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Der Kriterion Verlag und die Kriterion-Hefte

Summary

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2020

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Keywords: Kriterion publishing house, literary field, symbolic capital, cultural discourse, the German minority of Romania, protochronism

This doctoral research was inspired by a seemingly trivial book cover: a black and white photograph depicting a tear falling into a cogwheel. This image, featured on the front cover of the poetry volume *Hotel California 2* by the Romanian-born German author Richard Wagner, is highly suggestive for the period it was written and published in, namely communist Romania of the 1980s. Thus, this doctoral thesis represents an investigation into the conditions that made it possible for a poetry book with such a compelling cover to appear during the last and most repressive decade of the Romanian communist regime, as well as an attempt to analyse the history of the Kriterion publishing house, the largest publisher of works in the languages of the minorities living in Romania. Headquartered in Bucharest and with an editorial department for Hungarian in Cluj-Napoca, Kriterion was founded during the 1969 reform of the publishing sector as the only publishing house in the country expressly responsible for publishing the works of minority authors, as well as translations from other languages. The Kriterion publishing house still exists today, although after the fall of the communist regime it moved its headquarters to Cluj-Napoca. The most successful period in the history of this publishing house was nevertheless between 1969 and 1989. In this period Kriterion became not only the largest publishing house for German works outside German-speaking countries, but also the most significant publisher of Hungarian books outside Hungary.¹ Since our doctoral thesis aims to bridge the research gap into the history and literature of the German minority of Romania from the viewpoint of this publishing house and its production of German books, the analysis was primarily focused on the German editorial department and the nineteen years preceding the regime change. This was the most prosperous period in the history of the publishing house, which, in 2015, was awarded the Order for Cultural Merit as Knight, category F 'cultural advancement' by the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis for its "pivotal contribution to the promotion of the cultures and languages of national minorities and for facilitating their interaction with the Romanian culture and language, making the exchange of ideas and the acceptance of the values of others as the premise of a peaceful coexistence [...]".²

¹ see BARTHA, KATALIN ÁGNES: *A Kriterion Kiadó (1970-1989) interjúkban*. Egy kutatás keretei [The Kriterion publishing house (1970-1989) in interviews. Research framework]. *Certamen* 2016, H. III, p. 214.

² Decretul Președintelui României nr. 605/2015 privind conferirea Ordinului Meritul Cultural în grad de Cavaler [Decree of the President of Romania no. 605/2015 concerning the conferment of the Order for Cultural Merit as Knight], published in Romania's Official Gazette, part I no. 486 of 2 July 2015.

However, *Kriterion* did not only publish in Hungarian and German, but also in Serbo-Croatian, Ukrainian and Yiddish and starting 1978 also in Slovakian and Russian, as of 1980 in Tatar, while Turkish was added in 1981. Thus, this publishing house played a crucial role in maintaining the cultural identity of all minorities of Romania. One of the priorities of this institution, lead until 1990 by the Romanian-born Hungarian writer and editor Géza Domokos, was ensuring cultural rapprochement between Romanians, Hungarians and Germans by the translation of literary works written in one of these languages into the other two. In this manner, *Kriterion* enabled the reception of first and foremost Romanian literature by the German and Hungarian communities. The history of this state-run institution that placed literary value higher than cultural and ethnic differences remains an admirable and leading example even five decades after its founding.

Similarly to the structure of the doctoral thesis, our research objectives were threefold. At the macro level, our research highlighted the political and historical conditions that made it possible for *Kriterion* to become the largest German-language publishing house outside the German-speaking countries, as well as those conditions that allowed the addition of new languages to the portfolio, defying the ever more powerful protochronist cultural discourse and the utterly inauspicious political and editorial measures taken against minorities with the intent of linguistically and culturally homogenising the entire society. At the mezzo level, the aim of our research was to analyse and systemise the nineteen-year old history of the *Kriterion* publishing house with special emphasis on the German editorial department and its relevance for the German minority of Romania, as demonstrated by its publications schedule and by the books published. This was followed by the micro-level analysis of the poetic discourse of the series *Kriterion-Hefte* (*Kriterion* booklets) in order to establish, on the one hand, whether it complied with the cultural discourse furthered by the Romanian Communist Party and, on the other hand, to underline the discursive poetics of a generation of Romanian-born German authors whose majority gained literary fame and recognition especially after emigrating from Romania. A telling example for this is the Nobel laureate Herta Müller, whose works written in Romania have been published exclusively by the *Kriterion* publishing house.

