

Kurt W. Treptow, ed.. *Romania and Western Civilization / Romania si civilizatia occidentala*. Iasi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1997. 478 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-973-98091-5-3.



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Romania and Western Civilization employs one of the perennial themes in Romanian historiography. Usually the concept of "western civilization" goes unquestioned and its complexity is ignored. This also applies to the conference with this title organized in 1996 by the Center for Romanian Studies in Iasi.

The central questions have hardly been raised in the papers. Only Paul Michelson raises the importance of the following issue for the Romanians at the beginning of his paper: "The question posed for us by this conference is a variant of an age-old Romanian cultural problem, the preoccupation (almost a mania or complex) of Romanians with the process of their historical becoming. 'Who are we?' 'Where did we come from?' 'Where are we going?' have been constant themes in Romanian intellectual discourse" (p. 11). Michelson's definition of Western Civilization as the "Classical/Judeo-Christian/Modern mainstream of civilization" (p. 11), however, is a working definition at best. In the editor's foreword, such reflections are completely missing. Treptow limits himself to a one-page text instead of grasping the opportunity

to clarify some of the--certainly not easy--aspects of this theme, which ought to be the foremost task for the organizer of a conference and editor of its papers. Instead, in good Romanian tradition, he immediately turns the question of the bi-directional relationship between Romania and Western civilization into a mono-directional eulogy of the Romanian contributions to Western civilization, referring to the "increasing importance to bring to light those aspects of Romanian history and culture that illustrate the historic ties of the Romanians with Western civilization." Only a few lines later, these historic ties are transformed into "the role and importance of Romanian history and culture in European and American history and civilization."

In view of the above, one is quite tempted to review the second international conference itself, held by the Center for Romanian Studies in Iasi in June 1996, rather than a compilation of the conference papers. The title of the conference is nicely illustrated on the cover of the book by Brancusi's famous statue *The Kiss*. The conference ran over three days and included, according to the

book, twenty-seven papers—a sort of marathon for the participants. Thirteen papers were presented in English, fourteen in Romanian, promising a balanced approach to the central question. A look at the home institutions of the participants makes this balance disappear: the conference was more of a discussion forum for researchers from the United States (twelve) and Iasi (nine), Bucharest (three) and Chisinau (two). The European perspective was left to one participant from Paris.

Unfortunately the book does not convey the original conference program; panel titles or sections are not mentioned. With a look at the table of contents the reader soon becomes lost trying to sort out what belongs together thematically. I have grouped the papers into the following hypothetical sections for the purpose of this review:

1. Romania after World War I (eight papers) 2. Queen Marie's visit to North America 1926 (two papers) 3. Romanian history in Western context (four papers) 4. Romanian cultural highlights (four papers) 5. Romanians and their position in European Art and Literature (five papers) 6. Romanians and Western Culture (four papers)

The first section listed above is a pell-mell of papers: Dobrinescu's thirty-page article on Romania at the Paris Peace Conferences 1919-20 and 1946-47 is followed by a text on a secret service document from 1941 on foreign capital in Romania (Veaceslav Stavila). We are introduced to a Romanian activist, Marcu Breza, in London during World War II (Ernest Latham), having then to go back to the memoirs of a Romanian diplomat during the Roosevelt era (Radu Florescu). Dumitru Sandu's text on German emigration from Romania between 1940 and 1944 is followed by Emanuel Antoché's paper on Charles de Gaulle. Gheorghe Onisoru returns to the U.S. in his paper on "The State Department and the Royal Strike" while C. Joan Heifner discusses "Romania as a World Power."

Valeriu Dobrinescu gives a typically detailed Romanian account of the development at the two

peace conferences in Paris after the two world wars, based on a huge amount of archival material but without any analysis (pp. 353-82). In seventeen pages, he recounts the 1920 peace conference without even summarizing this section at its end. The description of the 1946 peace conference follows on the next thirteen pages, giving details on the events leading up to World War II and its consequences. The expectation from the title of the paper, a comparison of Romania's position and development of policy 1920 and 1946, is not fulfilled as Dobrinescu leaves the conclusions to the reader's imagination.

In his paper, Radu Florescu presents the memoirs of his father, Radu A. Florescu, who became a career diplomat under Nicolae Titulescu (pp. 407-18). Florescu concentrates on his father's years in the U.S. in 1934-36 when he was in fact head of the mission due to the frequent absence of the Romanian Minister Carol Davila. In his memoirs, Florescu comments on the developments in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and he gives insights in the world of the Romanian-American community and its debate with the Hungarians, but in general he focuses more on cultural than political aspects.

