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## **IMAGES OF TRANSYLVANIA IN LITERARY PERIODICALS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS**

*Camil MUREȘANU*

Director of the Institute of History of the Romanian Academy,  
Cluj Branch

In the period between 1933-1940, cultural life in inter-war Transylvania showed a much more intensive upsurge than in previous periods.

This statement is supported by several arguments: the number of literary periodicals published in the larger towns of Transylvania but also in many of the small ones; the variety of their contents and the high quality of articles written by already well-established authors. These were representatives of a future generation of high level of Romanian culture, which was, unfortunately, destined to assert itself in a too short period of time as it had been decimated, banished or reduced to a non-creative conformism by the circumstances after 1945. In addition there is the placing of these periodicals in the flow of European cultural problems for the discussion of philosophical and literary themes that are highly current in the West, and the reviews of books and periodicals published a few months, sometimes only weeks before in the spiritual centres of the continent. We find the friendly emulation remarkable between periodicals: even when there were arguments, presentations were continued so that the periodicals kept themselves alive in the sphere of interest of their readers. This is the case of periodicals in minority languages (Hungarian and German) presented by Romanian periodicals. These latter were also presented by Hungarian and German ones. The phenomenon of collaboration is also noteworthy: irrespective of their origin and nature, these periodicals were not isolated. Their contributions were published in other periodicals.

Beyond the quality and variety of contents the urbanity of literary manners was also a feature of these periodicals, evident also in the manner of most polemics. These characteristics strengthen our conviction that Transylvanian culture was at a high level in the third decade of this century.

Some of the periodicals of this time are attributed to historical preoccupations and to the historical vision in regard to their way of treating contemporary political and cultural phenomena. This tendency was even more obvious in *Țara Bârsei*, a periodical in Brașov which was concerned, more than any other periodical, with its local area, the South of Transylvania. In the period studied by us (1933-1940) it did not seem to attract valuable contributions of original literary creation, criticism, philosophical and political essay-writing, as other peri-



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odicals did. However, it had good relations with the Saxon cultural movement in Brașov and it had several reviews on the *Klingsor* periodical and on some Saxon cultural programmes and personalities.

This is a preoccupation of almost all periodicals of that time. The ideas expressed in the periodical *Blajul* introducing a sketch of Saxon literature in Transylvania written by Harald Krasser and published in Stuttgart seem very topical even nowadays:

"Only by knowing each other's cultural and literary values can we, says a Romanian critic, speak about a real understanding. We live close to each other...but at astral distances, in alien, closed worlds without spiritual interferences...Mutual understanding is possible only by a deep knowledge attainable at the "peaks" of the soul where the air is free of the centrifugal tendencies of some and of the national vainglory of others..."

The author ends his review by showing disapproval for the fact that "Saxon literature is less known by us than let's say, the latest cheap French play..."

Along the lines of this improvement of attitude that was requested, Ion Chinezu made a substantial analysis of *Klingsor* in the *Gândul Românesc* periodical in Cluj, in February 1934, entitled *Ten Years of Saxon Life at Klingsor*.

The well-known literary critic presented the judgement (or prejudice) of Romanian intellectuals regarding the Saxon: "they are sober, exclusivist, tenacious and proud in preserving their traditions, they have mainly materialistic preoccupations, so that they even disregard artistic ambition."

Ion Chinezu neatly corrects the last part of this "image of the other", underlining the spiritual propensities of Saxon sensibility and culture. One of these was promoted by the writer Adolf Meschendörfer, in the periodical *Die Karpathen*. He sustained the Saxons' need for escaping from the framework of their traditional view. Meschendörfer argued in favour of replacing the values legitimised by historical-political traditions with those founded on aesthetic criteria. He tried to inaugurate a critical line in Saxon culture, meant to bring about a reconsideration of the past and of future options.

Ion Chinezu also mentions that the modern orientation, freed from a stiff traditionalism, which was suggested by Meschendörfer has become prominent because of the great events that happened in Europe a few years ago. Although the group from *Klingsor*, says he, did not succeed in completely freeing himself from traditionalism, he let "all the anxieties planted in souls by the war and the agitations after it" to vibrate in the columns of the periodical.

These anxieties and agitations partly turned into a declaration of a "crisis of Saxon identity". Some journalists observed and explained it as a manifestation of an inadaptation which was a result of the Saxons' conscience between

the consideration of themselves being German or Transylvanian. In this way Heinrich Zillich, editor of *Klingsor* called in question the validity of a national culture as opposed to the European one. He saw the Saxon as the mediators and representatives of European culture in Transylvania.

Others, contributors to the same periodical, claimed that the Saxon had been given the privilege of being the "conscience of the Transylvanian soul" and they were speaking about the existence of a Transylvanian nation and its specific cultural language. This is the idea of Transylvanianism, also sustained by a group of Hungarian intellectuals centred round the *Erdélyi Helikon* periodical in Cluj.

