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# AICHELBURG'S FIRST YEARS IN GERMANY

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***Abstract:*** *This paper deals with Aichelburg's poetry published in Germany after his escape from Romania in an attempt to prove that his work was well received by German scholarship. After analyzing a set of several reviews and articles in the local media we came to the conclusion that the German public and scholarship of the time acclaimed the emergence of a new literary star banished from the communist East.*

***Key words:*** *Wolf von Aichelburg, German culture, German poetry.*

The arguments related to the opinions of Romanian critics on Aichelburg's work, to his work published in Romania and its context, to the reception of his volumes of poetry and essays by the Romanian public have already been settled. Nevertheless, almost unknown to the Romanian public is his work published in Germany as well as his reception abroad.

Modest, but diligent, he managed to slowly make his way toward the rostrum of German literature of the time. As soon as in 1983, he published some of his work in a local newspaper *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* and a small Austrian publisher supported his artistic endeavour by publishing three of his volumes. This Austrian publisher, i.e. Wort und Welt-Verlag, printed the following volumes: *Aller Ufer Wiederschein* (1984), *Anhalter Bahnhof* (1985), *Corrida* (1987).

About his first poetry anthology, *Aller Ufer Wiederschein. Gedichte* (Aichelburg, *Aller Ufer Widerschein: Gedichte*) published in the West three years after he had settled in Freiburg, there is an article published in *Beiträge zur deutschen Kultur*[i] by Renate Windisch-Middendorf, found in the Aichelburg archive at the *Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, the "Ludwig Maximilian" University, Munich* entitled *Bibliographie.* First, it highlights the significant role the poet played for decades on the cultural scene of the Germans in Romania. The volume amounts to 56 poems from several books previously published in Romania. Renate Windisch-Middendorf mentions the reader, who does not even imagine at his first contact with the book that the author of those poems had spent most of his life in Transylvania. One poem betrays his origin however, namely *Siebenbürgischer Dorfturm,* and it can only be understood by those concerned, namely the Saxons in Romania who had relocated to Germany.

However, the volume is a good example for *l'homme e l'œuvre,* for the fact that nor does man depend on his work and neither

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his work is in any way strictly related to his life. The poems are not related to a specific area, they can be associated to any space. Titles like *San Giovanni Maggiore, Lago Trasimeno, Zypressen in Galuzzo* evoke and locate the exotic south. *Pans Stunde* or *Dryaden* are signs of Aichelburg's relationship with the gods of Antiquity. *Tao* or *Yin şi Yang* are examples for the eastern thinking and feeling.

Fascination of creation and poetic desire extract things from the concrete context and give durability, validity and universality to symbols.

Aichelburg had commented his poetic work several times and explained the poetic process of *choice and limitation* as a road to a new *safety*:

> It is the return of the prodigal son from uncertainty to the safety of family, an image of spiritual salvation of fallen and then resurrected man. (Fingerzeige: *Essays* 9)

In a letter to Professor Dr. Peter Motzan he confesses:

> I have read poetry in every language known to me, I have written many, aware of artistic value, but not so much interested in publishing them, supported by a romantic self-consolation: You have enough time, your time will come ...

Aichelburg expresses in poetry what he wants to support theoretically.

> This volume distinguished by beauty of language makes the heart of any lover of poetry beat faster. Aichelburg's language is close to Eichendorff's poetic warmth. This volume of poetry enriches the reader and is a real win for him.(Aichelburg, *Aller Ufer Wiederschein – Gedichte*)

His language is a *safety chain* that in some magical way changes the way things manifest in the world. Thus, the poetic self hides behind the specific object *Orange, Zypresse* or appears in directly in the magic of nature, which brings the poet to a state of muteness *Dryaden.*

*Form consciousness is due to a precise interpretation of language and reality.*[ii]

*Silence* is not to Aichelburg that need for existential expression as in the poetry of Paul Celan, Aichelburg flies with the wind, surrenders to the adventure of the *wave,* in the golden sea.

> This opposition between Sprache and Klang, between speech and unspeakable on which Wolf Aichelburg's poetics is based is one of the most lucid and firm distinction between the Orphism of speech and that of silence. The road of poetry that descends from the Nous into the Logos is an elevation, an attenuated mystery since the self accepts and assumes the otherness of the world in that escape from the self which is naming and semiosis.(Ionescu 7)

About the volume *Anhalter Bahnhof* find an article titled complex dedicated his life Aichelburg *Heiterkeit aus Trauer, Mut und Hoffnung christlicher* stating that the volume memories of pre-war Berlin of the '30s are intertwined with the impressions of Berlin alone (Hoffmann). There is an complex article titled dedicated to Aichelburg's life, *Heiterkeit aus Trauer, Mut und Hoffnung christlicher* in which the author states that in the volume *Anhalter Bahnhof* the memories of pre-war Berlin of the 1930s are intertwined with the impressions of the divided Berlin.) The old Berlin turned into a new Berlin stirs up questions whose answer cannot be found in what is new in Berlin, but in the memory of the past. It is a return of the traveller to places which bear a special significance in his life.