The first chapter focuses on the general political and cultural framework during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, analysed using the theoretical concepts of the French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. It is his concepts of field, i.e. the scene of competitions aiming to acquire positions of power, and symbolic capital, respectively, as an expression of power, that were used to pinpoint the political and cultural changes which bore significance for the history and the development of *Kriterion*.

This chapter summarises the political and cultural measures adopted by the communist regime, starting with the naming of Nicolae Ceaușescu as the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965. In short and from the point of view of cultural policy, the communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu underwent a funnel-type development: whereas the beginning of his regime was marked by a relative liberalisation lasting until approximately 1970, the rest of the communist period is characterised by a progressive and ever more accentuated constriction of liberties and the freedom of opinion. One of the defining moments on this temporal axis was Ceaușescu's speech held in August 1968, refusing to take part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Following this event, Ceaușescu amassed enormous symbolic capital. This was followed by further concessions to authors and minorities, such as the founding of Hungarian and German workers' councils with rather symbolical power, the founding of the trilingual student journal *Echinox* in Cluj-Napoca and the Kriterion publishing house for minority literature. Throughout this period Ceaușescu attempted to distance the country from the Soviet Union and open it towards the West. Lacking external legitimation from the USSR, the only way to consolidate his regime was with the help of the intelligentsia, that, up until that point, had only been able to express its anti-Soviet resistance by promoting the values and the history of the Romanian people. This was the starting point of an ideology that later became known as protochronism, that purported the idea that Romanian culture had preceded the developments in the Western world.

Starting 1970, the period of liberalisation gradually ground to a halt. Ceaușescu's theses of July 1971, the Romanian 'cultural revolution', envisaged the use of culture, of the arts, sciences and education in order to promote the Party's ideology. At the same time, the party leadership began to sell German and Jewish citizens who were thus allowed to emigrate from the country. The situation only worsened once the so-called theses of Mangalia were presented in August 1983. This policy document assigned intellectuals with the explicit role of creating a "multilaterally developed" socialist society. In this decade, the policies enforced by the leadership of the Party lead the country to the brink of an economic collapse. The year 1984 saw the ban of TV-programmes in Hungarian and German, which had been introduced in 1969, followed by the removal of regional programmes in Hungarian, German and Serbo-Croatian in 1985. By the year 1988 only those first names were allowed that could be translated into Romanian. These measures were accompanied by the Party's systematisation plan, which entailed the urbanisation of the country meant to atomise compact minority communities by forced relocations.

In the literary field, these political measures were echoed in the history of the Writers' Union and at the level of editorial policies adopted by the party leadership. Whereas the first conference of the Writers' Union, held in 1968, assembled – for the first time since the naming of Ceaușescu as General Secretary – all the writers and poets in Romania who were allowed to elect the leadership of the institution in a free and secret ballot, the next conferences of this representative body demonstrated the attacks of the Party's leadership against the Union, which culminated in banning Union gatherings starting 1981. Thus, the power of the Writers' Union in the literary field was significantly diminished.

