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FACULTY OF LETTERS**

**PhD THESIS**

**THE RECEPTION OF KNUT HAMSUN IN THE ROMANIAN  
CULTURAL PRINTED PRESS FROM 1895 UNTIL 2016. NATIONAL  
AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

**SUMMARY**

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**Key-words:** *Romanian cultural printed press, interwar period, translations, core cultures, peripheral cultures, international reception, national reception, fluctuations, Nobel prize, Nazism.*

### **Summary:**

The PhD thesis entitled *The Reception of Knut Hamsun in the Romanian Cultural Printed Press from 1895 until 2016. National and International Perspective* offers an overview on the reception of Knut Hamsun in the Romanian cultural printed press from the beginning (1895) until present (2016). This thesis is thus an attempt at investigating intercultural exchanges<sup>1</sup> over a wider period: it systematically reviews the data for Knut Hamsun's reception in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting from a national and an international contextualisation and spreading over to Romania. A reception analysis of this kind is based on translations, articles or studies on Hamsun, first at a national and a European level, afterwards with emphasis on the Romanian culture.

Hence, the main objective of my thesis is to focus on the reception of Knut Hamsun in the Romanian cultural printed press via articles in different periodicals. However, in order to enlarge the reception spectrum in Romania, I also expose data about translations, with a special focus on the initial translations, in order to illustrate the contact culture. To reach this objective, I use a diachronic approach, intermingling quantitative (statistics, methodology) and qualitative data (analyses of the information stated in the articles). In order to set the Romanian press reception phenomenon in a wider context, considerations on his national and international reception have primarily been done.

The viability of the theme first lies in the fact that it brings a contribution to the international research on Knut Hamsun's reception. Up until the present moment, academic studies on his reception in Europe have been published in Hungary<sup>2</sup>, Italy<sup>3</sup> or Norway in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. The most comprehensive study in this field is attributed to Peter Fjågesund,

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by Franco Moretti and presented in the theoretical part.

<sup>2</sup> András Masát. "Tydninger og mistydninger gjennom 90 år. Om mottakelsen av Hamsuns forfatterskap i Ungarn" in *Edda*, nr. 86, 1986, pp. 227-238. (*Interpretations and Misinterpretations through 90 years. The Reception of Hamsun in Hungary*, translation from Norwegian)

<sup>3</sup> Margherita Giordano Lokrantz. "Hamsun och Italien", in *Edda*, nr. 81, 1981, pp. 337-345. (*Hamsun and Italy*, translation from Swedish)

<sup>4</sup> Tore Stuberg. "Fra landssviker til dikterkonge. Knut Hamsun i norsk offentlighet 1945-55", in *NLÅ*, 1978, pp. 144-162. (*From Traitor to National Poet. Knut Hamsun in Norwegian Media 1945-1955*, translation from Norwegian)



who edited a book about Hamsun's international reception<sup>5</sup>. Considering these circumstances, the Romanian academic and cultural space lacks applied research regarding his reception in Romania<sup>6</sup>. Hence, the novelty brought by the present thesis lies in the fact that it is the first comprehensive research on the reception of Knut Hamsun in Romania, with a special focus on the cultural printed press<sup>7</sup>. References to the translations of Knut Hamsun's works in Romania are also made. Considering all these, my thesis is the first inclusive academic attempt at presenting the reception of Knut Hamsun on Romanian soil, by also contextualising it from a national and an international perspective. However, given the complexity of the field, no reception study emits any claims to exhaustivity, this thesis included. Another element of novelty is that, in the final part of the thesis, I compare the results outlined by the Romanian reception with the ones illustrated by the Norwegian, respectively the international reception (in core and peripheral European cultures). By doing so, this PhD thesis brings its contribution to the research on Knut Hamsun's international reception, which was, up until now, lacking concrete data on Romania<sup>8</sup>.

This PhD thesis is structured in four chapters, as follows:

The thesis opens with theoretical considerations applied to a reception study. There are two primary aims of this part:

It first selects and defines the theoretical instruments<sup>9</sup> used throughout the thesis. These instruments are: *world literature* as one and unequal, as a system of variations; *interference* between either *core* and *periphery* or – not very common – between two peripheral cultures; world system seen as a *changing compromise* between *foreign form* and *local reality*. More exactly, the principle of *form as a struggle* (between the original form and its actual reception) helps to explain the process of translation. The central concept is the one of *distant reading* (as opposed to close reading), which implies admitting that *less is more*, namely that, while considering the complexity of the project, the focus is no longer on individual texts. During this sinuous process, what is lost is in fact an achievement. Another key concept, widely used throughout my thesis, is *the wave of diffusion*, which, together with *the law of literary evolution*,

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Fjågesund (editor). *Knut Hamsun Abroad: International Reception*, London, Norvik Press, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Sanda Tomescu Baciu. "Knut Hamsun, The Artist and the Wanderer", in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai*, vol. 55, nr. 2, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, pp. 23-28.

