

From Grigore Moldovan to Moldovan Gergely

A Career in Homeland

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Abstract. Professor at Ferencz József University in Cluj, a problematic personality at the end of the 19th century, Grigore Moldovan is canonised in the specialised literature of Romanian and Hungarian ethnology with a very valuable activity in this domain.

The problem consists in the fact that neither the Romanian, nor the Hungarian community can accept without critique his identity defined in his works: he is a Romanian intellectual, citizen of the Hungarian state, and loyal to it. The paper presents and analyses Moldovan's apolitical volume entitled *Egy fürdőidény Borszéken (A Bathing Season in Borszék)* written in 1883.

The text written in Hungarian and signed with the Hungarian variant of the author's name, presents an aesthetised identity that, nevertheless, keeps a continuous interest in trying to get acquainted with and understand the complex, contemporary interethnic relations of the author.

The national identity in the modern conception of the same period has influenced the minority communities living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, while the existing forms and possibilities of identification become problematic or inexplicable from the perspective of the end of the 19th century or even from the outlook of our days.

The tension existing in the duality of Grigore Moldovan/Moldován Gergely can be resolved through the study of his intellectual career, of the conceptions and identifications of his personality. This study leads to the comprehension of how the problematic identities are functioning, as well as to the more particular observation of the weak points of the paradigm of modern national identity.

Thus, the research on the literary, cultural relationships between two national cultures implies the evaluation of new possibilities in contactology, such as cultural anthropology, "histoire croisée" and the theory of translation.

Keywords: intellectual, Romanian-Hungarian, identity, the 19th century, Transylvania

In 1884 Miklós K. Papp, the typographer of the *Magyar Polgár (Hungarian Citizen*) newspaper in Kolozsvár edited a volume entitled *Koszorú a román népköltészet virágaiból (A Wreath from the Flowers of Romanian Folk Poetry)* containing Romanian folksongs translations by Gergely Moldován. Moldován introduces his volume noting that the wild flowers translated by him differ from perfect gardening, but they have the unifying power of folk songs: the sentiments expressed by them unify the country girl with the lady, the common man with the lord, erasing social differences. ¹ The activity of translation is interpreted here as a transmission between Romanian and Hungarian culture, but it also had the value of erasing cultural, social and national differences. This concept of translation is influenced by interests: it approximates the different communities and peoples by getting acquainted with artistic and cultural values of others. Moldován considers that the translation represents a double homogenisation: a social and a national one.

This volume of translations is dedicated to Ilona Urmánczy from Maroshévíz (today's Topliţa) who, in Moldován's view, represents the perfect example of affection for the people. The translator met this lady a year earlier – in 1883 – documented by another of his works that presents the memories of a summer spent at a spa. The introduction of the volume entitled *Egy fürdőidény Borszéken (A Bathing Season in Borszék)* specifies the intention of its author: it is not a scientific work, but it presents Moldován's private feelings related to Borszék, a balneotherapeutic location. He also wants to promote this place where he spent his holidays. At first sight, therefore, it seems to be a literature of escape, but it is more than a light reading. Henceforth, this paper will analyse the intentions of the author, the possible readings of the text, an outline of the above-mentioned surplus of meanings and the presentation of those parts of the book that lead to the problem of identity, as well as Hungarian–Romanian cultural contacts.

The text is written in the second person singular meant to refer to the reader. This perspective of narration and the fact that the text makes reference to real places,

¹ This articulation of the society is present also in Moldován's political works. Ten years later he publishes his critiques related to the question of nationality in is volume "Magyarok, románok" (Hungarians, Romanians) and emphasizes the influence of the historical-juridical approach of the structured society on the Romanian community, presenting how this community is distributed into "intelligentsia" and peasantry. The work dealing with the Hungarian social history of Gábor Gyáni and György Kövér defines this categorization as based on rank and prestige (Gyáni and Kövér 1998).

persons and dates authorise us to endue a value of documentation to the text and to identify the narrator with the author. So Moldován, the writer of this book, represents himself in an entertaining text, constructed and written after the experience.