The papers about Queen Marie's visit to Northern America again demonstrate an approach well known to scholars of Romanian studies: detailed presentations of collected material with hardly any reflection on it. Adrian-Silvan Ionescu contributes a mere chronological account of the journey (pp. 295-330), while Emma Porfireanu is slightly more critical regarding intentions and reactions in 1926 (pp. 339-352). In the two papers, some of the well-known photos of the Romanian Queen in the U.S. and Canada are reproduced.

The papers of the third section, "Romanian history in Western context," are not very inspiring. They offer new details rather than new views. Olga Tudorica Impey's paper on "Kogalniceanu and Spain" (pp. 233-50) is based on Kogalniceanu's

manuscript "Notes sur L'Espagne" about his stay in Spain 1846/47. According to her interpretation Kogalniceanu compared Romania (using this name for Wallachia and Moldavia ten years before their unification) and Spain because of their similarities: both countries have oriental traditions, but only Spain is accepted as part of the Western world (p. 247). Tudorica Impey considers this manuscript a milestone of European political literature and of the awakening of a Romanian national identity: "The Romanian Writer was not in search for himself, his quest in Spain was for his own country. "Notes sur L'Espagne" becomes, therefore, a quest for Romanian national identity in the context of European civilization" (p. 247). Tudorica Impey argues that Kogalniceanu wrote more than half of his text in the Latin alphabet, thus "expressing the search for ethnic and cultural identity for the Romanian principalities" (p. 237). Such an identity is at best a construction to be applied, but certainly not for which one is searching.

The fourth section, "Romanian cultural highlights," seems to be quite incoherent as well. Central papers are those of Nicholas Nagy-Talavera (pp. 159-63) and Anatol Petrencu (pp. 164-68), on historians of the Romanians. Nagy-Talavera delivered an uninspired paper of a mere four pages on Nicolae Iorga, without citing any sources and literature. According to Nagy-Talavera, Iorga argued that he wanted to unify the Romanian nation which "wanted" to belong to the West (p. 160). Here, the historian has the task of doing more with this argument than just reproducing it without interpretation. In reading this text, one gets the impression that the author lost the historian's necessary critical distance to his research topic. In contrast to Nagy-Talavera, Anatol Petrencu offers first insights into his newly begun research on Vlad Georgescu and his political analysis. His paper is also rather short but concise and clear in its argument.

The fifth section, "Romanians and their position in European art and literature," is the most interesting part of the book. This is due to the excellent article by Michael Impey, "The Receptivity of Romanian Literature at Home and Abroad: Tradition, Innovation, and the Avantgarde" (pp. 101-18). This well-structured and thoughtful paper provides insights into the position of Romanian and Romanian-born writers of dadaism and surrealism within the context of European literature. Tristan Tzara and Eugen Ionescu opened the path for the new trends of surrealism and absurd theater, but, according to Impey, neither artist was accepted in the Romania of World War I because of the "poorly ventilated cultural atmosphere in Bucharest" (p. 103). Impey concludes that "those Romanian writers who succeeded in achieving some measure of recognition abroad were essentially cosmopolitan in spirit, whether they were Jews or Germans born in Romania" (p. 117). Brancusi was an artist (although no writer) of genius, but not because he was Romanian by birth.

In the same section, one can compare Impey's views on Tristan Tzara directly with the article by Raluca Mihaela Dub (pp. 85-92) focusing more on Tzara's education as a student of Radulescu-Motru. Her thorough comparison of the Dada manifestos with Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* points to the philosophical background, but her conclusion spoils the good impression. Therein she argues that the cultural context of Bucharest at that time was a special one within Europe due to the fact that it was in Romania that Nietzsche was presented to a European audience for the first time and that two predominant figures of the avantgarde (Tzara and Marcel Iancu) were Romanians (p. 92).

Adam Sorkin continues his restless work of translating contemporary Romanian poetry into English, thereby opening a path to international acceptance of the poets. His thirteen-page text on "Postmodernism in Romanian Poetry: The 'Abnor-

mally Normal" (pp. 119-31) is followed by "A Mini-Anthology of Postmodern Romanian Poetry" (pp. 132-52) with translations by Sorkin, sometimes in cooperation with the poet her-/himself. Michael Impey considers the quality of a translation of poetry as essential in our times as "a bad or indifferent translation will often do irreparable damage to a writer's reputation, damage that may then reflect adversely on the reception of other writers from the same country" (p. 104). Adam Sorkin tries his best to protect poets of today from the fate of Tudor Arghezi, who lost any chance of winning the Noble Prize for Literature because of bad translations.

