

The Post-War Poetry of Bihor. Romanian and Hungarian Portraits

Summary

A city of transition and gate towards Central Europe, Oradea – together with its neighbouring regions – developed in the literary sense according to the possibilities. In the post-war period, the city congregated in a cultural node, neither large, nor small, which could be considered a forceful satellite of Cluj. However, the particularities of the poetry written in Bihor have been present in this area since the beginning of the 20th century and they must be acknowledged as such.

With a population composed mainly of Romanians followed in a considerable percentage by the Hungarian and the Jewish communities, in order to prosper, the city traversed by the Crişul Repede River had to provide for its citizens a favourable context for intercultural dialogue.

As this thesis reveals, for both Romanians and Hungarians living here, the *origo* of the poetic consciousness of Bihor is represented by the period around 1900. The two Maecenas, recognized and honoured by the city to this day through various memorial museums, were, on one hand, Iosif Vulcan, the founder of the cultural forum, which was the literary magazine *Familia* (*The Family*) for over 150 years of existence, and, on the other hand, Ady Endre, a poet of his time, a visionary and a revolutionary (let us not forget that Ady is considered the first and most important modernist poet of the Hungarians). Both of them, through a diligent literary activism that consolidated their reputation, brought around them intellectuals of all types, from theatre-related people and zealous journalists to ambitious prose writers and poets, building together the basis for the cultural scene of Bihor.

We believe that the most prominent particularity of Oradea is the cultural diversity. Our commitment to this hermeneutic analysis of vast complexity was fortunately rewarded with a multitude of findings, each of them contributing in its own way to the outline of this cultural mosaic, which is the poetic patrimony of Oradea. Hereinafter, we will attempt to articulate a few conclusive observations regarding the aforementioned.

1. The city as the hearth of inspiration: *Centrifugal destinies and centripetal destinies*. While cities like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iaşi or Timişoara can elaborate, without many conceptual limitations, dictionaries or critical histories of their own groups of writers, starting

with a sort of handicap in what concerns the difference between the profile and quality of the higher education, and the labour market opportunities, Oradea had to face a higher degree of writers' mobility. Thus, among the poets under analysis, we noticed that approximately three quarters of them are either rooted in the cultural climate of Bihor, or emigrants, namely those who moved to more advantageous cultural centres, among which, Bucharest, Budapest and Cluj-Napoca. Only a quarter of them can be acclaimed for the physical loyalty (because spiritually all of them remained loyal, without exception) to Oradea and its surroundings – few of them maintained, however, their lyrical output on an ascending path, from the quality point of view.

2. *The representativeness of the two complementary cultures of Oradea.* After delving into specialised dictionaries and the archive of post-war cultural periodicals (not only the local ones, but the national ones as well), we identified an approximately equal number of Romanian poets and Hungarian poets, who fall within the scope of our study. We tried to compensate for the slight imbalance – of twelve to eighteen – in the introductory chapter, by elaborately illustrating the stages of the Hungarian literature in Bihor at the beginning of the century, a discrimination justified by the years spent under Hungarian domination.

3. The agitation generated by the Great Union among the Hungarian intelligentsia resembles, in nature and intensity, the axiological confusion caused amidst Romanian intellectuals by the installation of the socialist regime. The amalgam of pressures drew from the overloaded and confused consciousness of poets a poetry of documental expressivity from a *psychosocial* point of view.

4. A detailed examination also reveals that the agora of poetic voices of Bihor is primarily constituted by *strong individualities*. The imagery, with many confluence points, is dispersed into various registers. On one hand, we have the conservatives, poets praising the humanist values, but also, and especially, the principles of *sămănătorism* and *poporanism*, while, on the other hand, there are the innovative spirits, the authors of (neo)modernist, postmodernist and experimental poetics. In the first category we would include, with their entire work, Tóth István, Doina Sălăjan and Viorel Horj, and with only some of their poetry collections, Fábíán Sándor, Ana Blandiana, Ion Davideanu and Nicolae Brânda. Among the poets with liberal vision and aesthetic, we firstly mention Zudor János, Sall László, Kőrössi P. József, Ioan Moldovan and Judith Mészáros. At an equidistance from the two extremes, we find Adonyi Nagy Mária, Gheorghe Grigurcu, Gabriela Hurezean, Fábíán Imre, Lipcsei Márta, Ioan F. Pop, etc., poets whose trope system governed by imaginative fervour and associations out of the ordinary.

5. *Isomorphisms and divergences* of poetics. Between the Romanian poets of Bihor and their Hungarian counterparts of similar generations, there were a few equivalences of style and vision. On a lexical level, for instance, the obsession – deemed unaesthetic – of Romanian poets to form genitive constructions of metaphors ("arhitectura valurilor" [the architecture of waves], "ceasul cetății" [the clock of the fortress], etc.) can also be found, according to the Hungarian grammatical logic, in their poetry, where, by juxtaposing two words, numerous titles with abstract semantic character ("amintirea miresmelor" [the memory of scents], "fantezia liniștii" [the fantasy of silence], etc.) were formed – especially in the "Forrás" generations. Another isomorphism is related to the landscape imagery, and also rural imagery, to which the debutant poets turned between 1955 and 1975, approximately. Both factions tried to disguise the modernist verve, whose essence was the (self)knowledge, for the feeling of belonging to a rich and blessed land; there were a few who proved more skilful, indeed, namely those who turned the wheels of identity towards a fictitious sphere of *texistence*. By using this strategy, fragmentary discourses were obtained, employing scansion as artistic method.

