

HOW CAN WE FIND OUT THE OLD SECRETS OF A TOWN? LITERARY SCENT ABOVE COPOU STREET

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Abstract

A short communication existing in a Moldavian capital with an elegant patriotic image evident in an architecture still present today, communication regarding the literary society as a form of a relationship between love and power, with old traits of ecology, communication that prepared the modern society, *Junimea*.

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If a traveller enters a town like Iași he may want to become familiar with its past: love stories are hidden behind the walls in old buildings oozing charm.

In this short text we would like to invite you to communicate with some writers in love with their country and visit three places in Iași: Beldiman Hous in Păcurari Street, Conachi House up the hill of Copou and the Park with the same name.

The town of Iași lies on seven hills like Rome and has the aura of a former capital, being also famous for its Copou Hill between *the Road of Salt/ Sărărie* and *the Road of the Shepherds / Păcurari*.

The first decades of the 19th century are marked by the existence of a ruling class, an *upper crust*, of Russian and Greek origin which wanted national freedom and had a great contribution to the formation of a literary language whose traits are still to be seen today.

Writers, often belonging to the aristocracy, used to go to international schools (they spoke an elegant Romanian and learnt Greek and French), translated from the Romantic French poets, or from the contemporary Russian poets like Andre Chenier, Alexandru Puskin.

The present day charming route starts at the monumental University Library, at the foot of Copou Hill, looking at Beldiman House, going

up the hill to Copou Park and meeting The Road of Salt.



Along this way we will come across some buildings linked to the name of the poet Al. Hrisoverghi (1811-1837)¹ whose image suggests that communication by means of love has given birth to poems and reflections; the relationships in those times were based on real love, solitude being chased away in literary circles populated by distinguished men and women.



The image of the young writer is outlined in *literary histories* from confessions of his friends and, then, they were taken over in documents. After his death, Mihail Kogălniceanu, the founder of modern Romania, published his poems in a posthumous volume.

The name of the poet has a Greek etymology, another indication of the origins of the intellectuals and of the political society in a Romantic century with cosmopolitan connotations.

The Iași capital was full of personal sentiments, being an open political European settlement, as it was also evident in the social behaviour of the young people, in the literary

circles abounding in various intrigues and in the publications of the day. A magazine with a symbolic title, *Dacia Literară*, addressed a cultivated Romanian speaking audience in Moldavia, Wallachia and Ardeal, which were only a symbolic state at that time.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Alexandru Hrisoverghi used to be named *Sandu* or *Alecu*; he was extremely good looking; „his swarthy face was beautiful and manly” said M. Kogălniceanu, although some indications of an unhappy destiny began to be evident as inherited from his old family of country gentry; on his mother’s side he was related to Ruset/Rosetti family. His family was known to have been affected by many diseases.

Two centuries ago in the verses of a poet of Iași we can find tense images characteristic to the chivalry poetry and the mention of two old places: Casa Conachi (it belonged to Hrisoverghi) and Casa Beldiman (from its balcony the poet jumped down after visiting a married woman in winter time). Not far from this building there was a coffee house owned by Felix Barla, from where one could watch both Copou Street and Pacurary Street in 1849.



In the book *The Life of A. Hrisoverghi*, Mihail Kogălniceanu introduces to the people in Iași of 1844 an aristocracy fond of poetry in the period of time before the great Union.

We would like to point out that Alexandru Hrisoverghi with his *Ode* influenced people’s attitude towards historic buildings and architecture, prevented the demolishing of Neamț Fortress, representing one of the first ecological endeavours.

„A few of his friends knew that the poet had some other creations; not being published they

remained unknown to the large public. After his death, his family were busy with trials and were not interested in publishing his writings; only six years after his death, his younger brother, Mr Manolachi Hrisoverghi, managed to fulfilled our wish and published this edition, which includes all the poet’s works, both the original ones and his translations.

All those loving the national poetry should be grateful to him for this achievement. This is a small collection. Few pieces can stand a severe criticism; but we have to take into account the short life of the author and how little time he was left for poetry while facing many troubles and pains.”

In 1844, M. Kogălniceanu underlined the fact that the poet belonged to the Romantic epoch: „Alexandru Hrisoverghi, like his role model, Andrei Chenier, left to his glory only one ode *„The Ruins of Neamț Fortress’ ”*.²

For the young Alexandru Hrisoverghi, lyricism represents an original language, including Orpheus’ harp, in the first stage of the historical evolution of humanity, poets were, before philosophers, the most important wise men in society; by his divine poetry, (becoming heroic later on), A. Hrisoverghi is a landmark in the first stages of the social and intellectual evolution of the Romanian writers in a universal and, at the same time, national context.

It may be that Alexandru Hrisoverghi seems to be far away from modern poetry due to his slightly pathetic poetical style, but pathos was necessary and represented a real means of communication because, as it is mentioned in the contemporary literary history (Florin Faifer), the young poet created a metaphor and a „limited myth” in his Ode, *The Ruins of Neamț Fortress*.

His work made the king Mihail Sturza preserves the ruins.