Censors were another category of essential actors in the literary process. At the beginning of Ceaușescu's regime, they were employed in the official institution for censorship, namely the Directorate General for Press and Print Products, overseen by the Council of Ministers. This institution was renamed in 1975 to the Committee for Press and Print Products. During the time censorship officially existed, the institution responsible for carrying it out faced multiple challenges: first and foremost a chronic lack of employees, who moreover lacked experience and specialisation, but also excessive workloads. Censors also bore a high degree of responsibility for the books they reviewed, which often made them overly censor manuscripts and perform unjustified interventions in these texts. Censors feared punitive measures in this latter case less than in the case of published books with severe ideological inconsistencies. The efficiency of this institution was further impaired by poor coordination at the different levels where manuscripts were reviewed. Thus, it was not uncommon to find inadmissible non-conformities in a manuscript that had already been approved at a lower level, which meant, in turn, that the whole process had to be restarted from scratch. The reason behind this dwindling efficiency was the absence of clear-cut censorship criteria. Censors worked in accordance with the most recent declarations of the Party that they interpreted in different ways. The profile of censors also became more nuanced following our research: similarly to any other category of people, censors too were not all necessarily harsh and unforgiving. There were examples of good-natured censors that allied themselves with the publishers and helped editors publish books that would have been heavily censored under normal circumstances. In their relationship to censors, editors used the strategy of negotiation and readily made compromises that were beneficial to both parties. Even though the official institution for censorship was dissolved in 1977, this equated by no means to the disappearance of this phenomenon. Censorship continued to exist, but was now carried out by the publishing houses and editors as well as the authors themselves. Simultaneously, the Securitate's network of unofficial collaborators and informants was being expanded to include the employees of publishing houses and even

members of the Writers' Union. They provided the Securitate with information regarding the manuscripts that were to be published and that did not meet ideological requirements. This ensured the Securitate could preventively intervene and get hold of the manuscript, for instance by house searches. Collaborators and informants also tried to convince authors to modify their manuscripts of their own accord. If they failed to do so, the Securitate would spring into action. The lives of Romanian-born German authors were closely monitored by the Securitate, especially in the 1980s. Even so, the manuscripts submitted for review were never turned down, merely endlessly postponed. This was the case of the second volume of the *History of Germans in Romania from the beginning of the 19th century until 1848* (*Geschichte der Deutschen auf dem Gebiete Rumäniens. Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts bis 1848*), which was delayed for so long, it was never printed. A similar fate befell the subsequent volumes of the *Lexicon of the Hungarian literature of Romania* (*Romániai magyar irodalmi lexikon*), which were only published after the fall of the communist regime.

The second chapter presents the activity of the Kriterion publishing house at the crossroads of the actors of the literary field described in the first chapter. This part accentuates the decisive role of Géza Domokos, the director of the publishing house, in the history and evolution of this institution. His tolerant philosophy of life and his passion for quality literature was forged during the time he spent together with five Romanian colleagues, who later became his lifelong friends, at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow under the guidance of Konstantin Paustovsky. This formative experience and his election in 1969 as a substitute member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party awarded him an impressive symbolic capital that he skilfully exploited in order to further the cause of minority literatures in Romania. Géza Domokos was held in high esteem not only by the leadership of the Party, but also by his peers and by the intelligentsia.

He organised the first meeting of Romanian and Hungarian authors and translators in July 1981 with the aim of bringing these two cultures closer together through translations. This also caught the eye of the Securitate which feared the event would mark the rebirth of the literary group *Helikon*, founded in Central Transylvania at the beginning of the 20th century. This free literary society pursued the ideal of transylvaniam, i.e. the rapprochement of the three largest ethnic groups of Romania: Germans, Hungarians and Romanians. The multi-ethnic conference bestowed even more symbolic capital upon Géza Domokos, who was questioned about the event by his superiors. His notoriety, which had exceeded the levels manageable by the Party, also led to a thorough investigation at the Kriterion headquarters carried out in 1984, the same year Géza Domokos was excluded from the Central Committee. The reason given for the need