Travelling to Borszék and taking the waters represent a different time and place than the closed world of the city of Kolozsvár (Cluj). In this text, the leisure time is interpreted as spending a meaningful and refreshing time. Thus, the book could be considered as the narration of a trip, also emphasised by this quotation: "Travellers are more curious even than women. They want to know the history of every single mound, they are interested in everything, becoming geologists, astronomers, botanists, zoologists, economists, or rather they'd prefer to become one if they could, as they are observing – and perceiving – things continuously, but they can't explain them later." (Moldován 1883: 10)

Relying on his power of observation and perception, the traveller of the volume encounters – exactly as he steps out of his everyday life – his limits, e.g. that he cannot catch the world in its entirety, he has no tools in comprehending the observed nature. This traveller's curiosity luckily goes together with the folkloric interest mentioned before. Moldován enriches his travelogue with legends from Borszék and with his own collections: e.g. he inserts into the text chapters called Egy rege a forrásról (A Tale about the Spring), Egy másik rege (Another Tale), Az erdő leánya (The Daughter of the Forest), A tündérkert (The Fairy Garden). He publishes data of local historical significance specifying its sources. Due to these the personal travelogue becomes a text written with scientific ambition.

This scientific ambition is also shown by the fact that Moldován categorises and comments the notes made in the visitors' book, such as: simple names without *manu propria*; lovers, melancholic, wise people, people with opinion, ones who attract attention to themselves, ones who make publicity, "revisors" and coward anonymous ones. Or he makes a statistical survey: as per domicile most of the visitors come from Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), Gyergyó (Gheorgeni) and Kolozsvár, then from abroad, mainly from Iaşi and Bucharest. As per employment and occupation merchants (91), landowners (54), teachers (47), people from the private sector (20) are the most frequent visitors of the health-resort. As per gender: "In Borszék the feminine public is always greater in number than the male one", and it includes those women and young ladies who "cannot be categorised according to their jobs, and who form a distinct group in an era that is not acquainted with emancipation." (Moldován 1883: 124)

The Hungarian – Romanian relationship appears several times throughout the volume. The Romanians are shown in the surroundings of the Kossuth-well, where the bathers mingle with the tourists in a linguistic variety. Though they are isolated in this cavalcade as a separate group, they discuss politics in Romanian. Yet, their connection is relative, for example, the narrator draws attention to the different ways of thinking of the Romanians living in Iaşi and in Bucharest.

The connection between the Romanian and Hungarian nation is illustrated by the relationship between Marie Cantacuzine [!] and Ilona Huszár. The presentation of the Romanian girl is a good opportunity for the narrator to write about the Romanians, too. Ilona Huszár "has made a conquest of a soul and thus she met her patriotic obligations" (Moldován 1883: 154), since Marie learnt Hungarian from her and thanks to her, she played Hungarian folk song on the piano.

This example shows both the fact that education makes people receptive and that this could be even a patriotic action. In this case the language acquisition, the interest towards the other culture seems to be one-sided and ideological. The relationship between the two women works as a pattern, in spite of the fact that, according to Moldován, one of the causes of the disagreement between nations can be found in women. Here is a longer quotation from the work:

... natural scientists can by no means determine either the time that bred and gave birth to the German, the Romanian, the Hungarian and the Jew, or the time that baked – as if they were pies made of an excellent material – the baron, the count, the prince, the plebs, the well-off citizen and the stocking-wearing peasant. They can only determine the time when man came into being in a wild state, stick in hand, naked, orphan and abandoned. [...] even at the health-resort there are high dividing walls between one man and another, one family and another, one race and another. [...] Women make the difference in a society, by job, birth and rank every class raises for itself crotchets and it lives according to them."² (Moldován 1883: 138-139)

He specifically outlines the history of the origin of mankind (or only of the Transylvanian nationalities?), according to which people are equal by birth, however, their education, socialisation, as well as their social life make them different. Women are the guarantee of life, but only in the family. Men remain the main actors of social life being active participants in communal events, from which women stay away.

