

# AN OVERVIEW OF KNUT HAMSUN'S RECEPTION IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL PRINTED PRESS (1902-1989)

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## Introduction

This article presents a diachronic approach to the image of Knut Hamsun in Romania as it has been framed by the Romanian cultural printed press spanning 1902-1989 outlining the major reception phases, as well as their subsequent fluctuations. The results of this article will also be presented in a doctoral thesis entitled "The Reception of Knut Hamsun in Romania" as part of a wider Romanian-Norwegian intercultural project carried out by the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures of Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. This reception analysis is based on articles from the Romanian cultural printed press. The dynamics of translations of Knut Hamsun's work into Romanian are also considered.

## Methodological Aspects

This article provides both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of Hamsun's reception in the Romanian press during the years 1902-1989 with special attention focused on the communist era. The comments and additional information encountered in most of the printed materials studied made it necessary for the quantitative study to be followed by a qualitative one. It became essential to analyse the type of reception highlighted by the thematic issues (biographic details, bibliographic details, reviews, translations, details about the author's lifestyle, or any other comments on his work).

As a main method of documentation, three major bibliographical works have been used. Each of these covers the two main time spans investigated here: the interwar period and the communist era. Of these three works, the one coordinated by the Romanian Academy Library stands out due to its complexity. It is actually a study of the relationship between Romanian literature and all foreign literatures as published in Romanian periodicals spanning 1919-1944 in its second series. It initially covered the period 1859-1918, but that era did not seem fruitful for Hamsun (except for some short story translations). With accurate references followed by a short description for each and every article, the second series of this bibliography made it considerably easier to access the articles on this topic. Its researchers have investigated the entire body of interwar printed press so as not to skip any article pertaining to a certain literature or discussing (directly or indirectly) a foreign writer. A massive amount of work was done in order not to leave behind those articles which did not have direct reference to the writer in their title. In respect to Knut Hamsun, the bibliography reported 107 articles with direct reference to him and his oeuvre (without taking into account the translation of some of his short stories, published articles, or those articles about universal literature where his name was only listed amongst others). Such a considerable amount of articles is directly proportional to the period covered by the Bibliography – as it shall further be referred to throughout this article. In addition to the sources found in the

Bibliography, A simple search for Knut Hamsun in the periodicals section of The Digital Library of “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca revealed 52 new articles, of which 49 are from the interwar period.

When it comes to the communist period, only 7 articles were found by consulting the *Bibliografia Republicii Socialiste România. Articole din publicații periodice și seriale 1953-1989*. A potential explanation in terms of methodology would be that this bibliography, edited under communism by The State Central Library of the Socialist Republic of Romania, comprises only articles whose titles point directly to the topic (as opposed to the more thorough cross-referencing used by the previously mentioned bibliographies).

As a research method, this paper analyses three out of seven articles from the period 1969-1989 that I had direct access to after consulting all the above mentioned bibliographies. In addition, qualitative analysis on the dynamics of the reception phenomenon in the interwar period has also been done. The first series of short story translations has also been analysed in order to contextualise the interest in Hamsun in Romania.

The articles (n=251) have been either photographed or copied directly from the printed resources under documentarian supervision from two major libraries, “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca and The Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest. In analysing the articles, fragments considered most relevant have been translated here. Focus has also been put on the relevance of the source and on the position of the contributor(s) within the Romanian cultural landscape.