of this investigation was the fact that, through its publications in varied fields such as linguistics, ethnography and folklore, *Kriterion's* publications schedule was not oriented towards the present and the creation of the new man, but the past, even though the same publications schedule had already been approved at three different levels: the book centre, the Council for Socialist Culture and Education and the Central Committee. As soon as the news about this investigation started to get around, the first signs of solidarity began to outpour not only from the Hungarian but also from the Romanian literary community. One such example was the article written by the famous literary critic Nicolae Manolescu defending the publishing house. Faced with attacks such as these, the editorial strategies of *Kriterion* also became visible: all *Kriterion* employees confronted criticism in a solidary manner and refused to admit to mistakes, given that they already had all arguments to defend their publications because they had had to use them during the approval process of said works. The fact that this investigation which included more than 100 people remained without any public consequence was due to Géza Domokos' immense symbolic capital that prevented the RCP from publicising the issue and thus causing a scandal. The investigation is an example of the repressive measures against the publishing house with the aim of hampering its activity. Nevertheless, *Kriterion* tried to present itself in a transparent manner and to make its readers into allies through various meetings with authors and the employees of the publishing house organised in different towns across Transylvania and in Bucharest. *Kriterion* also regularly published editorial bulletins that informed the readership regarding books that were being prepared for publishing, visits they received in their offices in Bucharest as well as details regarding exports and agreements with foreign publishing houses. These bulletins were allowed to appear only between January 1971 and March 1974.

The German editorial department was led by Hedwiga Hauser, known as Hedi Hauser. She was also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. She was nominated as department head in the period in which obligatory quota for women representing minorities and the arts were imposed for the management boards of all institutions. Being an author of children's books and a member of the Writers' Union, Hedi Hauser fulfilled all requirements. Besides German, she was also responsible for Serbo-Croatian, Ukrainian, Slovakian, Tatar, Turkish and Yiddish.

This chapter also features a quantitative analysis of the German book production between 1970 and 1989. For this analysis we compiled a database listing all works published in German in the aforementioned period on the basis of the yearly catalogues, which, singularly in Romania, also included the print runs of the publications. Thus, in 19 years, *Kriterion* published 585

books in German with a total print run of 1.714.249. This database was then used to generate various illustrative diagrams that enable us to easily capture the trends and developments in the history of the publishing house. These diagrams clearly show that the history of *Kriterion* can be divided into two major periods: before and after the year 1980. During its first ten years, the publishing house had a varied offer of books, organised into the following categories:

- 1) contemporary literature, divided into a) prose, b) short prose, c) humour and d) poetry;
- 2) cultural heritage, which included the series *Kriterion Bücherei* (Kriterion library);
- 3) translations of Romanian literature
- 4) translations of Hungarian literature written in Romania
- 5) world literature
- 6) history
- 7) art history, non-fiction books
- 8) folklore and ethnography
- 9) monographies
- 10) youth literature, divided into a) pupils' small library, b) *Kriterion* school editions and c) the series *Ferienbuch* (holiday books)
- 11) children's literature.

Thus, the German editorial department had a well-thought-out publications schedule aimed to meet the requirements of all categories of readers. Starting 1980, the categories listed above were merged into more encompassing ones and the number of published works was drastically reduced, even though the yearly lists of works submitted for approval always featured more books than those they were allowed to publish. This reduction was partly caused by a measure adopted by the Executive Political Committee on 27 February 1979 that stipulated the percentage-wise adaptation of the print run of books in minority languages to those in Romanian. Thus, the quota of Hungarian books was lowered from 33% to 10%, the percentage of German books from 14% to 3% and the proportion of books in other minority languages from 5% to 1% of the print run of Romanian works. The approval procedure of books was also changed: whereas up to two editions of Romanian works needed only the approval of the Book Centre, the second edition of books in the languages of the minorities had to be approved by the hierarchically higher institution, namely the Council of Ministers. In a letter addressed to the president of the Writers' Union, Géza Domokos highlighted on the basis of *Kriterion's* print run of 1979 the disastrous consequences of this measure. According to his calculations, the loss of the publishing house would have amounted to 744,61%. This measure not only restricted the access of readers to books in their own mother tongues, but also impacted the

revenue of minority authors. Following the implementation of this decision, only 233 works were published in the 1980s as opposed to the number of 352 books that appeared between 1970 and 1980. The only category in which books were published yearly in high print runs was children's books. This chapter traces the repercussions of the cultural policies adopted by the Party leadership at the level of the publishing house and numerically demonstrates their goal to suppress minority cultural activity.