Lujza Blaha, the famous Hungarian actress, who spends her holiday in Borszék, displays a different female attitude becoming the symbol of approach,³ since her appearances attract very different bathing public to events of

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² The author's translation.

³ The *Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction* establishes the Lujza Blaha Foundation from the income of these occasions, and its interest "should be appropriate to support two poor, but good students *without religious and ethnical differences*". We can make out from the text another important element: a cultic approach to Lujza Blaha. I quote from the narrator's confessions: "I noted down on the actress's fan: Should Borszék be able to carry a hundred times more, /That it carries altogether, / *Because you are an idol of the people*, / You are now its most precious pearl." [emphasis is mine – T. B.] (See: Moldován 1883: 64-65)

entertainment such as the ball, the banquet and the torchlight music event organised by the Mulató-klub (The Club of Amusements).

Bathing as a recreation connected to the preservation of health⁴ is also favourable to social life – beside travelling or excursions. For example, love, choosing a partner or the possibility of a future marriage, that are present in several cases throughout the text, turns the weeks spent in Borszék into a pleasant dream, that is beyond reality.

At the beginning of August our narrator and his company make an excursion to Moldova. There are thirteen people, including Lujza Blaha and her husband, Ödön Splényi. In connection with the excursion Moldován's emotions come to the front: "my heart sank on this bridge [at the frontier, at Tölgyes they needed a "passus" – addition by myself, B. T.]. I don't know how others felt when crossing the frontier, but it made me upset. As if something whispered to me: 'Don't go away, stay here!' Though the whole excursion was a joke and I knew that we turned back in a few minutes, yet something pulled me down to the ground so I could kiss it before I crossed it." (Moldován 1883: 68)

These plastic gestures (kissing the mother earth and emphasising the shortness of the journey) show adherence to the homeland, while the crossing of the border and leaving of the country suggest the idea of strangeness and homelessness in this context. With this gesture the narrator expresses his belonging and loyalty to Hungary, his native land. Owing to Lujza Blaha's indisposition, the journey is even shorter. After crossing the border to Moldova Moldován becomes embarrassed, Lujza Blaha gets ill. At this point, even if only implicitly, the text states that the space outside the country, stepping onto the foreign land could be unsettling. Where does this strangeness come from? Geographically Moldova is only the neighbouring country, while linguistically the travellers experience the fact that the Romanian soldiers working at the frontier speak only Romanian.

If the readers of the writer's age, or even you, do not have any information regarding Moldovan's origin, based on the author's name (Gergely Moldován), one could think him without any problem to be a Hungarian and his gesture could be natural.

Now I can reveal to you that Gergely Moldován is an intellectual with Hungarian, or, to be more precise, with Transylvanian Romanian origin. Does this information change anything in the judgment of Moldován's text?

If we look at Moldován, the tourist from a national point of view, who would kiss the earth of his country before crossing it, his relation to the Romanian ground

⁴ In the chapter entitled *Our cure*, with reference to the medical prescription the narrator mentions the tasks related to spending time slowly and peacefully (allowing a long time for accommodation, not thinking, concentrating on the things that we have seen, finding a company), and thus the bathers can regain their strength in six weeks. For differentiating leisure time, or more generally, the notion of time see Gellériné 1991.

is contradictory with his Romanian origin and meaningful name that indicates his origin (Moldova). According to our prejudices, we would have expected him to be happy when crossing the Hungarian border. Similarly we found his gesture strange, contradictory also from a national point of view. However, this gesture might have been natural in those times. Therefore, my paper continues with the discussion of the relationship of different ethnic groups at the end of the 19th century.

With reference to the excursion to Moldova, Moldován mentions the beautiful girls, the Romanian dance that he admired, as well as the event of buying Moldavian cheese and expensive sweets while Lujza Blaha was spending a quarter of an hour there. We can say that he also thinks stereotypically, and this appears also when mentioning other nationalities, but not at all with that emphasis: e.g. the Gypsies are musicians, the Jews are cheerful.

