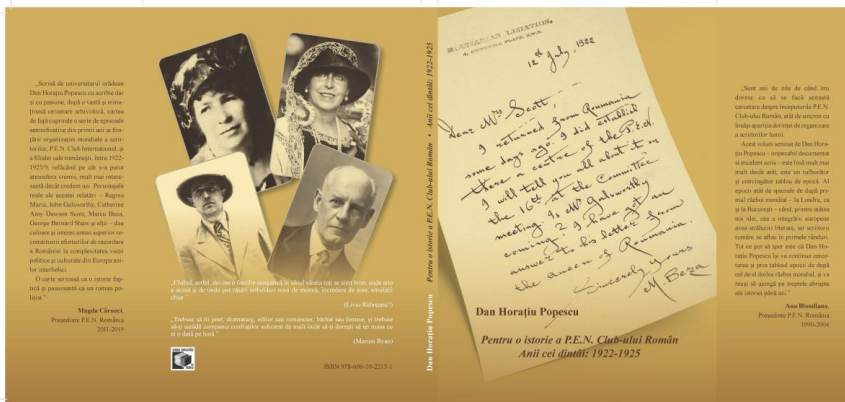


Unveiling the Founding Years of the Romanian P.E.N. Club: Dan Horațiu Popescu, *Pentru o istorie a P.E.N. Club-ului Român: anii cei dintâi: 1922-1925*

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Dan Horațiu Popescu, both a writer and a scholar, has taken up a research mission that is closely connected not only to his academic status, but also to his more artistic side; that of trying to shed light on the first four years of what is known as the Romanian P.E.N. Club. Therefore, D. H. Popescu's book, *Pentru o istorie a P.E.N. Club-ului Român: anii cei dintâi: 1922-1925*, published at Editura Universității din Oradea in 2022, is the result of such an ambitious research mission.

The book was very well received, being endorsed by former Romanian P.E.N. Club presidents, such as Ana Blandiana, who was responsible for the Romanian P.E.N. Club between 1990-2004, and Magda Cârneci, who took on such a role between 2011-2019. For the latter, D. H. Popescu's book is a serious book – a historical one, but also a passionate book, resembling a detective novel. On the other hand, for the former, the book is an answer to the poet's longing to see a published version of such research, that, she hopes, the author will continue in

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order to also paint the picture of what the Romanian P.E.N Club looked like from World War II to the present.

It becomes clear that D. H. Popescu's book is a long awaited published research, having the quality of not only offering a meticulous exploration of the early years of the Romanian P.E.N. Club, but also its connection to P.E.N. International.

From the introduction of the book, the stage is set for a comprehensive review by detailing the author's research methodology, sources, and the overarching goals of the book. The text presents a promise to its readers: to unearth the historical fabric of the Romanian P.E.N. Club's formation while acknowledging the limitations of source credibility and historical ambiguity.

One noteworthy aspect is Popescu's commitment to historical accuracy, which is emphasized in his research methodology. The author states that he has diligently scouted and distilled significant events from limited yet verifiable sources. Such a transparency regarding not only the limitations of the sources, but also several issues regarding their credibility demonstrates that the author is commitment to scholarly rigor. Furthermore, Popescu's reliance on documents, including letters from Romanian P.E.N. members and archival materials, indicates a strong foundation for his historical investigation.

Another standout aspect concerning Popescu's approach is his engagement with the primary sources, including the previously mentioned documents, letters, and press clippings. He provides insight into the challenges of piecing together historical narratives and, at the same time, manages to construct a compelling and coherent account of the Romanian P.E.N. Club's early years. Popescu's willingness to address ambiguities and confusions in the historical record is commendable, since he openly acknowledges moments when doubts about figures and locations arose during his research. By sharing these uncertainties, the author invites readers to engage critically with the historical narrative and emphasizes the importance of historical accuracy. This transparency enhances the book's scholarly value.

The book is structured into four chapters, each dedicated to a specific year (1922-1925). This chronological approach allows for a systematic exploration of key events, figures, and relationships within the Romanian P.E.N. Club and its connection to P.E.N. International. Popescu adeptly weaves together historical context, the personalities involved, and the broader cultural and political landscape of the time, creating what Blandiana calls "a disturbing and convincing painting of the period".

Chapter one, “1922: An Aromanian in the wider world”, introduces readers to the Romanian diplomat Marcu Beza and his pivotal role in establishing the Romanian P.E.N. Club. The chapter provides a detailed account of Beza’s life and contributions, offering a rich historical context. Chapter two, “1923: One secretary and two presidents”, delves into the early dynamics of the Romanian P.E.N. Club and its interaction with P.E.N. International. The inclusion of Nicolae Iorga’s perspective adds depth to the narrative, highlighting the challenges and debates within the organization. Chapter three, “1924: A subjective narrator and a Queen of Hearts”, explores the interpersonal dynamics within the Romanian P.E.N. Club and its interactions with Queen Mary of Romania. Popescu skillfully unravels the complexities of relationships and identities within the club. Chapter four, “1925: Translations that make... other literatures”, investigates the politics of translation within P.E.N. International and Marcu Beza’s role in promoting George Bernard Shaw. The author offers a nuanced perspective on the power struggles within the organization.

One possible drawback of the book is the author’s choice of language: Popescu decides to write the book in Romanian, since its focus is the history of the Romanian P.E.N. Club, a topic of interest mostly for the Romanian audience. However, probably aware of the limitations his choice of language imposes, the author does a very clever thing: Popescu ends his book with an English version of the introduction, thus, granting (limited) international access to his book.

Overall, D. H. Popescu’s book proves to be a well-researched and meticulously crafted work that sheds light on the early years of the Romanian P.E.N. Club and its connections to the broader literary and cultural landscape of the time. The author’s commitment to transparency, his use of primary sources, and the structured approach make this book a valuable addition to the academic discourse on literary history and international organizations. It promises to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the Romanian P.E.N. Club’s formative years while acknowledging the historical complexities that come with such research.