

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ NAPOCA**  
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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**EXTRACTED FROM**

**ROMANIAN GERMAN LITERATURE IN THE HEYDAY OF THE**  
**TRILINGUAL JOURNAL ECHINOX (1969-1989)**

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## KEYWORDS

Echinox, trilingualism, Romanian German literature, transculturalism, cultural transfer, imagology, Romanian-Hungarian-German literary relations, literary circles, multilingual journals, Aktionsgruppe Banat, Franz Hodjak

## EXTRACT

The focus of my doctoral thesis is the study of Romanian German literature published in the trilingual journal *Echinox* between 1969 and 1989, which can be considered the heyday of *Echinox*: before the turn of 1989, the journal gained recognition among students and professionals for its greater freedom of publication compared to similar journals, its unprecedented transcultural practices and, last but not least, its trilingualism.

In addition to mapping the material published in the journal's columns in the original German language and in Hungarian and Romanian translations, grouping it according to genre, and presenting the authors and editors, I am looking for broader contexts: I am trying to place the journal in the Romanian literary palette and to present the Romanian German literature that is represented here, while at the same time constantly reflecting on contemporary literary events - the Hungarian reader can thus get a more comprehensive picture and better understand this literary segment, which has not been studied in Hungarian so far. The other main focus of the thesis is the examination of the minority journal pages in comparison to each other and in the light of the majority pages, where the image of themselves and of each other is of most interest.

Since for nearly two and a half decades my interest has been focused on German literature in Romania, its functioning, its forums, and the primary texts themselves and their translation, the *Echinox* journal was a natural subject for my research. The multiculturalism and transculturalism of Transylvania and Cluj-Napoca have always been of interest to me, which also led me to research the trilingual journal. A journal such as *Echinox*, which constantly puts these three cultures and literatures into dialogue, must have had a completely different message in a multilingual environment in Transylvania during the communist period than perhaps the multilingual journals of today, which merely juxtapose studies written in different languages. I was also interested in how this journal became an escape from the constraints of the communist regime.

The choice of the topic was prompted by the following shortcomings: the *Echinox* phenomenon and the journal itself have been studied from a Hungarian (György Gaal, Gábor

Martos, Imre József Balázs, Szabolcs László, etc.) and Romanian (Petru Poantă, Traian Vedinaş, Horea Poenar, etc.) perspective in the past decades, but the German-language pages of Echinox, its authors and works have not been surveyed. Likewise, Hungarian-Romanian interactions, collaborations and translations have been dealt with (mainly by Szabolcs László, whose emphasis is on the Hungarian and Romanian pages), but what is missing in Echinox literature is a tripartite study that includes German alongside Hungarian and Romanian.

As for the research methods: the Romanian, Hungarian and German pages of the journal were not only analysed quantitatively (proportions) and qualitatively (genres, authors), but also comparatively, comparing the different pages. The analysis and comparison is preceded by a historical-literary historical section.

At the very beginning of my research, I had the following questions, which I tried to answer by mapping the issues of the two decades: which German writers-poets from Romania published fiction in Echinox? To what extent was the Aktionsgruppe Banat present in Echinox – did they appear as a group or individually, and were they still present in the pages of the magazine after its dissolution by the Securitate? Who were the most published German authors in Echinox? In addition to the publication of fiction, mainly poetry, what were the genres that delineated this literary segment for the reader of that time and today? What was the role of literary translation in Echinox and what proportion of Romanian German literature was translated by Romanians and Hungarians? In this context, the question was raised from the very beginning of my research: how much curiosity did Romanians and Germans have for Transylvanian Hungarian literature, and to what extent is this reflected in the literary translations? To what extent did the censorship stamp its mark on Echinox, and how much of the gradual hardening can be sensed on the issues themselves, in terms of page numbers and, of course, content towards the end of the 1980s? Based on these questions, I formulated my hypotheses as follows.

### ***Hypotheses***

1. The Echinox journal, although launched for ideological reasons, is an unprecedented initiative that occupies a significant place in the Romanian literary scene.
2. The magazine was equally important for the editors and authors of the Romanian, Hungarian and German pages.
3. Translating each other's literature is an important objective for all three nationalities.
4. The Romanian, Hungarian and German editors and permanent authors of Echinox have developed a close professional and friendly relationship.
5. Consolidated page numbers only represent an increase in page count.

6. Echinox is characterised by greater creative and editorial freedom than any other press organ of its time.

7. In the second decade of Echinox (1979-1989), the austerity of the Romanian Communist Party is also reflected on the journal.