<sup>7</sup> Professor Sanda Tomescu Baciu has signed several Hamsun studies (for further details, see the analysis on Knut Hamsun's reception in nowadays Romania, included in Chapter 3), out of which I hereby mention: "Knut Hamsun i rumenske oversettelser". In *Hamsun i Tromsø*, edited by Nils Magne Knutsen. Hamarøy, Hamsun-Selskapet, 1995, pp. 215-217. (*Knut Hamsun in Romanian Translations*, translation from Norwegian)

<sup>8</sup> I am particularly referring to the latest study, a volume edited by Peter Fjågesund, in 2009: *Knut Hamsun Abroad: International Reception*. London, Norvik Press, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Primarily exposed by Franco Moretti in *Distant Reading*.

explains both the interference between core and periphery, as well as between two peripheral cultures.

The second aim of the theoretical part is to describe, in short, how I apply the concepts in the body of the thesis. My research on Knut Hamsun in Romania complies with Moretti's theory that *two peripheral cultures cannot interfere directly, without the mediation of a culture from the core*. That culture has primarily been German (especially via the translation of *Pan* and *The Growth of the Soil*), then French (via the translation of *Hunger*, accompanied by Mirbeau's foreword, translated, and via multiple references to French editions of untranslated novels), and, at a lower rate, Russian (within the initial stages of short story translations). That is why, the interference between two peripheral cultures has been eased by a "longer" wave of diffusion than in the case of core-periphery intercultural interferences: Norway → Germany → France and/or Russia → Romania. Thus, by means of these theoretical tools, I ultimately illustrate the way and the reasons why Knut Hamsun entered the Romanian culture, based on analyses of his national and international reception.

My fundamental hypothesis is that *the Romanian culture has initially had a delayed reaction to Knut Hamsun and his oeuvre. The Romanian reception follows, though at a slower pace, the paths imposed by the Norwegian reception. Had it not been for the Nobel Prize, he might have reached Romania even later. Moreover, the degree of exposure and knowledge of his oeuvre in Romania is quite low today and it is mostly restricted to an informed readership.*

The first chapter of the thesis is entitled "Knut Hamsun: Socio-Historic Context, His Position in Norwegian Literature, Illustrated by The Reception in The Norwegian Cultural Printed Press". It outlines the reception of Knut Hamsun's authorship in the Norwegian cultural printed press from his time.

It thus had two primary aims: first, it outlined the socio-cultural context prior to and at the time of Hamsun's debut, together with some of his major works. The outcome was that I showed how his way of writing literature defined and established him within the Norwegian and European literary canon. Moreover, I emphasised the ongoing debate on his oeuvre.

The second aim of the initial chapter was to sketch the directions of Hamsun's reception in the Norwegian cultural printed press. The underlying reason was a comparison between the main tendencies at a national level and the ones outlined by the Romanian press reception. At this point, a special part is bestowed to a synopsis of the reception in the Norwegian cultural printed press, structured on several key points, dictated both by his writing and by significant events in his life. For instance, I have started with the image accompanying his outbreak (with

the novel *Hunger*<sup>10</sup>, in 1890) and his overall portrayal throughout 1890s, as Norway's first modernist writer. The press reception of his most well-known novels (*Hunger*, *Pan* and *Victoria*) has been given special attention, since these findings are, later on, compared to the Romanian reception. I have advanced towards the period of transition (1900-1910). However, the following point of interest has been the Nobel Prize (1920) and its corresponding reception in the Norwegian cultural printed press. This is again a common aspect shared with the Romanian reception. Following the same research pattern, I have investigated the Norwegian reception of three biographical events commented worldwide (Romania included): his 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1929), his 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1939) and the day of his death (February 19, 1952). The last aspect concerns Hamsun's post war debate in Norway, indicative of his status in Norway today as the central figure of an ongoing debate in all media. Together, these findings constitute a starting point for a better understanding of the dynamics within his Romanian reception. Moreover, they also lay the foundation for a comparative analysis, towards the end of the thesis.

On the basis of this first chapter, the research has outlined that Knut Hamsun has always stirred controversy, either via his oeuvre or via his life choices. The ongoing debate demonstrated that the situation has remained unchanged even today. The Norwegian cultural printed press has rapidly reacted to almost each and every aspect of Hamsun's life and work.