The category of differences includes the contrasting approaches of the two cultures regarding the language innovations in poetry. On the sinusoidal axis of the socio-political background, the degree of adherence to a certain expressive setting oscillated according to the consciousness of the time, more precisely, to its impulses at individual level. For instance, we have noted with relative surprise that in the case of the first post-war generations, the Hungarians (from "Ady Endre" literary circle: Sall, Kőrössi, Zudor, etc.) proved to be more open to novelty, more permeable to the idea of experiment than the Romanian poets who attended the "Iosif Vucan" literary circle (Țepelea, Pituț, Horj, etc.), the latter promoting a, stylistically, more lyrical poetry, but also more rigorous in form. Nonetheless, the order is overthrown during the period following the Revolution, when the 80s generation and their descendants, the 90s generation gathered around *Familia* magazine, outrun the Hungarians from *Kelet-Nyugat* and, later, *Várad*, in terms of verbal freshness; the writings of the latter are rather similar to the lyrical attempts of the Romanian poets from the 60s and 70s generations. This tendency is maintained up to these days, when poets like Mihai Vieru (Generation 2000, born in Ploiești, adopted by Oradea) or Dumitru Vlad (generation post 2000, born in Oradea, assimilated by the university environment of Cluj) put forth volumes of neo-avant-gardist poetics, while Szőke Mária Magdolna or Fábíán Judith, for example, (female poets who marked their début quasi-simultaneously with the aforementioned two young poets), choose to stick to the first modernist canons. Therefore, symmetry can also be found in the stylistic

and aesthetic innovations in poetry, only differently than how we imagined: diagonally, instead of horizontally.

6. When referring to the *editorial strategies* that became familiar among the Romanian poets and the Hungarian poets, we will look at the following aspects: while the first ones developed a habit of abundant publishing, with an overflowing frequency, the latter adopted a slower rhythm. By reviewing the publication date of their volumes and the quantity of new content, we witness a major discrepancy. Despite the fact that book launches became a routine for Romanian authors (just like birthday celebrations), their poetry volumes, although often not rigorously filtered by the editors, were composed exclusively of innovative poems. On the other side, the Hungarian authors – perhaps of a more relaxed temper, but also with more restrained publication possibilities – returned with volumes comprising larger collections, and when doing so, they included amongst the new ones texts from the old poetry volumes.

7. Another curiosity that we sought to satisfy regards the spectre of *poetic attitudes towards the ideology imposed* by the Party. Using the critical perspective offered by Ion Simuț in his volume entitled *Literaturile române postbelice* (Post-War Romanian Literatures)¹, we commented in the critical texts the results of this type of ethical test. The corollary of this approach revealed not only an unexpected symmetry of the two groups, but also volumes published in samizdat regime, giving voice to some radical visions about the Romanian communism (Gittai István, Zudor János or Sall László). We also found out who were the subversives of Bihor and the "beasts" they mentioned in their poems, as well as the poetic formulas of evasive nature, at the same time, where the situation required it, we unmasked the opportunistic lyrical momentum. Furthermore, we gained a coherent insight into the politics of the magazines of that time, evaluating their degree of resistance through culture – as much as it could be saved from the writers' confrontation with censorship.

8. By applying the hermeneutic principles, we investigated the *constant inspiration sources* that flooded the verse of the local poets. Summarizing their poetic pursuits, we point out: a) the refuge in the mystery and the mythological outlines adapted to the local environment, b) the Transylvanian imagery, idyllic par excellence, invaded by the longings and melancholies of passéist reflexivity, c) the belief in the precursors of this land.

9. We brought up the *cultural nodes and nuclei* that made the interaction between poets possible. We noted divergent affinities in what concerns the socialisation and the belonging: while some of them joined these public manifestations (Ioan Țepelea, Gheorghe

¹ Editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2017.

Pituț, Ion Davideanu or Ioan F. Pop, and, from the other faction, Gittai István, Zudor János, Sall László or Szűcs László), others preferred to isolate themselves, suffering the consequences of a lower visibility (Gabriela Hurezean, Judith Mészáros, Fábián Sándor, Lipcsei Márta, etc.).

10. Last but not least, we recalled the means of communication (literary, but also extra-literary) that existed between the Romanian and the Hungarian groups of poets. We also strived to find the methods of translating them in the light of the major events of that period. At macro level, of crucial importance is the contribution of Romanian literary historians in transmitting and commenting in Romanian language the literature of the Hungarians from Transylvania. At micro level, the most memorable, among others, is the experiment – which lasted a few sessions – of the "Iosif Vulcan" literary circle members in collaboration with the members of the "Ady Endre" grouping to organise bilateral literary translation workshops.

We hope that our thesis attained its goals, fulfilling both the geographic-historical role of mapping the poets from the Bihor region, and the vigilante role of establishing the natural balance of an ecosystem often disturbed by the consequences of literary activism and by the ideological compromise as well, unfortunately.

We believe that casting on adjacent pages two complementary histories, in fact overlapped from a geographical point of view, will increase the reciprocal interest of the two communities under the common sky of knowledge, empathy and admiration.