I have not mentioned the Hungarians here because it is obvious that Moldovan identifies himself with their perspective, and beside this, he relates his bathing experiences in Hungarian and he quotes Hungarian sources in relation with Borszék.

The Gergely Moldován who writes his travelogue shows himself in the company of Hungarians, whilst he is paying attention to the Hungarian and Romanian relationships and differences. If we try to differentiate from a national point of view, we get in a pitfall, since – as we have already seen and as I would bring additional arguments to it – the modern concepts of "ethnic identity" and "nationality" are less suitable for the description of Moldovan's intellectual identity. However, these points of reference and categorisation can help us understand Moldovan's thinking from the other perspective.

If the travelogue about Borszék is the space of private emotions, it can be seen that for the male Gergely Moldován not only female beauty gives reason to express these feelings, but the problem of the relation between language, culture and nationality is also ranked among the emotions of personal life, as well as others' social life.

We know that he frankly assumed that he was a Romanian citizen from Hungary, though in this work he wrote about the Romanians in such a way that he covered his own affection for this ethnic group. He can see this ethnic group in a differentiated way, simultaneously as an outsider and as a "native", and, compared to this, he sees the Hungarians as a homogenous group. Thus, we can ask by right: who was the person who published his Hungarian texts as Gergely Moldován from the beginning of the last third of the 19th century. In what way is Moldovan a Romanian? Or, if he admits to be a Hungarian, then how is he related to this ethnic group?

I am looking for the answers to these questions, because Moldovan's peculiar awareness of self-identity, as well as his works related to this, keep him away from national cultures, in the modern sense of the word. Already in his life he was characterised with negative, condemning attributes ("renegade, disinherited"), later

he was called "contradictory" or "the Győző Hajdú of Romanian literature", thus declining the possibility of any deeper analysis or interpretation.

Throughout my research I tried to understand Moldován's scholarly activities, his decisions that seem to have political colouring (since he was in conflict with the Romanian public opinion). Nevertheless, both Romanian and Hungarian ethnology considers them valuable – based on professional arguments. I am recalling the formation of Moldován's career and some of its moments, in order that one can see how much the national identity at the end of the 19th century is not obvious, and that the idea of the nation state involves difficult problems and results in peculiar interpretations on the level of individual identities.

We know that Moldovan studied in Szamosújvár (Gherla) for a short period. Coming to Kolozsvár, he graduated at the Piarists, and, after obtaining a degree in law, he found his first job in this city. The Piarist high school education has a great importance from the point of view of the Romanians from Transylvania: as an institution promoting further education of poor children and giving them even financial assistance, due to charitable people, it attracts the Transylvanian Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic pupils. Charity was not determined by reason of ethnicity, but by denominational and social considerations, as well as by the ideology of the Piarist order maintaining the institution. From the beginning of the 18th century, a full range of Romanian generations emerges from this institution, playing an important role in the formation of their own culture (Bíró 1926: 18-39).

In 1926 the institution was celebrating the 150th anniversary of the school publishing a volume entitled *Öreg diák visszanéz* (*The Old Boy Is Looking Back*) (György 1926). The volume presents illustrious teachers and former pupils, old boys remember their school. Among the texts of Péter Apor, baron Miklós Jósika, dr. Péter Erődi-Harrach, Miklós Torma and dr. Benedek Jancsó, Aladár Kuncz and others one may find the writing of Dr. Gergely Moldován, namely Grigore Moldovan, entitled *A piaristák melegében* (*In the Warmth of the Piarists*) (Moldován 1926).

When analysing the memoirs from 1926 of the now eighty-year-old Moldovan, I deal with the lines of an intellectual living in Romania after the First World War. He writes: "I almost wonder: how was it possible that despite the seven years in Szamosújvár and nine years in Kolozsvár, altogether sixteen years' of impact of the Hungarian culture I started my career as a Romanian writer? Where did I get the ability for this, what preserved the national feeling, the Romanian 'me' in myself, in order to realise the knowledge acquired from Hungarians for the advantage of my race? I would like to give an answer to this question now, since I watch the anniversary of the Piarists with grateful feelings."