Arriving now at the final section, "Romanians and Western Culture," the reader thinks that it was well to put Paul Michelson's paper "Romanians and the West" (pp. 11-24) at the beginning of the book, whether or not it was also the opening paper of the conference. Michelson gives a good and well-documented introduction to what Romanians wrote about during their visits to Western countries. The identity problem started only with the travelers of the nineteenth century who initiated an imitation of what was considered Western culture. The twentieth century brought Romanian introversion. The interwar period saw a debate between Europeanists and traditionalists. Michelson's plea for a comparison of the end of the Phanariot era in the 1820s with the end of communism in 1989, as both ended Romania's isolation from the West, is very interesting and deserves more attention.

Patricia Thurston's listing of "Romanian Collections in U.S. Research Libraries" (pp. 25-32) is a listing of well-known facts. Thurston presents brief introductions to twelve libraries and their collections regarding Romania. The value of the information that the Hoover Institution hold according to their 1990 (!) brochure some 14,000 volumes of monographs, 250 periodical titles, nearly 60 newspapers, and 56 archival collections is in 1997 rather questionable. The telnet address-

es of these libraries are about the only positive aspect of this listing. A favorite Romanian research subject is Romanian students studying abroad before World War I. Stela Maries (pp. 33-64) presents her results on Romanian students in Berlin, Leipzig, and Munich, proving that Romanians had contacts with the Western world. The main issue is their number, not studies or later career. Charts with names, addresses in Berlin, disciplines, etc. are not enough as long as they do not give details on later positions of these students back in Romania. Irina Andone closes this section with the inevitable paper on Mihai Eminescu, (pp. 65-72) in this case Eminescu and his views of Romanian culture. Basing her research on his work as a journalist, she concludes that "Eminescu was a poet and a journalist" (p. 65) and that "There was no gap in his personality" (p. 66). She gives long quotations, but never questions Eminescu's positions.

Pretensions of Romanian superiority are a burden on the book; quite often, the political aspect of the central question blocks new approaches to old and new questions. As mentioned at the beginning, the question of Romania's belonging to the Western world has a long tradition. This does not exempt researchers from questioning, at least from time to time, whether this approach should still be pursued. The question is missing from both conference and book as most of the papers remain traditional approaches to well-known subjects. Romanian protochronism has infected most Romanian research areas in history, literature and fine arts. As a general line, one can also observe that any book on Romania has to contain something on Eminescu and Michael the Brave; otherwise it is not complete. Michael Impey proves with his paper on dadaism and surrealism that there are more interesting subjects.

Everything born or created within the state borders of Greater Romania of 1918 is subsumed under "Romanian." Florenta Ivaniuc's paper on Romanian landscape in engravings from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries refers to ex-

amples in Timisoara and Oradea whose Romanianness can well be questioned for that period (pp. 73-84). Ladis Kristof acquaints the reader with the career of the singer Joseph Schmidt (1904-1942) from Bukovina whose nationality seems to be different from his (later) citizenship (pp. 93-100). Stela Maries also includes in the charts about Romanian students at German universities in the nineteenth century those who came from Transylvania.

The book seems to have not been edited at all. The reproduced papers differ extremely in length: Dobrinescu thirty pages, Nagy-Talavera four pages. Some articles have solid documentation in the footnotes, others provide bibliographical information in the text. The editor did not ensure that all articles come with a separate list of literature, so that only a few provide this service. From G. James Patterson's paper is reproduced as first footnote "This paper was presented at the International Conference on Romania and Western Civilization ..." (p. 153). The font-type varies (even within one article [p. 219]), and coated paper is used also for normal text, making some pages difficult to read (pp. 81-96 and 329-344). The pages given in the table of contents do not always correspond to the actual place of the text in the book. From a scholarly viewpoint, it is unfortunate that the original conference structure with panel titles is not reproduced, and that therefore the whole book appears unstructured. Some papers seem to have been written quite some time ago—for instance Florescu's: He does not use secondary literature published after 1984, and he writes: "[My father] had occasion to make use of the Titulescu's [sic!] Diaries which were subsequently purchased by the Hoover Institute, a publisher [sic!]" (p. 409, fn. 7), although these documents have been in the possession of the Hoover Institution since the early 1970s. The overall impression is that the articles were printed in their order of arrival. The twenty-six-line foreword by the editor listing the sponsors of the conference and the goals of the

Center exemplifies the uninspiredness of the book as a whole.

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