

**THE “BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF LETTERS
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF
LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY STUDIES**

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Scientific Doctorate in the Field of Philology

**Die Anfänge des modernen
siebenbürgisch-deutschen Romans um 1900
Abstract**

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2021

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Keywords: German-Transylvanian literature, fin-de-siècle, media, modernism, multiculturalities, feminism, gender role, self-image – hetero-image, urban prose – rural prose, psychological perspective.

The doctoral thesis *Die Anfänge des modernen siebenbürgisch-deutschen Romans um 1900 – The Beginnings of the Transylvanian German Novel at 1900* deals with the topic of the first expressions of modernism in the German prose from Transylvania at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is either about the analysis of some representative novels for this transition stage, or about highlighting others which were overlooked for a long time or until now their study was from a unilateral perspective. The purpose of this analysis was to identify those text characteristics differentiating it from those supporting the classical traditional German style, framed in the same well-known pattern. Reference was made both for predominant topics and motifs, the belonging to various literary currents being highlighted and reviewed, both for the utilised style – in this regard the context played an important part. The style pluralism characteristic for the beginning of the 20th century was also joined by the Transylvanian German literature: not with the same firmness, but obviously distancing from the traditionalism of the 19th century writings occurs. The innovative style provided in the current analysis of five novels coming from different layers is analysed in parallel with a work in prose belonging to the classical-historical paradigm from the end of the long 19th century. The changes registered at the level of the literary expression are justified by the sinuous evolution of the psychology of the modern individual. In a world in continuous change, the values defended by the power of tradition lose their intensity and the basis which the collective mentality was built upon proves not to be indestructible. The modern writer takes the risking fight for purely individual expression of the perception on the outer reality and of taking the path to discover the self. This endeavour proves repeatedly the high degree of difficulty. The modern writer undertakes the risking fight for purely individual expression of the perception on the outer reality and for taking the path for self-discovery. This endeavour proves repeatedly its high degree of difficulty caused by frustration, exacerbated emotion, anxiety, spiritual degradation, feeling of being powerless. With these feelings specific for the modern individual, both the text creator faces in his attempt to reach the recipient, and the work protagonist as the relation with itself and the others. As for the reader, this easily finds the way to identify itself with the characters' path. One of the questions often unanswered is the one related to the language capacity to articulate and transmit all these feelings. The fascination for this transition time with special features made me look for landmarks and similitudes in the

German literary creation in Transylvania of the 19th century and of the beginning of the next century. For this case, the particularity consists in the multicultural fingerprint marking both the social-political and the literary creation. The cohabitation of the multiple ethnic groups influencing the creation of various types of self- and hetero-images, of perceptions of self in relation with the other. A mixture of perceptions, mentalities and stereotypes are found in the Transylvanian texts of the German minority: it is written about Saxons' history, their relations with the Romanians, Hungarians, Jews, or gipsies. The literary creation stays a tool for expressing the own national identity: from the historical novels dominated by the prototype of the classical hero to various faces and identity crisis of the modern individual. It is shaped the rout of the German type of literature that hesitates between accomplishing the duty for the own nation and the reception of the West-European inspiration models.

The singular existence of the Saxon community is reflected in the writings of the reviewed period, through the oscillation between the cult of tradition and the decadence typical for the modernity, the issue of the homeland in its complexity and the destruction of the psychological balance for the not integrated and alienated individual. Three of the six analysed works gravitate around some strong female personalities: the teacher, the young woman of middle-class origin, and the priest's daughter. The theme is the dramatic path of their becoming, either shaped as a romantic story or by rendering the impressions of an existential path. Their relation to the reality, the providence and their kind, their life philosophy and also the wishes, dreams or anguishes pass in first plan and give the reader the portraits of three modern women in the Transylvania of the beginning of the 20th century.