8. Due to gradual restrictions and censorship, the writings of the anti-regime writers' group Aktionsgruppe Banat are not published after a while.

9. Franz Hodjak is the most published German poet in Romania.

10. Poetry is the leading genre of the texts published on the German pages of Echinox.

In my thesis I use two complementary theories: on the one hand, imagology, which helps to draw a self-image, an image of otherness – Echinox, which can be seen as a representation of Transylvania, started in the spirit of friendship and mutual knowledge of the nationalities living together. The question is to what extent the empty slogans have been transformed into meaningful action over the years, and how close the cooperation between the Romanian, German and Hungarian editors has been. The theory of transculturalism was of great help to me in this examination, since in the case of a trilingual newspaper, the question of self-image and identity is inevitably accompanied by the concept of mutual influence and interaction. An excellent way of getting to know the other and to familiarize is through literary translation, the study of which also occupies an important place in my thesis.

The outline of the theoretical framework is followed by a clarification of the concept of Romania German literature: since it has been understood differently in different periods (mainly due to the large-scale emigration of Germans), and since opinions on this concept still differ today, I feel it necessary to contrast the different opinions. Similarly, I will also discuss the possibilities of publishing Romanian German literature in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as today.

We cannot understand the start of Echinox, its operation, its greater freedom compared to other newspapers, without an outline of the cultural and political background of the period. I will also devote a separate chapter to this topic.

The Echinox phenomenon cannot be examined without precedents: therefore, in the next chapter I will also look at literary circles and earlier multilingual journals. Since the Echinox journal was preceded in time by the highly popular Echinox Circle, I consider it essential to present it, and I will also include the research of a Hungarian (Gábor Gaál Circle) and a German (Aktionsgruppe Banat) literary circle. Similarly, I consider it important to take stock of the earlier multilingual journals and periodicals from Banat and Transylvania, which, although short-lived, offer many lessons.

After these theoretical-historical chapters, I will move on to the actual research, in the course of which I will first write about the launch of *Echinox* and the circumstances of its licensing, and then, after discussing the two decades separately, I will take a look at the German authors and editors who started with the magazine – in this respect, I was also curious to know who stood out through their achievements and who dropped out of the screen, and who are those who, as literary historians, are still researching this literary segment today.

I dedicate a special chapter to the Transylvanian Saxon writer-poet-translator Franz Hodjak: my preconception of him at the beginning of the research was that he was one of the most published German writers in Romania and had been in the pages of the magazine for a long time.

In my thesis, I will look at the transcultural practices that characterise *Echinox*, both in the "normal" issues published over these two decades and in the combined, anniversary issues. Here I was interested in the writings, studies and book reviews that presented one's own literature to the "other", in the language of the other, but mainly in literary translations, i.e. which authors and texts were considered worth translating. Selection is a value judgment and contributes to the canonisation of an author. Where I have considered it appropriate, I have also carried out short textual analyses (mainly poetic analyses), which I hope to use to highlight the genre and stylistic characteristics of the period, and to shed light on the mechanisms by which censorship operated, especially in relation to Romanian German literature.

The primary source material for my doctoral thesis are the issues of *Echinox* from 1969 to 1989, which I studied in the periodicals library of the Faculty of Letters of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (P. 744) (where almost the entire collection can be found) and in the periodicals library of the Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca (P. III. 120 and 128 – this collection is rather incomplete). With the exception of a few issues, which are uploaded on the *Echinox* online platform under the archive heading, the complete series has not been uploaded on the Internet.

As a secondary source, I consulted monographs, theoretical and literary history studies. I would particularly like to highlight the memoirs and interviews – some of which I read from the pens of others, and some of which I conducted myself with former *Echinox* editors and authors, such as György Gaal, Zoltán Rostás, Franz Hodjak and Georg Aescht. My own interviews can be found in the appendix at the end of this thesis. Likewise the bibliography, which I have tried to select in a balanced way. A selected bibliography is given at the end of the abstract. The translation of the Romanian and German texts for which no Hungarian version was available

has been carried out by myself, and the original text, with its exact location, has been indicated in the footnotes.

In the course of my research, especially in the study of primary texts, but also in the study of secondary literature, I benefited greatly from my knowledge of three languages: Hungarian, Romanian and German. Likewise, I have benefited from my knowledge of Romanian German and Romania German literature, which I have acquired since my studies in Szeged in the early 2000s and during my research trips to Germany, and which I have deepened during the present research. In my view, the Echinox picture so far can be better nuanced by the information I have gained from journal interviews, reviews, interviews I have conducted, and primary texts.