Anhalter Bahnhof *was written in this decade; it was a shock turned into an elegy of the city which divides.* (Breither)

Another article focused on the same volume of poems, ... *wie auf der Bühne nach getanem Spiel*[iii] presents Aichelburg at a cultural meeting reading his poems, thus honoring an invitation from the

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cultural consultant of Baden-Württemberg, 26 March 1982. The author reports that the evening started with the reading of four poems, and after a music program, ended with the story *In Treppenhaus.* The article reflects public admiration for such an eloquent combination of music and literature and provides us with the practical evidence of the recognition of Aichelburg's complex personality. An invitation to a round table in the memory of Klaus Günther from *Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk München*[iv] comes to reinforce the facts stated above, especially with reference to Aichelburg's reception in Germany, a year after his leaving Romania.

A story entitled *Im Treppenhaus,* presented by Aichelburg at an author symposium, is interpreted by Marion Sichelschmidt (Sichelschmidt) as a sarcastic story, a horror vision of the totalitarian state regardless of the system, an author's whim to destroy the resistance of a man under subtle psychological terror, between fear and indifference. There might be a parallel between the story's main character, Z, and the biography of the author as a political prisoner. This story was allegedly written during the time Aichelburg spent in Midia as a political prisoner sentenced to hard labor. The poems *Im Sand, Am See* and *Schildkröte,* depicting wildlife of the places are mentioned in the article and are enough evidence that despite all injustice endured those landscapes remained alive in Aichelburg's soul.

Aichelburg's name with his *Streichquartett Nr. 5 – Sostenuto. Allegro, Molto Adagio, Allegro*[v] alongside other famous names in the world of music of that period, such as Paul Richter, Georg Wilhelm Berger, Rudolf Wagner Regeny supports our claim that Aichelburg was well received in Germany and actually enjoyed well-earned recognition.

Four years after his had settled in Freiburg, there was an Aichelburg evening in Traunreuth, where the public enjoyed, besides his poems, the product of his imagination as a painter. The meeting was very successful and ended with a discussion about Aichelburg's life and work, as well as about the status of German literature in Transylvania; the meeting was honored by the presence of the cultural consultant of Traunreuth and writer Hans Bergel from Munich. For the first time, besides Aichelburg's poetry and prose read by the author himself, and his concert for cello and piano perform ed by Bernhard Schinzel and Arnold Schlechter, in addition to the songs interpreted by tenor Bernhard Kesy (all composed by Aichelburg) art lovers had the opportunity to admire projections of his works in watercolor.(Aichelburg, "Abend")

The most eloquent proof of the recognition of his literary merits in Germany is the third prize for poetry for his *Luftige Wiege* awarded by *Gesellschaft der Freunde deutschsprachiger Lyrik* on 20 April 1986. From that point on, Aichelburg starts a rich career in journalism, during which, until 1992, he collaborated with several publications including the local newspaper, *Rhein Neckar Zeitung* with the biannual review *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahrsblätter,* and with the journal of writers association *Neue Literature, Dialogue.* His poems appear in various publications such as *Siebenbürgische Zeitung.*(Aichelburg, "Ostermorgen")

The third volume of poetry *Corrida* has been considered a unique piece in Aichelburg's literary work (Aichelburg, "Die Corrida Gedichte"). Almost all the poems belong to an artistic sense at the height of its bloom, when skill accepts only what is relevant. The fifty poems cannot be compared with Aichelburg's previous poetry.

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A relevant echo among book lovers in Germany was that of *Worte als Gefahr und Gefährdung* (Motzan, Sienerth, and Heuberger). The authors of this book were able to revive readers' interest of the five writers Hans Bergel, Harald Siegmund, George Scherg, Andreas Birkner and Wolf von Aichelburg. Thus an article published in *Badische Zeitung* by Martina Meister emphasizes that the five had never considered themselves guilty (Meister). Aichelburg's name appears in the first lines of the article with reference to the poem *Minciuna* sent for publication to a friend and which was the *corpus delicti* in the trial of the German writers. The five writers met in Freiburg, on Aichelburg's 80th and Georg Scherg's 75th birthdays after 32 years and recalled the past together; they unveiled it before the public's eyes, a yet unwritten chapter in the history of Romanian-German literature. The aim of both authors was not only to find information about the trial, but also to draw the public's attention to the five writers; their attempt was truly successful. Thus, we find in the book their own views about the trial, statements, comments about one another (e.g. Bergel about Aichelburg). The writers acknowledge their literary merits and agree that in prison, they became a group, even if some of them had had no contact with the others before.

