these movements indicate a profound tension between the landowning class and the peasants, highlighting how social agitation serves a function of economic justice within the national context.

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**Uneven and Combined Development in the Centre of Modernism:
Beckett, Joyce, London and Dublin**

**Response to Alina Bako:
“Semi-peripheral Nodes and the Circulation of Political Ideas.
The Case of a Romanian Novel”**

In this response to this Alina Bako’s overview of uneven and combined development within the modern literary scene of Romania, I merely want to pull out a few threads and, in combination with the Warwick Research Collective’s thinking, consider unevenness within works that might seem central to modernism but which are also inflected by postcolonial paradigms. By so doing I hope to tease out how the experience of inter-European colonialism might feature in a consideration of the political novel.

Alina Bako describes Romania in the early years of the last century as a quasi-postcolonial state that has recently emerged from centuries of Ottoman domination. Looking to the centre of capitalist Europe for its template for modernization, Romania appears to be lagging behind those centres in terms of cultural and economic progress. Perhaps correctly, Bako argues that the urbanization of Romania is a crucial prerequisite of the modernisation of cultural modernity and notes how, with the aid of the automobile, the archaic, rural Romania remains within that moment of modernity. In doing so, Bako succinctly captures the notion of uneven and combined development

which the Warwick group develops. What I wish to add by way of confirmation or complication is the mark of uneven and combined development within the metropolis itself. As the Warwick Research Collective remarks, “we will treat the novel paradigmatically, not exemplarily, as a literary form in which combined and uneven development is manifested with particular salience” (2015, 16). Indicating the plasticity and hybridity of the novel form makes it ideal for the incorporation of “other non-literary and archaic cultural forms” (2015, 16), the Warwick group opens up the possibility of the central and the peripheral, the modern and the archaic, the urban and the rural existing within the same literary space.

In an early novel by Samuel Beckett, the phenomena of combined and uneven development within London – the colonial metropolis par excellence – can be discerned. *Murphy* was Beckett’s first published novel (1938, but written in 1936) and was very much influenced by Joyce with whom Beckett was friendly in Paris throughout the early 1930s. Indeed, Beckett’s move from Dublin to Paris, as that of Joyce before him, could very easily be taken as a movement from the peripheral to the central, as Casanova argues in *The World Republic of Letters*: “Because he found himself in the same situation that Joyce had twenty years earlier, Beckett took exactly the same path [...] following Joyce in his exaltation of Dante and his sarcastic suspicions of the Celtic prophets” (2004, 319). Paris, as the “denationalized and universal capital of the literary world” (2004, 34) was therefore the somewhat inevitable literary centre to which Beckett and Joyce were drawn. However, the metropolis within *Murphy* is not Paris, but London: one of the three cities – the others being Dublin and Paris – that Casanova sees as the “tripolar configuration of Irish space” (2004, 319) of Yeats, Shaw, Joyce and Beckett, and others.

Murphy is set partly in Dublin but mainly in London as we see a host of eccentric Irish men and women cross the Irish Sea to pursue Murphy who has himself moved to London notionally in search of his fortune. Beckett himself also had to move to London from Dublin in order to pursue a course of psychotherapy with Wilfred Bion as psychiatry was not allowed within the increasingly Catholic influenced Irish Free State. In *Murphy*, the eponymous hero takes himself to the cockpit in Hyde Park in order to enjoy his lunch of assorted biscuits. He there meets Miss Rosie Dew, a mystic suffering from duck's disease, accompanied by her dachshund, Nelly. Miss Dew and Nelly are in Hyde Park to feed the sheep:

The sheep were a miserable-looking lot, dingy, close-cropped, undersized and misshapen. They were not cropping, they were not ruminating, they did not even seem to be taking their ease. They simply stood, in an attitude of profound dejection, their heads bowed, swaying slightly as though dazed. Murphy had never seen stranger sheep, they seemed one and all on the point of collapse. They made the exposition of Wordsworth's lovely "fields of sleep" as a compositor's error for "fields of sheep" seem no longer a jibe at that most excellent man. They had not the strength to back away from Miss Dew approaching with the lettuce (Beckett 2009, 59).

As Julie Campbell identified (2013), this is not some flight of fancy on Beckett's part as during the 1930s sheep were regularly used to keep the green spaces of London trimmed. So much so, that the sight of a flock of sheep in the centre of the imperium was not an uncommon one. The inclusion of the sheep in Hyde Park in *Murphy* is evidence that archaic forms of rural life were simultaneous with modernization and urbanization even within the very heart of imperial London to which Beckett and other so-called peripheral figures flocked.

Indeed, this sense of combined and uneven development was already well present within Beckett's precursor, James Joyce, especially when one considers the topography, history and discourses within the Martello tower at the start of *Ulysses*. The tower itself is not insignificant as it was built to defend against an invasion by Napoleonic forces and therefore serves as an expression of British hegemony. No less significant is Mulligan's, possibly ironic, claim that this small tower is the Omphalos, or the centre of the world. The fact that Stephen Dedalus and Buck Mulligan share the tower with the Oxfordian Haines who is keen, in a rather anthropological piece of patronizing romanticism, to immerse himself in a pure Irishness, points to a complex interpenetration and inter-interpretation of the cultural periphery and centre within a colonial milieu. Amongst all these discourses surrounding the central and peripheral, the question of Stephen's taste in tea arises:

O, jay, there's no milk.

Stephen fetched the loaf and the pot of honey and the buttercooler from the locker. Buck Mulligan sat down in a sudden pet.

—What sort of a kip is this? he said. I told her to come after eight.

—We can drink it black, Stephen said thirstily. There's a lemon in the locker.

—O, damn you and your Paris fads, Buck Mulligan said. I want Sandycove milk (Joyce 1992, 13).

Stephen, lately returned from a failed exile in Paris, is moving towards the cultural forms of the centre, even in the face of the rural forms embodied in the form of the Sandycove milkwoman:

Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk, pouring it out. Crouching by a patient cow at daybreak in the lush field, a witch on her toadstool, her wrinkled fingers quick at the squirting dugs. They lowed about her whom they knew, dew-silky cattle. Silk of the kine and poor old woman, names given her in old times. A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer, their common cuckquean, a messenger from the secret morning. To serve or to upbraid, whether he could not tell: but scorned to beg her favour (Joyce 1992, 15).

But least we should think that such a simultaneity of the archaic and the modern – the Sandycove crone and the aspirant Parisian artist – is only a feature of the peripheral in relation to the centre, later Stephen claims that the centre has always been marked by its own peripheral. The National Library of Ireland, in the very centre of Dublin, is the site where Stephen expounds his theory of *Hamlet*, which is arguably a text at the very centre of English literature. The library itself also bears traces of the shifting concrete realities of the centre and periphery. The grand, neoclassical building, with its Rotunda housing the reading room, opened in 1890 and is reminiscent of the reading room of the British Museum, which is itself reminiscent of classical Greek and Roman public architecture. Perhaps not incidentally, the architect of the National Library, Thomas Newenham Deane, was educated at the English Public School, Rugby. It is in this multilayered setting that Stephen reminds us of the uneven and combined development within Shakespeare's own historical moment: "Elizabethan London lay as far from Stratford as corrupt Paris lies from virgin Dublin" (Joyce 1992, 240). Before it was the centre of Britain, and then the Empire, England was already peripheral to itself. It took a Dubliner – on the periphery of both the political and literary centres of his day – to point this out.

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