"Transylvanianism, says the same Ion Chinezu, is a vague ideology with an all-embracing lyrical atmosphere, a certain mysticism. It can hardly be pinned down to a precise scheme, though there have been attempts to theorise it. It takes shape from melancholy, historical memories, from the delight in the Transylvanian landscape and the search for a subterranean link that would unite, during the centuries, the three coexisting nations in their spiritual essence, beyond their ethnic and cultural differences."

This characterisation was made by the critic of *Gând Românesc* when he presented the novels *Die Stadt im Osten*, by Meschendörfer and Hirtenfeuer, by Emil Witting, both published in 1931-32. These made clear the intention of these authors of embodying the idea of Transylvanianism in the substance and form of literary creation.

Romanians treated the idea of Transylvanianism with reserve. They were suspicious of unconfessed political connotations. Romanian intellectuals were adepts of the thesis of cultural autochtonism, first in the version which claimed that from among the Transylvanian nations only the Romanians with their spirituality born from the ancestral stratum of peasantry - the social class closely linked to land - are the bearers of a Transylvanianism, one that belongs only to them. This theory was put forward by Teodor Mureșanu, among others, in *Abecedar*, in 1933. Vita Zsigmond answered it in *Erdélyi Helikon*.

In a study entitled *Fenomenul Românesc din Ardeal* (in *Pagini Literare*, II, 1935, nr.6-7), Grigore Popa also contested Transylvanianism, relying on Lucian Blaga's concept concerning the concord between the culture-creating spirit and the exterior landscape within which it develops. The concept of the great thinker helped to support the thesis that the souls of the three Transylvanian nations are divergent; they gather different nostalgia. However, the coexistence brought about a "flexible sensibility of understanding" and a "polivalency of the Transylvanian soul." The author of the above mentioned

essay invites us to accept that "the flexible sense of understanding" is in an exterior sphere, a less essential centre of significance than the sensibility of soul-divergence of the three coexisting nations.

Romanian essayists did not approve of Transylvanianism in the version suggested by Hungarian and Saxon writers, since the representatives of Romanian culture saw in it an attempt to authorise regionalism in culture, whereas they longed for a pan-Romanian spiritual synthesis.

This desire which was supported by Romanian autochthony on the one hand and by an opening towards European horizons on the other, can be seen in the subtext of Grigore Popa's essay in *Pagini Literare* (January 1934), entitled *Transylvanian Landscape* (*Peisaj Ardelean*) which created a great stir in its time.

The author brought a charge against Romanian culture in Transylvania in the fifteen years after the Union. Three generations coexist in this culture: one which was formed before 1918 and did not adapt itself to the new problems of Transylvania and still lives with the nostalgia of its past role, a role which is irretrievably obsolescent. The author utters a drastic judgement: "The historical generation of Transylvania does not satisfy present demands." However, it is the second category called the "the generation of the reverse way" that the essay accuses most severely. It consists of those who appeared on the public scene between 1918-1926. They were characterised by careerism and lack of substantial talent: "a generation without creativity, suspended between the past and the future".

These are both opposed by the young generation that entered university after 1927, a generation that had ideals and was able to give the Transylvanian culture that desirable, pan-Romanian vocation stimulated by the synthesis between autochthony and Europeanness.

A year after the publication of this study, Ionel Neamtzu, a young novelist wrote in the same spirit in *Blajul* that Transylvania did not produce very much in the years after the Union, neither in politics, nor in culture.

But, he goes on, "Transylvania amazed those who condemned its cultural-literary productivity through movements in different centres. The stifled latencies broke the bridge and overflowed... with a real amazing richness and exuberance. The idea of creative localism forwarded by Al. Dima turned into a movement, unique in the history of Transylvania."

One can realise therefore that contemporary views on the state of Romanian culture in Transylvania oscillate between clear disappointment and the hope for an impetus, its signs being received with confidence and even enthusiasm.

Communication between the three coexisting nations - Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons - have a surprising intensity if we take into account the fact that it is due to a spontaneous initiative, without the calculated stimulation of authorities as is the case so often.

Much has been translated. Romanian readers have had the opportunity to become acquainted with long, representative passages from the poetry of Ady, the prose of Gárdonyi and Móricz Zsigmond, the contemporary poets - Áprily, Reményik, etc. The publication of the final version of *Az ember tragédiája* by Madách in the masterly translation of Octavian Goga was a literary event praised by Romanians and Hungarians alike. In the years between the two world wars there were more Hungarian translations from Romanian literature than in any other previous period. Kibédi Sándor translated Eminescu's poems which was a daring and praiseworthy deed, though not perfect from an aesthetic point of view. There were also other successful translations, by Dsida Jenő and Berde Mária, of some other poems (*Glossa, Rugăciunea unui dac*).