The second chapter is called "Aspects of Knut Hamsun's International Reception in Core and Peripheral European Cultures". It describes Knut Hamsun's international reception in core and peripheral European cultures, both during his lifetime and post-mortem. It outlines the fact that the German culture has primarily acted as the main pillar mediating the reception in both core and peripheral cultures (Romania included), thus ensuring Hamsun's European (and worldwide) outbreak.

On the one hand, the reception in core cultures (Russia, Britain, Germany and France) aims at identifying which contact culture has been most prominent for his European outbreak. There are several factors implied: the cultural ties to Germany, the adversity towards British imperialism, his political sympathies and, of course, what I consider of utmost importance, his talent as a writer. These factors are interconnected and have thus influenced his image abroad.

On the other hand, the reception in peripheral cultures (Hungary and The Former Republic of Yugoslavia) is intended to analyse how well informed has the Romanian reception been, as compared to neighbouring countries. In addition, I have also focused on the contact

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<sup>10</sup> I have only used the English titles of Hamsun's works throughout the PhD thesis. For details about the Norwegian titles and/or their corresponding Romanian translation, see Appendix I.

culture mediating the intercultural exchanges in peripheral cultures, more exactly, on verifying whether the contact culture indicated by the research on mainstream cultures remains unchanged. Outlining Hamsun's connections to core and peripheral European cultures and the efforts to be translated into those languages offers an international perspective to Hamsun's writing, which is useful in charting the contact culture that has mediated his reception in Romania. This second chapter thus confirmed that the German culture was the main pillar mediating the reception in both core and peripheral cultures, thus ensuring Hamsun's European (and worldwide) breakthrough.

The third chapter is the most comprehensive one. It investigates Knut Hamsun's reception in the Romanian cultural printed press spanning 1895-2016. It is entitled so as to express the exact purpose: "Knut Hamsun's Reception in Romania, as Expressed by The Cultural Printed Press Spanning 1895-2016".

The interwar period proved to be utterly prolific, hence the attention bestowed to it and the effort to encompass it as inclusively as possible. In Romania, from 1940 onwards, Hamsun is perceived in terms of his political orientation, thus, he is eluded because of his political involvement during the Nazi rule in Norway. The reception under Communism is obviously influenced by this aspect; therefore, his authorship is reduced to a minimum. As a result, this thesis only examines the main directions in Knut Hamsun's reception in Romania within the Communist times and up to the present (2016).

To sum up, the first serious discussions of Hamsun in the Romanian cultural printed press emerged during the interwar age, with a considerable number of articles (154 spanning 1919-1939), published in various periodicals, out of which the following can be mentioned: *Adevărul literar și artistic (The Literary and Artistic Truth)*, *Rampa nouă ilustrată (The New Illustrated Ramp)* or *Tribuna (The Tribune)*. The contributions were signed by important names of the time, as Ovidiu Drimba, Ion Călugăru, Adrian Suchianu or Demostene Botez. The first translations of his novels are published (*Pan, Hunger, Victoria, The Growth of the Soil*), although none directly from Norwegian. French and German act as languages mediating the intercultural exchange. What is more, the entire information within the articles emerges from these or other source cultures. However, thematically speaking, the articles abound in commentaries or reviews on the above mentioned novels, coupled with more or less fair biographical data.

Echoes of his controversial political views are first heard in 1936, after the notorious Ossietzky case, and amplified during the 1940s. The irreversible downfall in the Romanian cultural press is, as present research has outlined, after 1945, when Romania enters the Soviet

sphere of influence. Beginning with 1945, Hamsun is stamped as a traitor of his homeland. As a result, the Communist era reduces his authorship to a minimum. If 61 articles were still published between 1936-1944 (most of which bearing negative connotations), the time span 1945-1947 gathers solely 11 articles, whereas 1947-1963 registers no mention of Knut Hamsun in the Romanian cultural printed press. This total silence is a result of the meagre period of transition Romania was forced to face, doubled by the censorship Hamsun had fallen under (together with many other foreign writers). As historical studies indicate, the age of censorship reached its peak during the 1950s-1960s, concomitant to the total silence on Knut Hamsun, mentioned earlier.

Regarding the reception in the Communist times, despite solely 11 articles published between 1963-1988, the activity in the translation field is quite satisfactory. The highest achievement in the reception of Knut Hamsun in Communist Romania lies in the direct translations of some of his novels. Valeriu Munteanu, who knew Danish, translated many novels, reprinted nowadays. Sanda Tomescu Baciu, who knew Norwegian, also signed the translation of a novel<sup>11</sup>.