### *Theses*

1. Based on a comparative analysis of Echinox, I see the three most important contributions of the journal as follows:

On the one hand, it managed to attract talented students and young creators, and as a result, it managed to fill the journal with content that soon earned itself a prominent place not only among students, but also among professionals. The high quality of its writings and its non-compromising nature made it unique among other Romanian student journals (which numbered over thirty in the 1970s) and it soon became a well-known and respected journal throughout the country, even receiving regular coverage on Radio Free Europe.

On the other hand, the journal also played a lion's share in the education of the critical generation, in the launching of young writers and poets, but it must be noted that this is more pronounced in the Romanian context: in their case, besides the Echinox, it also meant a creative workshop, the organisation of regular literary circles, where beginners could also present themselves regularly. Romanian German authors were sometimes invited to these events. As regards German authors, most of whom began their careers in the late sixties and early seventies, researching the two decades of Echinox were a particular voyage of discovery for me: I was able to discover the texts of many of the authors of their youth and to follow the development of their creative careers, whose works I myself translated in the course of the years after they became established writers and poets. I believe that this knowledge has also been useful for the translations I have produced since studying Echinox.

Third, but not least, Echinox is a unique example of transculturality. While it is true that it started out with the slogans of the Romanian Communist Party, the friendship of "brotherhood and nations living together", most of the editors managed to turn "obligation" into an



opportunity. In the period in question, there was no other journal that made a similar effort to provide insight into each other's literature through translations and studies, and in general, there was no trilingual journal in Romania. It is important to note, however, that we cannot speak of symmetry, since the quantity of translations and often the curiosity about the three literatures is not the same. Nevertheless, the demand for knowledge of the literature of the "other" and thus of the "other", the openness and, as a result, the translation itself as a concrete practice, is very much to be appreciated.

2. For the young German poets and writers in Romania, especially in the early years, *Echinox* was a significant publishing opportunity, as the older generation did not really support them in the field of publishing until the late sixties (*Neue Literatur*, *Volk und Kultur*, *Neue Banater Zeitung* only started to open up to them in the early seventies). And Bernd Kolf is regarded as being discovered by *Echinox*.

In addition to young people, the German middle or older generation is sometimes featured in the journal's columns in the form of primary texts or interviews, which is a sign of the prestige of the journal and the respect that young authors have for their elders. However, it is important to mention that for them, the limited space available (one page on average) was a constraint.

In the Hungarian pages, the same constraints of space apply, if not to the same extent: the average of three pages per issue proved to be too narrow for the large number of authors of the seventies and eighties. Moreover, for young Hungarians, *Echinox* was only one of the forums for publication, since they had more publication opportunities than the Germans (*Igaz Szó*, *Utunk*, *Korunk*, *Ifjúmunkás* and, for a short time, *Fellegvár*). In addition, a separate volume (*Forrás*) or a book published by *Kriterion Publishing House* carried much more weight for the Hungarian poets and their readers.

For Romanian authors, on the other hand, 20 pages per journal gave them much more room to manoeuvre and publish, and editorial concepts could be better expressed.

So, despite the fact that all the great representatives of German and Hungarian literature in Romania have published in the journal, it can be said that for the Romanians *Echinox* has a much greater weight. In fact, in their case, *Echinox* has grown beyond the literary circle and the journal, and the history of Romanian literature, which now includes the term "echinoxismul", or echinoxism, treats it as a phenomenon, a movement.

3. Literary translations have been an important segment of *Echinox* throughout the two decades under discussion, and even more so in the first period between 1969 and 1979: the curiosity and openness towards the literature of the "other", and the desire to make translated literary works known to readers, is an appreciable ambition on the part of the editors. There are,

however, differences between the (editorial) eras of the journal, with some editors placing greater emphasis on this. Similarly, there is a difference in the target language and source language: there are far more Romanian-German, German-Romanian translations than Hungarian-German, German-Hungarian. The lowest number of translations from Hungarian into German is explained by the fact that there were few young native Hungarian speakers who spoke German at (almost) native level, but also by the fact that Hungarians could easily read German literature on Romanian pages written in the language of the state. The Germans could also find out about what was happening in Hungarian literature from the Romanian pages, with the help of Romanian translations. Only the most striking example of transcultural practices, literary translation, has not grown as much in Hungarian-German as in Romanian-German translations.