Chapter three is geared to analyse the discourse of the series *Kriterion-Hefte* (Kriterion booklets) initiated by Klaus Hensel in 1980 that included twelve publications. This series was discontinued in 1984. The book covers of eight of these volumes were designed by the art photographer Edmund Höfer who collaborated with Kriterion until 1982. The following works were published in this series: *Niederungen* (1982) and *Drückender Tango* (1984) by Herta Müller, *biographie. ein muster* (1980) and *so wars im mai so ist es* (1984) by Johann Lippet, *Am Rand einer Hochzeit* (1984) by Helmuth Frauendorfer, *Selbstanzeige* (1982) by Adrian Löw, *Reibfläche* (1982) by Horst Samson, *Normalzustand* (1984) by Reinhold Schmidt, *Eine Entwöhnung* (1980) by Werner Söllner, *die vergesellschaftung der gefühle* (1980) by William Totok and *Hotel California I* (1980) and *Hotel California II* (1981) by Richard Wagner. All are poetry books with the exception of the two works by Herta Müller and the volume by Reinhold Schmidt.

The publishing of this series is all the more surprising as the majority of the authors were already being eyed by the Securitate as former members of the literary society *Aktionsgruppe Banat* (Banat Action Group) or the *Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn* literary circle, respectively. Both of these literary organisations had been dissolved by the Securitate. Due to the formative effect of these literary societies, the authors of the series *Kriterion-Hefte*, who were their former members, are stylistically and thematically similar. The poetic discourse of the series is parallel to the official protochronist discourse of the era. The authors of the series do not contribute to the creation of the 'multilaterally developed socialist society'. To the contrary, they broach sensitive issues in the context of communist Romania of the 1980s. The apparently idyllic life of a Swabian family is deconstructed and demystified, the traditions of the German community is critically analysed and abandoned, the authors openly refer to the Nazi past of the previous generation, to the deportation of Germans in the Bărăgan steppe, to collectivisation, but they also talk about the precarious status of authors in socialist Romania. The works include numerous references to the usual phenomena accompanying daily life in Romania, such as power or water supply cuts, queueing, cold apartments, food shortages etc. The feeling of fear and hopelessness marks the majority of the volumes issued in this series.

Overall, the booklets are characterised by a marked orientation towards foreign influences and feature numerous references not only to authors from the German-speaking countries but also Western films and music. The influence of Bertolt Brecht can be strongly felt throughout the majority of the poetry books. These last representatives of the generation of Romanian-born German young authors wanted to create a fifth German literature through the critical analysis of snapshots of reality.

These features allow the conclusion that the *Kriterion-Hefte* series was not part of the official cultural discourse of the Ceaușescu regime. Protochronist attitudes or even patriotic ones are completely missing, the authors are not oriented towards creating the new man, but towards the present and the past. At the same time, this series represents a telling example of the accomplishments of the Kriterion publishing house during a period in which freedom of speech was severely restricted.

In conclusion, this doctoral research points out the significance of the Kriterion publishing house as a mediator between the cultures of Romania and especially its relevance for the German community. It is our opinion that the history of this multilingual publishing house is exemplary thanks to the tolerance and solidarity manifested by its employees and that their work promoted quality literature beyond language and ethnical barriers. In spite of the obstacles created at the political level which prevented the publishing of all works foreseen in the yearly publications schedule, the Kriterion publishing house and the German editorial department proved to be indispensable to the survival and enrichment of Romania's minority literatures. Through its editorial strategies, by skilfully using its symbolic capital and by recognising that the only way to survive restrictions was to compromise, Kriterion became the ally of authors and readers and managed to publish an impressive variety of books, even such works that should not have been published according to the official cultural discourse.

For the Romanian-born German authors that emigrated to West-Germany in the 1980s, Kriterion was a launching pad towards literary notoriety in the West. As a recognition of their contribution to the maintenance and purity of the German language, Herta Müller, Helmuth Frauendorfer, Johann Lippet, Werner Söllner, William Totok, Richard Wagner, and Klaus Hensel, the initiator of the series *Kriterion Hefte*, were awarded, in 1989, the Award of the German Language by the Henning Kaufmann Foundation.