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DANUBIENSIS

Romanian Literature in the German Press: Translation, Cultural Mediation and Reception

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Abstract: Objectives: This article examines how contemporary Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova is represented in the German-speaking press, focusing on the mediating roles of translation, translators, and press discourse in shaping reception and symbolic legitimation. **Prior Work:** The study builds on reception aesthetics (Jauss, 1982), paratext theory (Genette, 1997), translation studies and translator (in)visibility (Venuti, 1995), and sociological approaches to literary circulation and center–periphery dynamics (Casanova, 2004). **Approach:** A qualitative discourse-analytical approach is applied to a curated corpus of press-based paratexts: review notices and critical summaries (e.g., Deutschlandfunk; Frankfurter Rundschau; FAZ; NZZ; Süddeutsche Zeitung; Die Welt) and an institutional interview-format conversation (IKGS München). The analysis focuses on recurring frames, evaluative patterns, and translator positioning. **Results:** The press reception oscillates between aesthetic recognition and contextualization through post-/Soviet history, migration, violence, and geopolitical threat narratives. Translators appear as key cultural mediators; their work is explicitly praised and used as a quality seal, while press discourse simultaneously legitimizes authors through event- and institution-driven paratexts. **Implications:** The findings highlight the press as a gatekeeping arena that constructs interpretive frames for “(semi-)peripheral” literatures and influences cultural promotion, publishing decisions, and readership expectations in the German-language literary field. **Value:** The article contributes a focused, theory-informed reading of concrete German-language reception materials and demonstrates how translation and press paratexts jointly produce visibility, meaning, and value for Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova abroad.

Keywords: cultural gatekeeping; press paratexts; translator agency; reception frames; semi-periphery

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1. Introduction¹

The visibility of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova in the German-speaking world has increased during the last decade through translations, festival participation, institutional programs, and sustained press coverage. Yet “visibility” is not a neutral fact: it is produced through discursive selection and framing in reviews, interviews, and promotional texts. The German-language press functions as a powerful mediator by evaluating texts, positioning authors, and shaping reading horizons. In this context, translation is not merely a technical transfer, but a cultural practice that enables circulation and reconfigures meaning, legitimacy, and expectations.

This article investigates the presence and representation of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova in the press of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, with particular attention to translation, cultural mediation, and reception patterns. The study addresses five “What” questions required by the journal format: (1) What is the problem? Romanian literature’s reception is strongly dependent on press-based paratexts that may aestheticize, contextualize politically, or stereotype “the East,” thereby affecting symbolic value and long-term canonization. (2) What have others done? Prior work in reception aesthetics, paratext theory, translation studies, and world-literary sociology explains how mediation and gatekeeping structure international literary circulation (Casanova, 2004; Genette, 1997; Jauss, 1982; Venuti, 1995). (3) What is done here? A qualitative discourse analysis of a small but illustrative corpus of German-language press materials is conducted. (4) What is new? The analysis demonstrates how translators are discursively positioned as “quality guarantors” and how press frames oscillate between aesthetic recognition and geopolitical/historical contextualization. (5) What next? The paper proposes expanding the corpus and adding reception metrics (reprints, prize circuits, festival networks) to model the interaction between press, institutions, and publishing strategies.

2. Theoretical Framework

Reception aesthetics conceives reading as a historically situated process guided by a “horizon of expectations,” which is shaped by prior reading experiences, genre

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Education and Research, CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PN-IV-PCB-RO-MD-2024-0038, within PNCDI IV

conventions, and prevailing public discourse (Jauss, 1982). Within this framework, press discourse represents one of the most influential sites in which such horizons are constructed, stabilized, and disseminated, thereby structuring interpretive frameworks for literary reception.

Paratext theory posits that textual meaning is co-produced by titles, blurbs, reviews, interviews, festival announcements, and other “threshold” materials that mediate between text and reader. Genette defines the paratext as that which “enables a text to become a book and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (Genette, 1997, p. 1). In transnational contexts, paratexts acquire heightened significance, as target audiences often encounter foreign literature primarily through mediating discourses rather than through direct familiarity with the source culture. Consequently, paratexts play a decisive role in framing reception, shaping interpretive expectations, and legitimizing literary works within new cultural fields.

The concept of the paratext is attributed to the French literary theorist Gérard Genette. It first appears in *Introduction à l’architexte* (1979) and is subsequently elaborated in *Palimpsestes* (1982) as part of his broader typology of transtextual relations, before receiving systematic theoretical development in *Seuils* (1987; English translation *Paratexts*, 1997).