As far as Romanian German literature is concerned, the materials studied show that their representatives tried to provide Romanian and Hungarian readers with an insight into their own literature, as well as into contemporary German literature. The fact that the texts of young contemporary German authors were thus accessible to Romanian and Hungarian readers certainly had an impact not only on the zeitgeist, but also on the further creative activity of young students.

A common solution in *Echinox* is to juxtapose poems by Romanian, Hungarian and German poets (mainly contemporary) (it depends on the page which ones are in the original language and which ones are in translation) – this can be a full page or half a page. Sometimes "only" two literatures are juxtaposed, but this attempt is to be appreciated. As this tendency to juxtapose and present one's own and others' work is also found on the Romanian, Hungarian and German pages, we can assume that the editors' decision to do so was a joint one.

4. German-Romanian literary ties were much stronger than Hungarian-Romanian and Hungarian-German ties, which I think was due to the past historical events in Transylvania, and also to the fact that the Germans' knowledge of Romanian was much more satisfactory, and Germanists, not being a separate department, most often combined German with Romanian as a minor. The Hungarian 'editorial staff' existed and worked in greater isolation from the others, and Hungarians were not very involved in joint leisure activities. However, since editors were often changed and, in some periods, even closer ties were forged between Romanian-Hungarian *Echinox* writers and editors (which could mean better cooperation, greater curiosity about the literature of the "other", or even friendships), we must distinguish between the different periods of the journal in question in this respect.

5. The consolidated issues provide a literary vision of the times, and also provide a space for various transcultural practices: literary translations, reviews, studies of the literature of the "other", etc., so they can bring more not only in terms of volume, but also in terms of quality to the contemporary and modern reader. And the issues of 24 or 36 pages instead of 12 have a well thought-out concept, often thematic issues, which give a more comprehensive picture of a literary phenomenon. The culmination of transcultural practices is the issue 1981/4-5-6, which spans two decades, with 34 of its 36 pages devoted to the literature of the other nationality, mainly through a large number of translations, but also with studies and reviews. There is a lack of symmetry here too, with the Romanian language dominating the field, if only because of the distribution of the volume, but this is of great benefit for minority literature: it can provide a much greater immersion in contemporary German and Hungarian literature.

The combined issues (5, 10, 20 years) answer the research questions of how editors and authors in different languages saw themselves and each other in this Echinox story. It is clear that while the Romanians are very much celebrating Echinox, the Hungarians and Germans are much more reserved on the subject, even going so far as to say that "the Hungarians have nothing to celebrate" (András Keszthelyi).

6. The study of two decades of the journal's material, the analytical analysis of some texts, and the testimonies of the former editors also confirm that Echinox was characterised by much greater freedom than other press organs of the time. With the exception of the first issue (when the Romanian editor-in-chief was replaced because of the Heidegger article) and the 1981 issue (which was withdrawn because of the ban on the film *Pintile*), the editorial work was not particularly intrusive: if the obligatory RCP directives, texts praising Ceaușescu or the Party were included, the pensum was met, and texts that could not have appeared elsewhere were even allowed to appear. The fact that the Echinox did not pose a major threat to the authorities is explained by the relatively small number of copies, the correspondingly limited distribution possibilities, the small readership, which was limited to the profession, and the fact that censorship was carried out in internal circles. However, it also turned out to me that the greatest freedom of all went to the Germans, since their pages were not censored as much as the others, given that German further restricted the already narrow Echinox readership. Another reason, apart from the language, was that emigration from the 1970s onwards was increasing, so that, apart from the fact that there were fewer and fewer German authors to request texts from, the dwindling German readership was no longer a very high stake, or in other words a source of danger.

7. In the second decade of Echinox (1979-1989), party propaganda texts proliferate, and the coverage is sometimes reduced: sometimes it appears on fewer pages, sometimes German literature is given less space, but in the second half of the decade even whole issues are omitted – the lack of paper also proved to be an excellent censorship "tool". The increasing restrictions on Romanian literary life from the end of the seventies onwards were thus reflected in Echinox.

8. Aktionsgruppe Banat, which was active between 1972 and 1975, was a notoriously anti-establishment writers' group, so it was surprising to me that its members' writings were regularly published in Echinox, in German, Romanian and Hungarian. This is still the case even after the members of the group have started to be monitored, some of them abused and dismissed from their jobs. In fact, even after the group's dissolution in 1975, they continue to publish texts, mainly poetry – the last works by Richard Wagner appear in 1985. I assume that this was possible, and that they did not dare to take major reprisals, because the Aktionsgruppe's activities were attracting the attention of the West, and because they had to maintain the appearance of freedom, even against Germany, to which they had sold off a large part of the Transylvanian Saxons and the Swabians of Banat for bounty over the years.