Another direction of the analyses focuses on the shape of the works: four of them are conceived as journals or letter novels. The long history of this species finds a rebirth in the reviewed period and allows for sending ideas, feelings, and attitudes of the protagonists, giving access to their internal universe. At the same time, we talk about psychological novels, allowing for an entire series of interpretations and their level of actuality is still high. Another highlighted aspect is the opposition urban-rural as expression of changing valences between the traditional and modern scope. The tradition represents the known, the harmonious and balanced existence, while modernity generally presents negative connotations: change, unbalance, regression, decadence. The village symbolises the safety, the idyllic childhood, the observance of certain rituals, while the urban existence is precisely the loss of these norms and values.

One of the theses developed in the paper is the obvious presence of the male-female dichotomy in the primary literature. The entire architecture of the works, and the running of

the action relies on the complex structure of this opposition. The sociological aspects of the analyses, the assignment of specific gender roles are highlighted through the analyses. There are pursued the realities in the social and familial environment during the 19th century and their reconfiguration around the year 1900. The interferences between genders and their evolution from acceptance as norm to overcoming or even denying are discussed during the way. The social roles assigned to the man start from family leader and father, keeper of the ethnical tradition and reach the priest, artist or philosopher, politician, solitary, or bohemian. First of all, the woman appears as mother and ensures the family unity. If, usually, in the past, we talked about of a social subordination towards the man, now, more often appear situations where she takes over the partner role. On one hand we have to deal with the traditional antinomy religious being – erotic being with subcategories “femme fatale” and “femme fragile” and, on the other hand, with the explosive expression of the phenomenon of feminine emancipation providing for the chance of academic study and choice of a profession.

The primary texts are reviewed through the hermeneutic method, and the semantic levels of the text are gradually revealed by passing through the various stages of interpretation. It can be focused on the language or on the individual¹ and evolves from the literal meaning, to the allegoric and moral one, highlighting to the anagogic one.² The hermeneutic perception on the text carries both the individual psychological fingerprint and that of the nationality-ethnicity. The individual appears as product of all characteristics and influences exerted on its mental or the two mechanisms assigned for the dream activity – condensation and transfer – find through the hermeneutic analysis of the text the concrete scope of use. Similar to the attempt to explain the transfer as substitution of a latent element by something distant, respectively the condensation as fusion of the various characteristics contributing to the extension of the latent content despite the conscious one,³ the analyst moves towards the identification of the multiple text levels: from those easy to identify to the symbolic ones, ending with the crypted ones.

The psychological component of the literature is obvious. It is both about the author’s and reader’s psychological structure, and about the function of the literary communication,

¹ SCHLEIERMACHER, Friedrich D.E: *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, 1977. Quoted after: KOPPE, Tilmann / WINKO, Simone: *Neuere Literaturtheorien*. Eine Einführung. Second Edition updated and supplemented. Stuttgart - Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2013, p. 22.

² NÜNNING, Vera / NÜNNING, Ansgar (coord.): *Methoden der literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Textanalyse*. Ansätze - Grundlagen - Modellanalysen. Stuttgart - Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2010, p. 31.

³ NÜNNING, Vera / NÜNNING, Ansgar (coord.): *Methoden der literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Textanalyse*. Ansätze - Grundlagen - Modellanalysen. Stuttgart - Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2010, p. 52.

being targeted the psychological effect⁴. There is in the centre of the analysis the thesis based on which the conscious behaviour is just a small part of the soul activity of the individual, while the refuted content is expressed in a distant layout.⁵ In the context provided by the German-Transylvanian prose of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the direct connection with the author's psychology, respectively the biographic information has a relatively low relevance comparatively to the action, the symbolistic, and also the characters' construction and interaction, respectively the reactions occurred at the level of that time reader's psychology and the modern one's. There are highlighted the pathological and the deviation from the social norm.⁶The reader's reaction is in direct connection with the individual experiences and the lived traumas.⁷The perception on the text is singular, characteristic for everyone. The literary creation represents the individual mental reaction to the daily experience.⁸

After the introductory chapter presenting the stage of the research and the methodical approach, attention is directed to the historical and social framework, through a general perspective on the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the next one, to the literary currents of the German area. The perspective passes from general to particular: the Transylvanian context from the analysed period, the cultural activity, emphasising the media bodies of German facture. The publications of Adolf Meschendörfer and Regine Ziegler in the cultural magazine *Die Karpathen*, and the Sighișoara writer's involvement in the feminist movement issues and illustrating it in the pages of the newspaper *Siebenbürgisch-deutsches Tageblatt* are analysed.