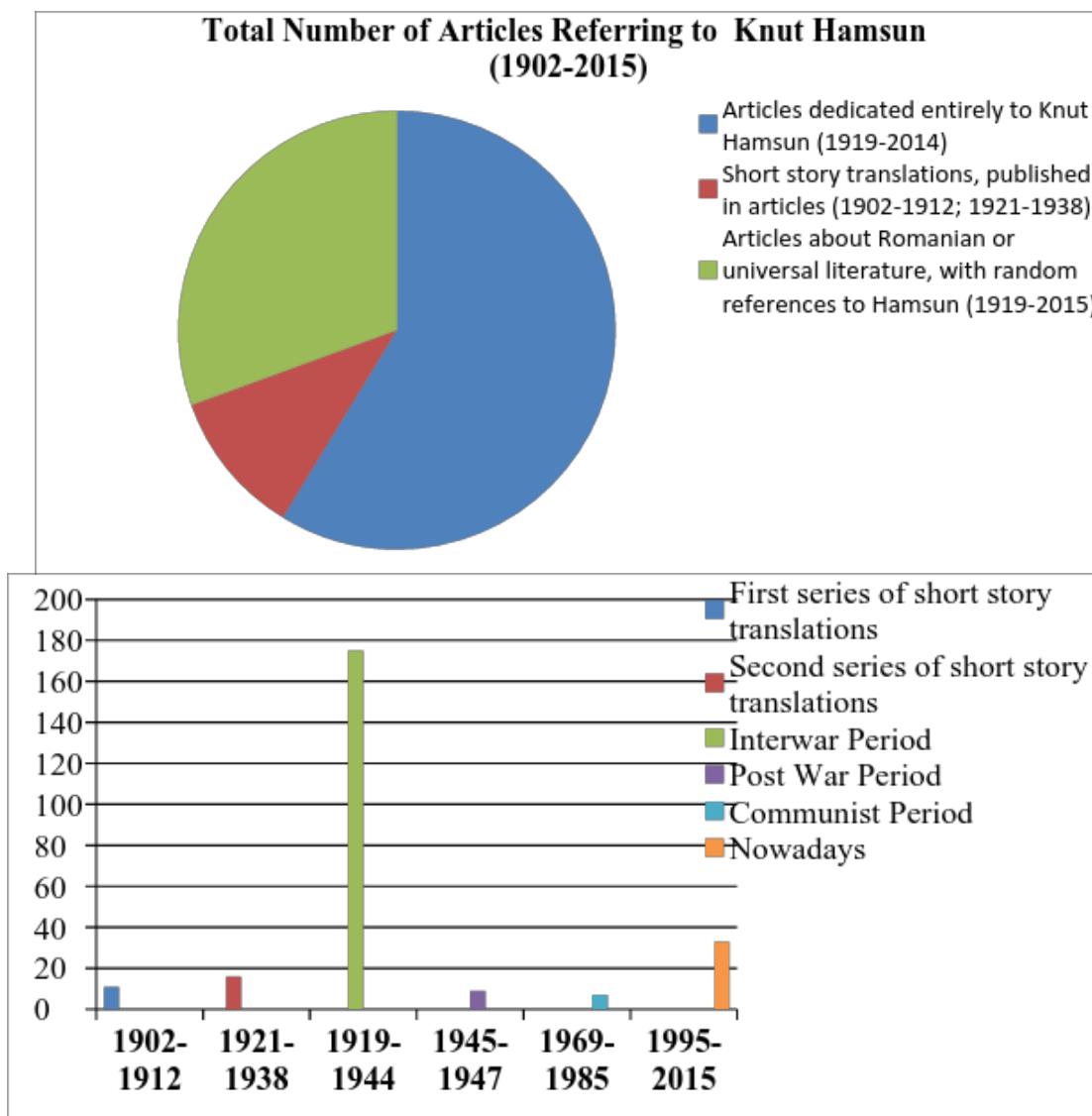
### Statistical Data

As stated in the introduction, this paper analyses articles making direct or indirect reference to Hamsun that were published in the Romanian cultural printed press between 1902-1989 with an emphasis on those published during the communist era. The research work has, up to now, revealed a total number of 251 published articles, a number by no means meant to be exhaustive. Due to the complexity of the task at hand, it is necessary to further group this plethora of articles into more delimited time spans, so as to ease the understanding of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects.

To begin with, initial references to Knut Hamsun have been done through the first series of short story translations, some of them published in excerpts, others in full text, in 11 articles spanning **1902-1912**. Secondly, the most prolific period was undoubtedly the interwar period between **1919-1944**. In this period, 175 articles were written on Hamsun. 118 of these were entirely dedicated to him. The other 57 included only passing references. Within this period, a second series of short story translations, published in 16 articles, can be framed between **1921-1938**. Thirdly, the post war period shows interest in Hamsun considerably diminished. This tendency is illustrated by 9 articles in **1945-1947**, of which only 5 make direct reference to him. Fourthly, this trend is continued during the communist era. From **1947** and all the way to **1969**, i.e. for more than twenty years, no direct or indirect reference to Knut Hamsun has been found in Romanian periodicals. The period **1969-1989** records only 7 articles, of which 1 is actually a short story translation. The period spanning **1995-2015** sums 33 articles, 19 of which are dedicated entirely to him. Even if this

time span shall not be analysed in the present paper, its relevance to the reception phenomenon makes it an important factor.

At this point of analysis, a visual support to ease the readability of the above-mentioned data is considered essential.



If one takes a closer look at the dynamics of the reception phenomenon from a chronological point of view, one notices how low the interest is after the 1940s as compared to the “Golden Age” of Hamsun’s reception in Romania during the interwar period. Further details and analyses on each period, especially the communist era, are to follow.