A revival is felt after the fall of the regime, and the upward curve is sustained nowadays by the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Emphasis was laid on the dynamics of Knut Hamsun's reception in the cultural press today (1995-2016), with two analyses: in *România literară (Literary Romania)* and in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Series Philologia*.

If one is to take a look at the dynamics of the Romanian translations, Knut Hamsun's books were first translated for the Romanian public in the 1920s. *Pan* is in this first category, together with *Hunger*, *Victoria*, *Growth of the Soil*, but also parts of *In Wonderland*. As was the case with *Hunger*, they were published in Romanian when Hamsun had already achieved a name in Europe and worldwide, through contact cultures like German or French, as Sanda Tomescu Baciu has first pointed out in her article about Knut Hamsun's Romanian translations. In the 1960s, Knut Hamsun came out again in Romanian, with the same novels that had been translated during the interwar period – *Hunger*, *Pan*, *Victoria*. The greatest achievement this time is that they were translated directly from Norwegian<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> See the list of translations for further details (Appendix II).

<sup>12</sup> Sanda, Tomescu Baciu. "Knut Hamsun i rumenske oversettelser." In *Hamsun i Tromsø*, edited by Nils Magne Knutsen. Hamarøy, Hamsun-Selskapet, 1995, pp. 215-217. (*Knut Hamsun in Romanian Translations*, translation from Norwegian)

The final chapter, “Aspects of Knut Hamsun’s Reception in The Romanian Cultural Printed Press in The Context of His National and International Reception” is meant to compare the Romanian reception to the previous results: the reception in Norwegian press and in the core and peripheral cultures analysed throughout the PhD thesis. I have compared the level of exposure to Knut Hamsun and his oeuvre in Romania with the results defined by the national and the international reception. I have reached the conclusion that the Romanian reception follows the paths imposed by the Norwegian reception in European core cultures, though at a slower pace.

Therefore, my fundamental hypothesis, according to which the Romanian culture has initially had a delayed reaction to Knut Hamsun and his oeuvre, was successfully confirmed. Nonetheless, the second half of my hypothesis, namely that the degree of exposure and knowledge of his oeuvre in Romania is quite low today and that it is mostly restricted to an informed readership, did not entirely correspond to the latest results.

As a matter of fact, recent evidence suggests that the interest in Knut Hamsun on Romanian soil is awakening and is twofold. There are both reprints of Munteanu’s translations and an increased number of articles in specialised journals, signed by renowned names in the cultural field and/or by persons affiliated (in some way or another) to the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The articles are far more comprehensive and well informed, some of them are even written directly in Norwegian. The contributors who do not master Norwegian can easily approach Hamsun through the Romanian translations (although not very many) or through the foreign translations, available as a result of the freedom of the press (brought in by the fall of communism, in 1989). It seems that this relatively new perspective (of Norwegian bachelor studies at a Romanian institution of higher education) meant a revival of Hamsun’s reputation.

The thesis ends with Appendices, numbered I-X, and a Supplementary Appendix (Appendix XI). The utility of the appendices relies in the fact that they ease the readability of the quantitative data expressed throughout my thesis. The Supplementary Appendix is added to the actual PhD thesis. This Appendix is the most comprehensive one. For this reason, I have chosen not to print it, but to include it on a CD that accompanies my thesis. It comprises all the articles on Knut Hamsun published in the Romanian cultural printed press between 1895-1947, both those directly referred to within the body of the thesis and those mentioned only in the *Statistical Data* section. During the documentation stage of my research, I made a literal transcription from the original sources (mostly from the interwar periodicals). My aim in doing so was twofold: I primarily intended to facilitate my access to these articles (whenever it was

necessary during the writing process), giving, at the same time, the opportunity of a more detailed analysis to anyone interested in the corpus of articles published in the aforementioned period.

To conclude, Knut Hamsun has had a tumultuous reception trajectory in the Romanian cultural printed press, up until today. Nevertheless, the scenario is not very different from other European countries (he was controversial right from the start, and he still is, especially in his homeland). All the same, my PhD thesis has outlined that Knut Hamsun remains in fashion in nowadays Romania, through both reprints and articles. His originality seems to have shifted towards a rather immemorial age, his reception intensifying as one comes closer to the present days. Given all these, I consider that this thesis is a first attempt at portraying Hamsun through the articles published in the Romanian periodicals. It thus represents a valuable contribution, both for the Romanian culture, as well as internationally. On the one hand, the research of his reception in periodicals shows the Romanian interest for literature, namely the Scandinavian one. On the other hand, the findings could be incorporated into future research regarding Hamsun's reception in Europe.