The magazine edited by Adolf Meschendörfer in Brasov, between 1907-1914 is considered the publication that puts into circulation modernist theses, cultural phenomena, current problems of interest and activities of the Saxon environment. Not only news from the field of literature, philosophy or art, but also intercultural ethnic relations or even information from the economic sphere is transmitted. In addition to the generally recognized importance of

⁴ BAASNER, Rainer: *Literaturpsychologie / Psychoanalytische Literaturwissenschaft*. In: BAASNER, Rainer / ZENS, Maria: *Methoden und Modelle der Literaturwissenschaft*. Eine Einführung. 3rd edition updated and supplemented. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag 2005, p. 148.

⁵ KÖPPE, Tilmann / WINKO, Simone: *Neuere Literaturtheorien*. Eine Einführung. 2nd updated and supplemented edition. Stuttgart - Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2013, p. 66.

⁶ NÜNNING, Vera / NÜNNING, Ansgar (coord.): *Methoden der literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Textanalyse*. Ansätze - Grundlagen - Modellanalysen. Stuttgart - Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2010, p. 59.

⁷ RUHLING, Lutz: *Psychologische Zugänge*. In: ARNOLD, Heinz Ludwig / DETERING, Heinrich (coord.): *Grundzüge der Literaturwissenschaft*. 9th edition. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 2011, p. 483.

⁸ WECHSEL, Kirsten: *Sozialgeschichtliche Zugänge*. In: ARNOLD, Heinz Ludwig / DETERING, Heinrich (coord.): *Grundzüge der Literaturwissenschaft*. 9th edition. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 2011, p. 447-448.

the publication, for the current approach it turned out to be the re-establishment of the style of some of the authors analysed, this time being stories, sketches or short stories. Notable similarities are evident in the themes and motifs - these appear in miniature. Many of Meschendörfer's auctorial gestures, which aim at the construction of the analysed novel, can be explained through his publishing activity, respectively found *in nuce* within the examples of short prose printed in the pages of the magazine *Die Karpathen*.

Regarding The sketches, stories or lyric of Regine Ziegler in the Brasov magazine, we also find the highly individualized style, emotional descriptions, harmonious coexistence of the human soul and the spirit of nature. In addition to the strong lyrical load, it is necessary to emphasize the ethnographic feature of her writings. This stems from the confession of the sense of adherence to the tradition of the German-Transylvanian community. The peasant's unique connection to the piece of land worked by the toil of his own hands is probably the strongest expression of the sense of patriotism. Also, the pure living of religiosity achieves in the same time inexperienced valences until that time.

Regine Ziegler represents one of the personalities engaged in the pioneering struggle of the feminist movement in Transylvania. In the context of a Saxon literary creation that is in full its fore, but which is still manifested in places by a dilettante and mimetic expression, a woman's creative activity can easily become the target of criticisms started from a closed mentality. *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt* is the daily newspaper that, in the period 1889-1907, offers remarkable female voices, including the poet and the prose author Regine Ziegler, the chance to express his artistic creed or, simply, the mentality. Replacing some conservative characteristics by something individual, but constructive, motivated by love and singularity, the freedom to express themselves in the field, in which talent smoothes the path towards harmonization with oneself - thus expresses the writer the standing of feminist movement. The variety of social and private roles accessible to women, not perceived or not accepted until that time, is put in the light.