### **1902-1912**

According to the information revealed by the bibliographical material, Knut Hamsun appeared for the first time on the Romanian cultural stage in 1902 through translations of several short stories. These include: “The Lady from the Tivoli”

(1902), "Slaves of Love" (1902; 1910), "På Prärien" (1910), and "The Call of Life" (1910; 1911). It is indicated that the translations are either from Norwegian or from Russian, but after investigating the activity of the actual translators (Gh. D. Belinschi and Lt. Cezar Sfat) no clear connection to Norwegian literature can be traced. This issue is open to further investigation.

The first detail to be pointed out is that "Slaves of Love" came out both in 1902 and in 1910 in two different periodicals. According to the footnote accompanying the translation, it was published again in 1910 as a celebration of Hamsun's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. One encounters a similar situation with "The Call of Life". The difference here is that there is no note indicating Hamsun's birthday as a reason for republication, neither in 1910 nor in 1911. Still this short story had four reprints during the interwar period between 1930-1941, making "The Call of Life" Hamsun's most popular short story in the Romanian cultural printed press.

There were 8 other short stories published (or republished) either in excerpts or in full text in 11 articles that appeared in different periodicals in 1902-1912. However, one cannot equate these translations with a real interest in the work of Knut Hamsun only in Romania. At that time, the Norwegian writer was widely acknowledged across Europe. For example, there was an influx of translations of his work into Russian after 1900, climaxing in the years before 1910 with two parallel editions of his *Complete Works*. (Egeberg, 2009, 132, 134)

### **The Interwar Period (1919-1944)**

The period from 1919-1944 is by far the most prolific period for the reception of Knut Hamsun in Romania. Even though the translations of his novels did not reach their peak (with only 4 novels translated), the interest in his life and creation is illustrated by 175 articles, of which 118 set him in the centre. Before proceeding with a wider analysis of his image in these articles, there are a few things that must be mentioned about the 4 translations and their translators. According to the list of translations (attached as an appendix), the first novel to be translated in Romanian was *Pan*, from German, in 1920. Ion Luca Caragiale, the translator, is considered one of the greatest Romanian writers of all time. A translation of Hamsun's *Hunger* followed six years later. Ion Pas, an important figure in the interwar period, translated the novel from French. Translations of *Victoria* appeared for the first time in 1931 and *The Growth of the Soil* in 1941, but there is no reference to any contact culture mediating the translation.

A key element for the reception of an author belonging to a peripheral culture (Norwegian) in another culture of the periphery (Romanian) is the presence of a contact culture mediating the exchange, in this case German and French. This observation is in line with Franco Moretti's theory of "waves of diffusion", stated in the chapter "Conjectures on World Literature" from *Distant Reading*. He explains that usually a culture of the periphery is intersected by another one, a mainstream culture, which influences it without any intention of doing so. Furthermore, it "completely ignores it". The power to influence a peripheral culture is thus inherent in the status of any mainstream culture. (Moretti, 2013, 47-61)

If one comes back to the reception of Knut Hamsun in Romania, such an explanation may be relevant. Source literatures, like those from German and French

culture, influence the target literature, i.e. Romanian. They do it first of all through translations, which, in their turn, “alter” the cultural life. In this case, echoes of these initial translations are found in a plethora of articles published during the interwar period. The wave of German translations directly from Norwegian encountered other mainstream cultures, such as English and French. Given the poor Romanian reception of British culture, France stands out as a contact culture for Romanian research in this respect. However, French translations were also influenced by the German ones. As a result, the wave of translations spread in Romania both through French and German. As Moretti puts it, the mediation occurred easily in all three cultures (German, French and Romanian). Although the source cultures have not deliberately sought to influence the target culture, Romanians accepted and needed such a “compromise” in order to enrich their cultural horizon. (*ibid.*)

A thematic organisation of the content of the selected articles follows. In order to frame the productivity of the interwar period as clearly and concisely as possible, a diachronic approach is employed.

After the first series of short story translations is completed in 1912, no other article is written about Knut Hamsun until 1919. Hamsun’s winning of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1920 garnered 8 articles in 1919 and 1920. The first conclusion that could be drawn at this point is that the real interest for Hamsun is concomitant with his Nobel Prize, that is, the Romanian cultural press vibrated to the dynamics of the author’s evolution as presented, most probably, by the foreign press. It must be understood that during those times almost no Romanian travelled to Norway to get direct sources of information. Romanian researchers were totally dependent on the information that emerged from foreign channels, mostly Russian, French, and German.