In Iași, in the fourth decade of the 19th century, poetry was the basis for ecological and national reforms and, at the same time, it was the foundation of the social relationships with a melodramatic hue.

His love poems, published posthumously, have as their topic the *sigh* and the way to hide

it, poetry being a form of faithfulness and silence between the two lovers, especially when the lady was married to someone else.

The first Moldavian lyrical creations were written by educated important aristocrats or by minor country gentry with or without estates, and were dedicated to young ladies, such verses were written in Albums which were, later on, commented on or became topics for gossip or epigrams.

The so called „manele”, sung by Barbu Lăutaru at the beginning of the 19th century, show the Romanian manner of arranging rhymes, the neo Greek type of verse and the Romantic translations from Russian, French and German.

A literary historian called Alexandru Hrisoverghi, the *Troubadour*.



The famous M. Kogălniceanu gives us some information from those days resembling the ones to be found in the contemporary VIP magazine, proving that the old atmosphere was very much like the one of today. Like today, at the beginning of the 19th century the desire, the appetite and the feeling equal beauty and the aesthetic taste: „L'amour e un appetito di bellezza”; the desired and worshipped person is not the same in reality, the desire dies the moment it is fulfilled, while love is eternally unsatisfied in poetry. For Alexandru Hrisoverghi the physical image precedes the poetical idea „When he loved, he loved with all his soul and the world for him was embodied by his beloved woman.”

Psychological categories are non-pertinent in the lyrical analysis, because the lyrical „ego” resounds in the abyss of existence: its „subjectivity is an illusion according to modern aestheticians.

In love with Catinca Beldiman, the wife of the poet Nicolae Dimachi Alexandru Hrisoverghi wrote verses about the pain generated by **love**.

As the legend says A. Hrisoverghi died at the age of 26 after jumping from Catinca Beldiman's balcony in winter time when hearing her husband coming home. It is said that he died of love.

For him poetry at its origins expresses the idea of belonging to a cosmic unity, in a pre-rational zone („mystery”), where the divine and the human meet.

Al. Hrisoverghi's texts, published by M. Kogălniceanu six years after his death, speak about the inner age of the Romanian poetry, in its three successive forms: **lyrical** (*hymn* and *ode*, characteristic to a primitive society, having as its monument the Bible and the necessity to express a threefold mystery: *divinity – soul – creation*); **the epic** *saga* and *tragedy*, characteristic to the ancient society with its main representative Homer and the polis as a form of heroic existence) and **the drama** (a combination of lyrical and epic, expressing the modern concept of antinomies based on the duality, grotesque-sublime, with Dante and Shakespeare as its representatives.)

Some literary historians bantered Al Hrisoverghi, but his first critics and friends, M. Kogălniceanu and C. Negruzzi, spoke about the Poet Prince who loved and died as a young officer. Theodor Râșcanu wrote a novel about the poet, entitled *The Charming Hrisoverghi*, published in Bucharest in 1943.

G. Călinescu has given us a complex image of the poet, underlining his connections with his contemporary poets. Coming down Copou Street, on the right side you can see the 40 Saints Church, where Gheorghe Asachi was buried, but later on he was moved under a statue close to the Palace, but on the grave monument in the churchyard it is mentioned that Alexandru Hrisoverghi was buried there too (1811-1837).

As a conclusion to the idea of communication, we can say that the present century has been prepared by beautiful stories about gentle Ladies. Ladies of old times liked to read interesting and short texts what is today a mere list of titles.



Niccolo Levaditti (1804-1858), *An Aristocrat family*
(Vasile Alecsandri)

References

1. Cihodaru, Constantin, Platon, Gheorghe, *Istoria orașului Iași*, Editura Junimea, Iași, 1980.
2. Wikisource

Endnotes

1. „O, fraților moldoveni, bătrâni, tineri, de-a valmă, / Veacurilor viitoare nu gândiți că-i să dați samă? / Și puteți cu sânge răce privi ace daramare? / Nu opriti barbara faptă, nu-nălțați toți o strigare? / Priviți marturul ce unul din veacuri ne rămăsese, / Că neamul nostru din neamuri de viteji se alesăse, / Cum îl darămă și-l strică lăcomia-n sumețire, / Și își face ei palaturi, spre a-și găsi mulțămire.” / „O, Moldavian brethren, old and young alike, / Don't you think that you'll be called to answer in future eras? / And will you, in cold blood, witness that demolition? / Will you not stop that Barbaric deed, will you not raise your voices? / Gaze upon the sole witness left to us from another age, / For your nation is successor to nations of braves, / How the gluttony ruins and spoils it into ostentation, / For it to build palaces for itself, in order to gain satisfaction.”
2. Born in Iași, Hrisoverghi was a member of the boyar category: the second of Vornic Neculai Hrisoverghi's four sons, he traced his origin to Greek Phanariotes who were present in Moldavia during the rule of Prince **Dimitrie Cantemir**. His mother was Elena Ruset, a member of the Rosetti family. According to his friend and biographer Mihail Kogălniceanu, “Hrisoverghi took absolutely no pride in this vain noble origin; he had sufficient personal merit, without needing any more from his parents” .It was a really communication with the European Aristocracy.