Poems by Nichifor Crainic, Zaharia Stancu, Elena Farago, Mihai Codreanu were translated in *Erdélyi Helikon* by the great poet József Attila. Ion Barbu's poem, *Riga Crypto și Iapona Enigel*, the plays *O scrisoare pierdută*, *Maica cea tânără* by Emil Isac, *Cruciada Copiilor* by Blaga, *Meșterul Manole* by Goga, *Prometeu* by Victor Eftimiu, *Manechinul sentimental* by Ion Minulescu and *Molima* by Ion Marin Sadoveanu had also been translated.

Bardócz Árpád translates a lot from Alecsandri whereas Szemlér Ferenc has a permanent column of reviews on Romanian books and periodicals.

Saxon writers, Harald Krasser especially, translate works by Ion Pillat, Vasile Voiculescu and Nichifor Crainic.

Hungarian writers have reviews on Saxon writers' novels and short stories (*Bruder nimm die Brüder mit* and *Die Freundschaft von Kockelburg* by Erwin Wittstock, Meschendörfer's latest novel, *Der Büffelbrunnen*) and anthologies of poems and stories (*Herz der Heimat* and *Himmel über dem Acker*), also commented upon by Romanian periodicals.

Kós Károly had an argument in *Erdélyi Helikon* with Ernst Jekelius, editor of *Klingsor*, who regretfully states that cultural relations between the Hungarians and Saxons have become less friendly. The answer of Kós, even if it was an exact one, shifted the problem on principles, even if not in an elegant way, towards the political aspect. It was only August 1935 and the Hungarian journalist was eager to point out that the Saxons accepted the Hitlerist doctrine which was rejected by the Hungarians in Transylvania. It is true that not long after this Romulus Demetrescu, the "official critic" of *Pagini Literare* makes a similar allusion, a short but sharp one.

Among all literary periodicals in Transylvania in any language Erdélyi Helikon seems to be the most well-informed about English and American literature. One of its contributors lived in the USA.

The third series of Familia, published from 1934 in Oradea, edited by M.G.Samarineanu, has a special place among literary periodicals of that time. Its intention of fighting for Romanian-Hungarian friendship is clear from its first issue. It does not omit, however, the debate on some revisionist political articles. A short statement of platform speaks about the intention of promoting nationalism guided by the principle of "Know yourself so that you can understand and appreciate your fellow man."

Familia initiated an interesting investigation among Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania, the old Romania and Hungary, on the topic "can we and the Hungarians understand each other?"

The answers were published in three double numbers of the periodical in 1935. Generally, those of Hungarian intellectuals' were more moderate and conditional, those of Romanian intellectuals were more generous. There were famous personalities among those who had answered the question: Sadoveanu, Camil Petrescu, Cezar Petrescu, Victor Eftimiu, Corneliu Moldovanu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Octav Suluțiu, Petru Comarnescu and Hungarian writers, such as Babits Mihály, Illyés Gyula, Berde Mária, Tabéry Géza and Szemlér Ferenc.

Virulent was the answer given by Cezar Petrescu. After expressing his honest wish for rapprochement and his conviction that it is possible, he claimed that the artisans of this process can only be the intellectuals. "To know, writes the novelist, means to understand; and to understand is halfway to loving. And what about politics?, he asks himself and answers, The profession of patriotism and humanitarianism becomes unscrupulous before the ballot-box. It is sure that meddling with politics will only compromise, minimise and make trite the idea. Watch how the most noble intention is automatically distorted as soon as it becomes part of the platform of some political party."

A recurrent theme in Familia had its origins in the statement of some of its contributors that the world is in a spiritual crisis and the social stratum of intellectuals seems to have lost its inner equilibrium. Culture could be, among others, the remedy for this disease, a culture which "gives our moral concepts a new contents and a steady place in public life..."

If other periodicals made a comparison between the generations of Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania which was unfavourable for the past generation considered to be unable to adapt itself to the complexity of political and cultural problems after 1918, Familia set up an opposite hierarchy of values

within the past and present generations, arguing that former Transylvanian journalists had a superior strength of character.

Recalling the aspects under which Transylvania has been presented in cultural periodicals in the 30s is, we hope, valuable and interesting in itself. It is also a way towards the present, the very immediate one

The issues debated six decades ago are on the agenda even today, either in different or in almost identical terms, presented even more energetically and passionately than before. It proves the fact that men of culture are extremely sensitive to the essential realities of their nation. Instead of their superficial journalistic improvisations their deep anxieties should be studied by the "analysts" of the present and the "prophets" of the future.