Chapter three balances literary realism and modernity and highlights transition points, influences, conceptualizing them. *Georg Hecht*, Traugott Teutsch's historical novel, is emblematic of the classic-realistic prose of the late 19th century. After an introductory study that defines the literary current, putting it in touch with the historical-philosophical context, there are highlighted the most important hermeneutic and stylistic aspects of the novel, whose action takes place in 1466, in Sibiu. The starting point is a real historical event - the revolt of part of the Saxon nobility against the Hungarian king Mathias, aiming to achieve the independence of Transylvania. Against the social-historical background, there folds the

relationship between the protagonist, which reflects the classic image of the hero, willing at any time to the ultimate sacrifice, and Gertrud. The paths placed in the path of personal fulfilment come from a sense of moral duty to the community and place of birth.

Another realistic novel, framed in the prose of the village, is Heinrich Schuster's *Martin Alzner*. Placing the action on the Hârtibaci Valley, in the immediate vicinity of Sibiu, strong autobiographical footprint, but first of all the sensitivity and accessibility of the style ensures the uniqueness of the work. The rhythm and rites of village life are presented in detail, the image of family life as a whole, but also at the particular level is rendered with a special attention to detail. The importance of marriage and relationships within the family, the premature death of the mother and the long-term impact on the child's psyche are analysed through the prism of the connoisseur of different behavioural types. Starting from the events reported and the human types presented, the image of the German peasant from Transylvania is outlined. Moreover, the interethnic relations existing at the level of the village community are highlighted. It insisted on the interaction of the German inhabitants with the members of the Gypsy colony at the edge of the village. The imagological perspective finds in this context an effective use: it is, on the one hand, the perception of the unknown, on the other hand, the crystallization of self- and hetero-images. Character traits which the clichés apply to gypsies, such as cleverness, inclination towards deception and theft or framing of gypsies in the tagma of riddles/witches are analysed. Social roles influence behavioural patterns⁹ and reporting to the unknown remains a fascinating subject.¹⁰ Regarding the perception of each other and the pencilling of hetero-images, are presented travel markings and impressions from the second half of the 19th century, in order to explain the possible mechanism of generalization or stereotyping of certain traits, the special context existing in Transylvania, the mutual influence of ethnic groups, the imposition of the most powerful in political terms are characteristics that mark the collective mind and are perpetuated for a long time.

The transition between the 19th and 20th centuries is under the impact of a generalized crisis, encompassing both the social environment and the artistic creation. It is about a re-staging of the philosophical and poetic system, about its relation to reality. The importance of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical work for this period, the treatment of neuralgic themes of general interest are balanced with the personality of Sigmund Freud and its impact on the research of the human psyche. Basic concepts in the sphere of psychoanalysis are transposed on the literary creation of this period: the use of themes and reasons like psychic imbalances

⁹ DAHRENDORF, Rolf: *Homo sociologicus*. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte, Bedeutung und Kritik der Kategorie der sozialen Rolle. 17th edition. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2010, p. 34 f.

¹⁰ LESKOVÉC, Andrea: *Einführung in die interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft*. Darmstadt: WBG 2011, p. 46 f.

of various types, disease, non-integration and isolation, depravity, decadence, sexuality, the importance of dreams, the subconscious and their integration into reality.

Chapter four *examines* in detail the transition between *physis and psyche*, using Fred Fakler's novel *Das Gespenst* as a study material. The main reasons for the work, character construction, stylistic analyses, and the highlighting of the psychological perspective in the interpretive approach represent the related subchapters. The obvious similarities with the expressionist movement are also highlighted.

Chapter five focuses on conceptualization from a female perspective: Regine Ziegler's novel *Wenn Ähren reifen*. *Dorfbilder aus Siebenbürgen* and Oskar Wittstock's *Der sechste Tag*. *Aus den Briefen einer siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Lehrerin*. If in the case of the first it is a text with a strong autobiographical load, a personal writing, in the manner of the journal text, the second places a young teacher in the spotlight. Particularly interesting is the way in which the author transposes into the female universe, in its complexity, contributing to the shaping of the different typologies of the period: on one hand the wife and mother, devoted entirely to the family, on the other hand the woman eager for intellectual fulfilment, the teacher, the student, the writer.