In order to better understand the Aktionsgruppe Banat as a phenomenon, I have carried out several textual analyses, and I am also publishing a letter written by members of the Aktionsgruppe to the first secretary of Timis county and the writers' union, in my own translation, which has not been available in Hungarian before, describing the unsustainable conditions of the time and calling the people in power to account.

9. Following the trajectories of various contemporary German authors, I started my doctoral research with the assumption that Franz Hodjak is the most frequently published German poet and writer in Echinox. My assumption proved to be true, but it also emerged from interviews with him that Echinox was an 'island of freedom' for him and that he was close friends with Romanian Echinox authors. In the first decade, his presence in the journal was more pronounced: he was mainly the author of poems and short prose, but also a translator of contemporary Romanian poetry, and several interviews and reviews of his works were published in the journal. His poems can be found in the German pages in the original and in translation in both Romanian and Hungarian pages. His last publications appear in 1988, so he has been in the journal for the two decades I have been studying. This is due not only to his unique style, which has been recognised during this period, and thus to the fact that he has been able to raise the quality of the journal by adding a major name to it, but also to the fact that he himself has always remained open to young people, regularly attending Echinox circles, where he has tried to help young people with his comments and critical remarks.

10. Regarding the genre distribution of *Echinox*, I mainly examined the German pages, of course, like all other aspects, also in relation to the Romanian and Hungarian pages. My observation is that poetry predominates, and that the German authors include both Transylvanian Saxon and Swabian poets from the Banat region. In addition to poetry, there are occasional short prose, which are characteristic of this period. Literary translation, as I mentioned in point 3, also plays a very important role in all three directions, albeit in different proportions. I would add to what I said there that more translations were produced in the 1970s than in the 1980s not only because the journal had more freedom then, but also because those who joined *Echinox* in the 1970s as editors or authors were much more willing to translate. Criticism, reviews and studies also play a huge role in the life of the German page(s), and it is also important to know that this is where the young German literary historians and critics emerged, whose representatives devoted their whole lives to researching and systematising Romanian German literature like Peter Motzan, Georg Aesch, Gerhard Csejka. Interviewing is also an important genre in the journal's pages: both young and older generation writers and poets are interviewed, which also helps to paint individual career portraits. Last but not least, it helps to paint a picture of Romanian German literature: fiction, reviews, studies and interviews provide an insight into this literature.

*Echinox* is the forum where the representatives of these two German ethnic groups are represented in balanced proportions, and we cannot ignore the fact that this is a time when these artists are emerging from isolation, when these two cultures are becoming interpenetratable, and when more and more friendships are being forged between the representatives of these two literatures. Of course, this process was also facilitated by the establishment of institutional forms of Romanian German literature and culture, such as the launch, at the end of the 1960s, thanks to the Great Opening, of central newspapers, radio and television broadcasting in German, with editors appointed from various regions in Bucharest. The *Echinox* journal of Cluj-Napoca, almost halfway between Saxony and Banat, can also be considered the main forum for this transition.

As a final conclusion, despite some shortcomings and disproportions, the trilingual *Echinox* journal played a very important role in the literary life, especially during the communist period, and its name became known not only in Cluj-Napoca, but also throughout Romania and even beyond its borders. Thanks to the editors' hard work of selection and editing, quality texts and literary translations were published here, and therefore the debut in *Echinox* gave its writers the opportunity to publish in other forums, it represented a kind of passport to other literary

journals. And the fact that it still exists today, 55 years later, even if not in the same form, scope, composition and frequency (its Hungarian editor is currently Zalán Serestély), is an unprecedented achievement.

I consider the main advantage of this research, and the primary contribution of my doctoral thesis, to be the fact that I used a threefold perspective throughout the research, and tried to present the German perspective as well, i.e. to map out what the Echinox newspaper meant to the German editors, authors and readers. To do this, it was essential to systematise and analyse the German literature published in Echinox: authors, texts, which can be important in that it can very well outline the trends in Romanian German literature during the period under discussion. Romanian Echinox research is very rich. To a lesser extent, but also in Hungarian, there are writings on the subject. In German terms, however, there is no research on the subject, at most there are short sections in studies and literary histories about it. In particular, there is no Echinox study of Romania German literature that includes Hungarian and Romanian aspects.

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