Translation studies further underscore “the active role of the translator as a cultural mediator rather than a neutral transmitter of meaning” (Venuti, 1995). In press reception, translators frequently emerge as visible authorities whose expertise serves to “authenticate” foreign texts for target audiences. This dynamic is especially salient for literatures positioned as peripheral or semi-peripheral within the global literary system, where symbolic legitimacy often depends on external validation through translation and critical mediation.

World-literary sociology elucidates the unequal distribution of symbolic capital across languages and literary fields (Casanova, 2004). In this regard, translation into German and favorable press coverage function as mechanisms of symbolic legitimation for Romanian literature, enabling texts to move beyond peripheral status and attain greater international intelligibility and recognition within the global literary marketplace.

3. Corpus and Method

The empirical basis of this study consists of a purposively selected corpus of publicly accessible German-language reception materials that engage with contemporary

Romanian-language literature from both Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Rather than aiming at statistical representativeness, the corpus was designed to capture key discursive sites in which literary mediation and evaluation take place within the German-speaking public sphere. The selected materials stem from influential quality media outlets as well as from an institutional cultural platform, thereby allowing for an analysis of both journalistic and semi-academic modes of reception.

The corpus includes four main categories of texts. First, it comprises review notices and critical summaries of Tatiana Țibuleac's novel "Der Garten aus Glas", published in Deutschlandfunk and Frankfurter Rundschau (Teutsch, 2023; von Sternburg, 2023). These texts provide insight into how a contemporary author from the Republic of Moldova is framed within German cultural journalism, particularly with regard to questions of post-Soviet transformation, social vulnerability, and narrative aesthetics.

Second, the corpus incorporates a set of review notices on Liliana Corobca's "Der erste Horizont meines Lebens", drawn from Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, and Die Welt (Berking, 2015; Breitenstein, 2015; Kahlweit, 2015; Schümer, 2015). This cluster of reviews enables a comparative perspective on how different German-speaking media outlets construct interpretive frames around Moldovan social realities, childhood, migration, and moral vulnerability.

Third, the analysis includes an institutional interview-format conversation conducted by IKGS München with Oleg Serebrian and his German translator Anke Pfeifer (Dácz, 2025). This text is of relevance because it blends literary commentary, translator reflection, and authorial self-positioning, thereby functioning as a rich paratextual document that illuminates processes of cultural mediation, translation practice, and transnational literary legitimation.

Finally, the corpus is complemented by a critical reception text on Serebrian's "Tango in Czernowitz" authored by Mario Kluge (2023). This review contributes an additional layer of journalistic interpretation that foregrounds questions of multiethnicity, historical memory, and the collapse of cultural diversity in Bukovina.

Taken together, these materials constitute a coherent yet diverse corpus that allows for the examination of recurring patterns in press framing, evaluative discourse, and translator visibility within the German reception of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical approach, which is particularly suited to examining how meaning, value, and legitimacy are constructed in public cultural discourse. Rather than quantifying reception, the analysis seeks to interpret how language, narrative framing, and evaluative strategies shape readers' perceptions of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova in the German context.

The analysis is organized around four interrelated dimensions. First, it examines discursive frames, focusing on how reviewers and commentators situate literary texts within broader narratives of poverty, violence, post-Soviet transformation, migration, war threat, and multiethnicity. These frames are understood as interpretive lenses that guide readers toward readings while marginalizing others.

Second, the study analyzes evaluation patterns, paying attention to how aesthetic praise, moral-emotional impact, and claims of authenticity are articulated. Particular attention is given to moments in which reviewers explicitly balance literary appreciation with socio-political commentary, thereby revealing the interplay between aesthetics and contextualization.

Third, the analysis foregrounds translator positioning, investigating how translators are portrayed in the press and in institutional discourse. This includes examining instances of translator visibility, references to scholarly expertise, and the use of translation as a marker of quality and credibility.

Fourth, the study considers paratextual functions, exploring how reviews, interviews, and promotional materials contribute to processes of legitimation, cultural promotion, and symbolic canonization. Paratexts are treated not as secondary supplements but as integral components of literary reception that actively shape meaning and value.

By integrating these analytical dimensions, the study provides a nuanced account of how Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova is mediated, interpreted, and valorized within the German-language press. In addition to the three core case studies, the broader landscape of Romanian literature in the German-speaking space also includes the reception of other authors from Romania and the Republic of Moldova who circulate primarily through literary journals, anthologies, publisher paratexts, and cultural media rather than mainstream national newspapers. Notable examples include Emilian Galaicu-Păun's poetry volume "Yin Time" (translated by Hellmut Seiler, 2007), discussed in *MATRIX* (2017), where reception foregrounds postmodern aesthetics, intertextuality, and global cultural dialogue rather than socio-political hardship. Likewise, Iulian Ciocan's dystopian

novel “Am Morgen kommen die Russen” (2025) is mainly mediated through publisher descriptions, digital platforms, and documentary formats (ARTE, 2024), which frame the text as a geopolitical satire on post-Soviet anxieties rather than as social realism. Furthermore, Nicolae Dabija’s novel “Die Hausaufgabe” (2018) appears predominantly in online book ecosystems and AI-generated summaries rather than in major press reviews. These materials are treated here as contextual background rather than part of the core analytical corpus, as their circulation patterns differ significantly from the press-based reception analyzed in this study.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Aesthetic Recognition vs. Contextualization through History and Politics