Georg Aescht's article on the same topic[vi] reports that the only professional thing in the socialist construct was the conception of lie from partial truths. It should be noted here that, in the 1940s and 1950s, literary production in minority languages was tolerated but also compulsory for the minorities. Because what is compulsory is also easier to control, writers were required to publish on a regular basis. An example in this respect is Aichelburg's collaboration with Neuer Weg, in which he had published a weekly column for several years.

Aichelburg's 80th birthday was a cultural event celebrated by a small group of artists at the initiative of professor Ernst and Mrs Karin Beither. Professor Eugen Ernst spoke in the Laudatio about the author's destiny and he praised the way in which he had endured the harsh conditions of life and the unmistakable style of his writings. There was a reading session from authors such as Friede Schulte Tigges, Helmtrud Rückert, Karin Breither, Anna Sindermann, Hilde Kampermann and Dr. Siegfried Lahnstein. Several musical pieces were also performed by composers such as Helmtrud Rückkert and Petra Loewe and Adolf Rückert, who played the piano. Towards the end of the event, Wolf von Aichelburg delighted those present with his poetry and fantastic prose[vii].

On his 80th birthday, Professor Dr. Peter Motzan published an article in *Siebenbürgische Zeitung,* in which he includes an autobiographical letter of Aichelburg which he had written in 1971 and thus completes Dr. Walter Engel's speech at the ceremony for the award of *Siebenbürgisch-Sächsischer Literaturpreis* to Wolf von Aichelburg (Motzan 3). The publication of this letter was a good opportunity for Aichelburg's readers to know his own opinions about his life and understand his destiny.

Walter Engel focuses in his speech on the subject of Aichelburg's poems, his vision of nature and the landscape itself being not only pure description but also a traveler's perspective, that of an observer always looking for a secret (Engel 13). The poet describes nature in three different hypostases: its secret, undisclosed beauty, its continuous transformation and its new faces.

Aichelburg participated in a series of cultural events, reading evenings, conferences and his was constantly interested in music.

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It can be argued that Aichelburg received the same recognition for artistic work both in Germany and in Romania if we were to ignore baffles of the Romanian Political Police, i.e. Securitate, home detention and forced domicile. He became famous faster in Germany, if we were to consider the fact that he published his first volume in Romania at 56 years of age. Let us remember that in Romania his work was very well received by the public even from his first lines of poetry. Nobel Prize holder and author of a final diploma paper on Aichelburg's poetry, Herta Müller acknowledged and wrote about Aichelburg's human and literary value even if they did not share in the same beliefs. Everything seemed to separate her from the world of the Austrian Baron in Sibiu: age, social origin, literary tastes, but she felt an attraction to the value of his work.

His affiliation with various publications at home and abroad demonstrates that the author was and is a valuable writer both for the Romanian and German culture, about whom there is still a lot to discover. This article is a first step in the quest for traces left by Aichelburg's work in European culture.

## Notes

[i] Renate Windisch-Middendorf, *Bibliographie.* In: *Beiträge zur deutschen Kultur,* 1 Jg, Freiburg, 1984.

[ii] Johannes Zultner: *Wolf von Aichelburg zum 75 Geburtstag.* În: *Siebenbürgische Zeitung,* 15 December 1986, p. 7

[iii] Johannes Zultner: *…wie auf der Bühne nach getanem Spiel.* In: a newspaper copy in the Wolf von Aichelburg archive at the *Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, the "Ludwig Maximilian" University, Munich*

[iv] Invitation dated November 12, 1982 in the Wolf von Aichelburg archive from the *Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, the "Ludwig Maximilian" University, Munich*

[v] Invitation and agenda *Kammermusik aus Siebenbürgen,* October 20, 1984, in the Wolf von Aichelburg archive at the *Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, the "Ludwig Maximilian" University, Munich*

[vi] Georg Aescht, *Weiße Flecken, schwarze Löcher.* In: Korrespondenz, no. 903, June 5, 1994, copy in the Wolf von Aichelburg archive at the *Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, the "Ludwig Maximilian" University, Munich*

[vii] Erich Mony, *Harmonie von Prosa, Lyrik und Gesang*. Newspaper photocopy, illegible title 10.01.1992 in the Wolf von Aichelburg archive at the *Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, the "Ludwig Maximilian" University, Munich.*

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