Moldovan could rarely experience being close to his teachers, for example, in the refectory, replacing one of his supported colleagues. The text repeats the syntagm twice: "the Piarists were those who made me a man". Then he also gives us the explanation: he thanks them for his way from satisfactory to excellent grades. Thus, Moldovan's life and career covers a clear developmental path, being a school-inspector, then a university professor, a dean and rector magnificus.

According to his memoirs, the Romanian pupils attended the institution and were present in its organisations, but beside these, they were active in their own school literary and debating society, they sang at the services of the Romanian church. He was a Romanian writer during his school years in one company with Alexandru Radu and Ioan S. Bădescu. He mentions their career after school: Radu became a teacher, the editor of the periodical called *Dacia* in Romania, while Bădescu became a poet, editor, school-inspector also in Romania. By 1926 both of them had already died. Compared to them, Moldovan did not emigrate to Romania, but he stayed in Hungary and – according to his interpretation – he became a loyal citizen of his country.

The closing thoughts of his memoirs are also noteworthy: "the rise from the goose-herd, from the little shepherd to the rector's chair was by all means a beautiful rise. The way, the direction was shown to me by the Piarist fathers. In 1908 I established a foundation with 500 crowns for the literary and debating society of the school to award a valuable literary paper, in the memory of my son, István. For this, I wanted to express my gratitude to those people who had behaved like my father. I raise my hat in front of the Piarist order, the Piarist fathers, and I feel extremely happy that I could express once again my gratitude at their jubilee." (Moldovan 1926: 92)

Moldovan, who takes advantage of the different opportunities to give thanks, not only financially but also symbolically, wants to return the kindness towards him, but with this gesture he seemingly shows himself in the role of those who helped him once: he would support the pupils' literary attempts with his own foundation. He mentions his charity, plastically illustrates his rising career, and he emphasises the importance of the Piarist institution from the point of view of his own career.

Getting out of there, he is not attached to the Romanian community of the literary and debating society, but, as a Hungarian author, he has active positions in Hungarian state institutions. Taking maximal advantage of the citizen's rights and opportunities his career turns into a story of success that has an enormous importance upon him. At least, his memoirs convince us of this.

After his father's death, as well as while studying law in Kolozsvár, his education is made possible by church foundations (or foundations in the possession of the church), and this assumes a stronger denominational affection. When Moldovan emphasises his Romanian nationality, he does not refer to the modern conception of nation. This component of his identity might be legitimised only by his denominational affection, as well as the presence of Romanian culture and politics as regular topics in his Hungarian works.

The question is also worth seeing from the point of view of his family's history. Moldovan had only one son, István. He was born on 15 August, 1871, in Kolozsvár, (Szinnyei 1893-1914),⁵ studied law in Graz, Geneva and Kolozsvár, in 1894 he took his doctor's degree, while in 1896 he took his diploma as a lawyer in Budapest and in 1897 he opened a lawyer's office there. At the same time, he became cattle overseer of his lordships, Count György Bánffy (1845?–1929) and the family's legal adviser.

The young Moldovan's career was formed similarly to his father's, though under different circumstances. He had the chance to continue university studies abroad, which was a great gap in his father's education. His doctor's title was not only honorary, but a degree obtained in a specialisation. He was also a lawyer, following the steps of his father, but he kept to his chosen profession. We find him in the service of the Bánffys' even at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1907 the father spends Christmas at his son in Bánffyhunyad (Huedin) where the younger Moldovan's lawyer's office is. He died in 1908.