The most frequently mentioned or reviewed novels are *Pan*, *Hunger*, and *Victoria*. Of these, *Pan* (1921-1936) and *Hunger* (1926-1943) stand out. Each received 8 reviews or commentaries published in different periodicals in the intervals indicated in parentheses. The date of the first review for both novels comes shortly after their translation. Given the fact that *Pan* was the first one translated (1920), its first review followed shortly after (1921), as compared to *Hunger* (1926). *Victoria* received only 3 reviews between 1921-1923. Other novels commented on, analysed, or reviewed are: *Chapter the Last*, *A Wanderer Plays on Muted Strings*, *Benoni*, *Wayfarers*, *In Wonderland* and *The Growth of the Soil*. While the Nobel Prize novel was given only three analyses (1921-1938), Hamsun’s travelogue *In Wonderland* raised slightly more interest with 5 analyses between 1923-1928. The most plausible explanation for this is that *The Growth of the Soil* had not been translated in Romanian by the time Hamsun was awarded the Nobel. Its first translation was done only in 1941. Following the same path, Hamsun’s travelogue was not entirely translated in Romanian. According to a 1928 article in “Patria”, only some chapters had been translated in 1928 by Ion Pas, the one who had translated *Hunger* in 1926. Previous references to the travelogue cited French sources.

Moving forward to other types of articles, one comes to the widest category, articles about Knut Hamsun’s life and work. Biographical details or quite general judgments on his work appear in no less than 40 articles. A special category of these is his 70<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1929, when Hamsun turned seventy, 12 articles

indicated the great celebration the entirety of Europe had prepared for him through the two “Festschriften”. His 80<sup>th</sup> birthday did not stir public opinion to such a degree; nevertheless, there were 3 articles celebrating it in 1939. Another category is the second series of short story translations (1921-1938) published in 16 articles. Many of them are reprints of the first series. For example “The Call of Life” was reprinted three more times between 1930-1934, although it already had been reprinted twice in the 1910s. Interestingly, there were two different translators listed on these reprints.

To sum up, bibliographical elements, coupled with primarily correct biographical data (although there are some minor inconsistencies), indicate a prolific author with a varied life experience. The only comments bearing negative connotations are in regards to the adversarial nature of Hamsun’s relationship to Henrik Ibsen. The articles which do not refer directly to him (n=57) place Hamsun in the context of universal or Norwegian literature. (Lătug, 2014, 374-386) A last observation makes reference to the authors of the articles and the importance of the periodicals where the articles have appeared. Many prolific Romanian poets, prose writers and/or translators, including D.I. Gherea, Demostene Botez, D.I. Suchianu, Eugen Jebeleanu, Ion Călugăru, Horia Vintilă, and Ovidiu Drâmba contributed in more or less specialised periodicals. Previous case studies have been partially published on three of these periodicals: “Adevărul literar și artistic” (20 articles between 1920-1935) “Rampa Nouă Ilustrată” (13 articles between 1920-1934) and “Tribuna” (6 articles between 1939-1943). Their conclusions are sketched below.

Seen in retrospect, Hamsun’s reception in the interwar period was initiated both through translations, accompanied by introductions or prefaces, and through numerous articles in periodicals. Although some of these articles are not of a very scholarly nature, they point to a Romanian interest in Hamsun. He was framed as a novel element in literature. His characteristic way of writing, using a simple but intense style, attracted the admiration of almost every journalist. His capacity of creating a distinct epic universe, apparently simplistic but in fact engaging through the power of introspection and psychological analysis, is also valued. The authentic descriptions of the northern Norwegian landscape in which he grew up and toward which he developed strong feelings of belonging, led to a mostly positive reception in Romania until 1944. (*ibid.*)

### **The Path towards Oblivion (1936-1944)**

A close reading of several interwar articles published in the Romanian cultural printed press shifts the centre of analysis from Knut Hamsun, the writer who stirred everyone through his talent, to Knut Hamsun, the still genial writer who shocks by his daily comments. The first echoes were heard in 1936 via 4 articles commenting on Hamsun’s position in the Ossietzky case. Although the echoes came one year after the Norwegian writer had published his declamatory article, they are the first to condemn his pro-Nazi attitude in Romania. As a matter of fact, these articles are in line with the first anti-Hamsun signals worldwide. This is no doubt due to the fact that information in Romania was filtered through mainstream sources in other parts of Europe.

As time passes, Hamsun continues to slip into oblivion on Romanian soil. Although 1 article in 1944 tangentially condemns the writer’s intermingling in

politics, Hamsun is only used as an example and is not the main focus of the article. The tendency here is clear, and, as we shall see, will be gradually augmented.