Across the corpus, Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova is frequently made legible through historical-political contextualization. In the reception of Țibuleac, the review discourse foregrounds poverty, violence, and socio-economic ruptures around late Soviet and post-Soviet transitions. The press frames Lastotschka’s story as emblematic of systemic transformation: “wie aus vielen Verlierern der Sowjet-Ära Verlierer des Postsowjetismus wurden” (Teutsch, 2023). This frame elevates the novel beyond individual fate to a socio-historical diagnosis, thereby increasing relevance for German-speaking audiences, but also risks reducing literature to “evidence” of Eastern hardship.

Similarly, the reception of Corobca’s novel is mediated through the social phenomenon of “Sozialwaisen” and labor migration, positioning Moldova as a space of deprivation and familial rupture. The press emphasizes emotional intensity -“liest sie daher mit Beklemmung” (Berking, 2015) -and “repeatedly interprets childhood as prematurely burdened by adult responsibilities” (Kahlweit, 2015; Schümer, 2015). The result is a dominant interpretive frame: Moldova as a nearby yet “other” Europe marked by structural lack. While this framing increases empathy and moral attention, it can also stabilize a limited repertoire of themes through which Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova becomes readable.

In Serebrian’s case, the press and institutional discourse foreground multiethnic Bukovina, the collapse of cultural diversity, and the violent reordering of the region through shifting state sovereignties. “The narrative is contextualized through changing borders, forced resettlement, and the return of Soviet troops” (Kluge, 2023). This produces a “history-heavy” frame that offers educational value, but again

risks subordinating aesthetic autonomy to geopolitically charged interpretive demands. These patterns show an oscillation: the press grants aesthetic recognition but frequently anchors value in political-historical legibility. This corresponds to a typical reception mechanism for “semi-peripheral” literatures: “they gain visibility when they appear to deliver cultural knowledge about an underrepresented region” (Casanova, 2004).

4.2. Translators as Key Mediators and “Quality Seals”

A striking finding is translator visibility. Review discourse explicitly praises Ernest Wichner’s translation of *Țibuleac*, highlighting it as a medium that transfers “Poesie” and stylistic energy into German (von Sternburg, 2023). Translation becomes not only a condition of access but a criterion of value: the press uses translator competence to legitimate the text. This aligns with the idea that in international circulation, translation is part of the “symbolic packaging” that enables recognition.

The IKGS conversation makes translator agency explicit. “Pfeifer reflects on her non-native relation to Romanian and frames translation as an accumulated competence built through research practice and sustained language work” (Dącz, 2025). Her account shows translation as cultural scholarship: mapping multilingual toponyms, verifying geography, reconstructing historically layered names, and deciding whether to “Germanize” or preserve Romanian forms. This is an instance of translator visibility in Venuti’s sense, but with an important twist: visibility here is not a threat to fluency norms; it is used as authority and authenticity.

Moreover, Serebrian’s own remarks emphasize translation as an improvement potential – “manchmal kann die Übersetzung den Roman noch besser machen als das Original” (Dącz, 2025). In press and institutional discourse, the translator emerges as co-producer of literary value and as a gatekeeper for credibility.

The corpus indicates that translators function as “cultural diplomats.” Their expertise is mobilized to validate texts from lesser-known literary fields, thus increasing symbolic capital in the German-language market.

4.3. Paratextual Legitimation: Reviews, Institutions, and Promotional Discourse

The corpus illustrates “paratexts as a network” (Genette, 1997): reviews evaluate; institutional interviews narrate authorial identity and cultural relevance; promotional texts position works within festival circuits and public discourse. This network does not merely inform - it legitimizes.

The IKGS format combines biography, institutional authority, and interpretive framing. “Serebrian is introduced through academic and diplomatic credentials, prizes, and offices, which function as legitimation signals for readerships that may not recognize Romanian literary hierarchies” (Dácz, 2025). Similarly, Pfeifer’s scholarly credentials are part of the paratextual “trust infrastructure.” These moves illustrate how symbolic validation can depend on extra-literary capital when literature circulates across unequal fields (Casanova, 2004).