Chapter six - *Modern images of the genre in the German Transylvanian novel in 1900* - deals with the expression of nervousness, in its various forms, its source, the manifestation in daily life, respectively in the action of literary work and its effect on human relations. The existence of the artist in 1900 is characterized by extreme sensitivity, irascibility, hedonism, and a harrowing fear.¹¹ The appearance of nervousness and mental imbalances in the analyzed works is tracked and explained in detail, the phenomenon being integrated also into the broader social context. Roles and gender differences mark the studied period. Changing the mentality, framing the female image in a new value scale, reporting both genres to providence are points of interest. Symptoms are not exclusively emotional in nature, but often relate to clear somatic deficits. Conservative bourgeois education is directly related to the suppression of sexual desires. The manifestation of personality has different trajectories, starting from similar situations, experienced by men or women. One of the considered aspects is the sexually transmitted disease - the problem of syphilis, the way in which it is perceived at the individual and community level, the exacerbated tension, arising from the lack of effective treatment before the discovery of penicillin, the destructive consequences, in some cases, on the psyche - a complex problematic, which finds expression in German-Transylvanian prose, considered until that time eminently conservative. The trauma of the disease is regarded, in

¹¹ SCHORSKE, Carl E.: *Viena fin-de-siecle*. Politica și cultura [*Wien fin-de- siecle*. Politik und Kultur]. Translation by Claudia Ioana Doroholschi und Ioana Ploeșteanu. Iași: Polirom 1998, p. 9.

some cases, as the divine punishment for the selfish satisfaction of pleasures, arrogance or lack of empathy. The result is the appearance of the rebukes of consciousness, the feeling of de-radicalization, the impossibility to overcome the daily obstacles. The nervousness deepens, the line of demarcation between the immediate and the imagined reality becomes more and more blurred, and the thought of suicide becomes, as the only viable solution, dominant. Identification in different human typologies obviously differs in the case of each individual. Also, the gender gap brings with it changes. The process of human growth and maturity and becoming is experienced differently: the reference to fellows and providence is singular, the perception of life and death too. The description of multiple types of nervousness or behavioural deviations in the analysed novels represents a singular approach in German-Transylvanian prose, indicating an obvious tendency to renewal. Either it is offered to the female perspective, neglected until the fin-de-siècle period, the free path to the psychic-emotional expression of character, or the description is centred on the symptomatology of mental illness.

Description of gender images, male-female relationships, the presence of the erotic component are tracked during the analysis. The differences in this context between rural and urban areas are also considered. The importance given to marriage, expectations and norms imposed by the community is an integral part of the text analysis. The traditional bourgeois model of social role-taking is perfectly valid throughout the 19th century. Deviations from the duties imposed by belonging to a particular group are rare, but not non-existent. Social opprobrium occurs, in case of violation of public morality, firmly and without delay.

Chapter seven deals with the emergence of the modern urban novel in German-Transylvanian literature. One of the perspectives pursued is that of the artist's identity and affirmation. The small bourgeois lifestyle is placed with irony in counterbalance with the aesthetics of Western European origin. Balance is also assured here by the intelligence and constructive passion of the woman. The stylistic analysis highlights the intertextuality aspects of the work. The accession of Transylvanian prose to the European literary movement is evident.

The final chapter is dedicated to conclusions. Starting from the status of Transylvania at the end of the 19th century as a multicultural and transnational territory, a conservative cultural island, the transition is achieved to a literary scene that brings to the fore a conglomerate of voices and expressions. At the end of the research, an overview of German-Transylvanian literature is possible as an integral part of the Western European literary scene. After establishing the main literary currents and the specifics of each, clear similarities were

identified with the analyzed works, insisting on the many aspects. It primates the psychological load of the text. Its personal brand occupies the main position in the process of interaction between author - work - reader. As for the connection with the current plan, it should be pointed out once again that they represent fragments of individual history and reflect human destinies on the boundary between external reality and artistic creation. With all the changes that have occurred in Transylvania in the last hundred years, human destinies still exist in all their complexity, and the aspects of interculturality have turned into a global phenomenon.