I have mentioned before that the younger Moldovan studies at the university of Graz at the time of the Monarchy, and he registers at the university's register in this way: "Moldovan Stephan (Moldován), nationality: ung., age: 18, place of origin: Klausenburg [the German name of Cluj], religion: römisch-katolisch [Roman Catholic], father's profession: univ. prof., entering 1889 W, leaving 1890 S, faculty: Jurist." From our point of view, this list of data has several interesting aspects.

The rectification of his name in parentheses, the national identification is aimed to legitimise that the student was Hungarian. The fact that in the register at the religion section appears "Roman Catholic" and not "Greek Catholic" (disregarding the possibility of a mistake/clerical error) can be meaningful from his father's perspective: it may have happened that the father had his son baptised not as a Greek Catholic – which indicates his ethnical affiliation, (too) – but as a Roman Catholic, which is an over-represented denomination in Hungary.

Thus, it is more convincing if one mentions the father as Gergely Moldován rather than Grigore Moldovan. On the one hand, this was the practice in Hungary at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, e.g. in the case of Vulkánu József, Eminescu Mihai or Verne Gyula. On the other hand, there were also Hungarian citizens in the country whose ethnical identity differs from the national one, and they have a certain kind of attitude to this situation. The Romanians, the Saxons, the Slovaks, etc. got to a difficult situation at the time when the nation state came into being, since according to the official Hungarian concept of nation the mother tongue and the culture that uses it became one of the crucial criteria of affiliation.

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⁵ At this time Grigore Moldovan was a law student, since he had graduated in 1872 and became a lawyer in Kolozsvár.

Thus, Moldován sees himself as a Hungarian writer; he has good relations with the Hungarian intellectuals from Kolozsvár and from Hungary but problematic ties to the Romanians. However, his case cannot be seen as a change of nationality. We cannot speak about assimilation in the case of Moldován since he is persistent to the utmost in asserting that he is a Romanian. However, his son's identity in the university registration highlights a process of assimilation. According to Moldovan's family history, we have seen that the Greek Catholic Romanian grandfather has a Greek Catholic Romanian-Hungarian son, who has a Roman Catholic Hungarian son. The changes take place on the male line, but surely these are not indifferent from the viewpoint of the family's female members. Thus, the change of nationality or the assimilation takes place in István Moldován's case.

Gergely Moldován was judged mainly by those who profess extremist political theories (Onisifor Ghibu, Ioan Slavici). He is not the only Hungarian citizen with Romanian origin in the second half of the 19th century who forms and later makes good use of his knowledge of Hungarian and his Hungarian net of relations in Hungarian state institutions. Here we can think of Iosif Vulcan who edits his periodical called *Familia* in Budapest and Nagyvárad (Oradea), or of Emanuil Gojdu/Gozsdu Manó, who is also problematic regarding his identity, and who is also condemned by his contemporaries just like Moldován. However, he could become a positive figure since with his fortune and foundation he sponsored the education of more than a hundred Romanian students.

Moldován's work starts from Romanian publications, and through Hungarian translations of Romanian folk literature and a Hungarian overview of Romanian literature and popular culture it arrives at exclusively Hungarian literary texts that thematically are always connected to Romanian culture. I think it is not practicable if one puts aside or condemns the work of life of Moldován and of the intellectuals similar to him. Interpreting his literary achievements, the ideas hiding in these, the motivations and interests moving his career are much more important since they take us closer to the consciousness of the self-identity that is difficult to understand. On the other hand, they can explain to us that what we now call a hybrid identity could be even natural at the end of the 19th century in Hungary, where in 1896 the millennial existence of the independent nation state was celebrated, though Moldován's homeland politically belonged to a dualistic regime, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The undecidedness of the Moldovan/Moldován question, understanding the identification gestures of the intellectual with Hungarian citizenship and Romanian origin requires further analyses that could start a new series of research in relationship history. As I have shown earlier, the Romanian-Hungarian attributes that in my paper are defined as features of intercultural connections, in the 19th century were less suitable for unambiguous identification, the more so since this

field of science was part of a process of institutionalisation in the 20^{th} century called relationship history, contactology or comparatistics. However, this question should be the topic of another paper.

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