In review notices, paratextual writing often highlights extreme experiences (violence, poverty, war, displacement), which makes the works “newsworthy” and morally urgent. The risk is that Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova is canonized abroad primarily through limited thematic corridors. Yet the same paratexts also create entry points for broader recognition: “they foreground narrative voice, irony, poetic density, and stylistic mastery” (von Sternburg, 2023; Breitenstein, 2015). The press operates as a gatekeeping institution: it distributes attention, frames meaning, and translates cultural distance into readable narratives.

4.4. Stereotyping and the “Eastern” Readability Trap

The findings support the conclusion that reception oscillates between appreciation and stereotyping. The recurring emphasis on suffering, deprivation, and geopolitical vulnerability can stabilize expectations that Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova should deliver “post-Soviet hardship” or “borderland trauma.” This resembles a “readability trap”: texts are valued when they confirm a recognizable repertoire about the East. At the same time, the corpus contains countersignals: “reviewers note narrative irony, aesthetic strategy, and complexity; institutional discourse foregrounds multiethnicity and moral ambiguity rather than one-dimensional victimhood” (Dácz, 2025; von Sternburg, 2023). The

press both opens and narrows the horizon of expectations. It enables access but may inadvertently reinforce asymmetric cultural schemata.

4.5. Beyond Mainstream Press: Literary Magazines and Digital Mediation

While the focus of this study lies on mainstream press reception, Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova also circulates in more specialized venues such as literary journals, cultural magazines, and digital media. In these spaces, interpretive frames differ from those dominant in national newspapers. For example, the reception of Emilian Galaicu-Păun's "Yin Time in MATRIX" (2017) emphasizes postmodern experimentation, intertextual density, and philosophical play with language, rather than social deprivation or geopolitical trauma. Galaicu-Păun is framed as a globally oriented poet who "looks at the world with other eyes," situating literature within a transnational aesthetic continuum rather than within a post-Soviet deficit narrative.

Similarly, Iulian Ciocan's novel "Am Morgen kommen die Russen" is primarily mediated through publisher paratexts and audiovisual formats (ARTE, 2024), where it is presented as a dystopian satire anticipating geopolitical conflict. This contrasts sharply with press reception of Țîbuleac and Corobca, which foregrounds social vulnerability and historical rupture. The Ciocan case illustrates how different media platforms generate distinct interpretive frames: cultural documentaries privilege political foresight and satire, while literary magazines privilege aesthetics and formal innovation.

The case of Nicolae Dabija's "Die Hausaufgabe" (2018), mostly mediated through online summaries and commercial book platforms rather than traditional criticism, demonstrates how some Romanian language literary works remain visible primarily within digital book ecosystems rather than institutional press circuits. This suggests that reception is increasingly fragmented across media regimes with unequal symbolic power.

5. Conclusion

This article examined German-language press and institutional paratexts as mediating infrastructures for the visibility and reception of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The analysis demonstrates that the press constructs Romanian literature through a dynamic interplay of (1)

aesthetic evaluation and (2) political-historical contextualization. Translators emerge as highly visible cultural mediators: their names and expertise function as credibility markers, “quality seals,” and co-producers of symbolic value. Institutional discourse (e.g., IKGS) amplifies legitimation through biographies, prizes, and research-based translator authority.

The reception patterns show a persistent oscillation: recognition is frequently tied to narratives of post-/Soviet transformation, migration, violence, and borderland history - frames that generate relevance but also carry stereotyping risks. For (semi-)peripheral literatures, such paratextual dynamics can be decisive: they shape interpretive horizons, influence publishing and marketing strategies, and determine which Romanian language texts become internationally readable and valued. Further research should expand the corpus (additional newspapers, radio formats, podcasts, book fair programs), include longitudinal comparison (2010 -2026), and integrate network analysis of institutions (publishers, festivals, translation funds). Such work could model how press discourse, translator agency, and cultural institutions jointly produce international literary circulation.

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that not only cultural journalism and institutional paratexts, but also commercial paratexts (publishers’ and online booksellers’ websites, editorial descriptions, blurbs, promotional excerpts from reviews, author biographies, thematic labels, and audiovisual materials associated with books) play a significant role in shaping the reception of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova in the German-speaking space. These platforms function as mediating interfaces that pre-structure the reader’s horizon of expectations, ascribing aesthetic and political value to texts and guiding interpretation prior to direct engagement with the work itself. Consequently, the visibility and legitimacy of Romanian-language literature from Romania and the Republic of Moldova do not depend solely on reviews in quality press outlets, but also on the commercial and digital circuits of the book market, which contribute to the symbolic distribution of cultural capital and to the stabilization of interpretive frames regarding “(semi-) peripheral” literatures.

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