### **Echoes Turned into Voices (1945-1947)**

This time 5 more articles, 4 in 1945 and 1 in 1947, contain clear hints against Hamsun's Nazism. They have been closely analysed in a previous investigation about the fluctuations in Hamsun's reception in Romania. (*ibid.*) The reason for reconsidering them here is solely to place the present analysis in a wider perspective.

First and foremost, why are there so few negative echoes before 1945? The explanations bear the marks of historical transformations. Up until 1944, Romanians were on the side of the Nazis, fighting for territorial freedom. After Antonescu was arrested, Romania joined the alliance with the USSR. This decision led to the country's sovietisation and, inevitably, to the installation of communist dictatorship. (Baciu, 1990, 176-181)

It is no wonder why Hamsun was no longer allowed to be a chic writer in Romania. He was a declared Nazi, and Romanians were now fighting against them. Hence, Knut Hamsun was condemned to extinction, no matter how genial he might have been. A Nazi writer was not allowed to be a great writer in communist Romania; he was only allowed to pass into oblivion and remain there as long as dictatorship lasted.

### **Communism (1967-1985)**

There are 7 articles written about Knut Hamsun in this obscure period. Of these, 1 is only a translation of a short story. Out of these 7 articles, 3 have been chosen as relevant for analysis. Before proceeding to analyse the content of the 3 articles, one should understand the historical and political changes that affected Romania under communism. These changes are reflected in socio-cultural life and have thus influenced the reception of foreign literature. The concept of "censorship" is representative of these historical and political changes. Censorship was a common issue in every country in the Soviet sphere of influence. Romania was not an exception. Data presented here about censorship in communist Romania is taken from a 1995 case study – the first of its kind published after December 1989 – on the secret collection held by "Lucian Blaga" University Library in Cluj.

The so-called "S" (secret) collection had two periods of development until the mid-sixties. The first one (1945-1948) was shaped by the historical context of a fascist, anti-hitlerist policy. This first stage of forbidden collections began with the Decree-Law on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945. It stipulated the withdrawal from circulation of any fascist, hitlerist, or iron guard publications. As a result, publishing activity was under increased surveillance, and many books were withdrawn from libraries, bookshops, and second-hand bookshops. The sovietisation process then led to the emergence of a communist ideology, especially after March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945<sup>1</sup>. This process led to the initiation of a project of "cultural revolution" in 1947.

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<sup>1</sup> The first Communist Government in Romania, imposed by Moscow, under the leadership of Petru Groza, Prime Minister of the first Communist Party. Mihai I, Romania's monarch, was forced to abdicate in 1947.

The second stage (1948-1965) is also characterised by this secret interdiction of publications, reflecting the increasingly communist ideologisation within Romanian society. New lists of forbidden authors and works were printed in 1949. The beginning of the fifties marks an even darker period. In addition to the legislation and the forewords attached to the listings of forbidden publications, some "indications" of network were confidentially distributed. Restrictions were imposed not only on authors and titles, but also on the very structure of all library collections. One of the first of these lists of indications classified library collections into three categories: books with "forbidden topics", the collections of "documentary libraries", and "open libraries". Listings accompanied by indications reappeared during the mid-fifties. As the communist movement was consolidating itself, new indications came out in 1960. These indications were used to redefine and strengthen the content of the three library holdings by increasing their "confidential" and controlled character. In this respect, the "S" collection had a "separate and controlled nature" which further limited its accessibility. (Costea et al, 1995, 344-348)

As expected, Hamsun was censored in communist Romania. According to some imprecisely dated instructions from 1950-1955, most probably from soon after 1953, ("Instructions for the selection of books from the library" – "Instructiuni cu privire la selectarea cărților din fondul bibliotecilor"), he belongs to the list of entirely censored authors. Other authors on this list include: André Gide, Rudyard Kipling, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Cocteau, Claude Anet, André Maurois, Léon Daudet, Jacques Bainville, Léon Blum, André Malraux, Upton Sinclair, Ignazio Silone, Jean Cocteau, Antoni Ferdynand Ossendowski, Giovanni Papini, Dmitri Merejkovski. Along with these many international names, prodigious Romanian authors were also censored. These included: Elena Văcărescu, Ion Agârbiceanu, Lucian Blaga, Liviu Russ, Manuilă Sabin, Rosetti Radu, and Speranță Eugenia.

The purpose of these instructions was to sort the books within libraries and to eradicate all that was not in accordance with communist doctrine. Hamsun's works were listed in the above mentioned "documentary library" (biblioteca documentară), which was not entirely hidden as was the "forbidden library" (biblioteca interzisă). This "documentary library" included religious and historical works and all works featuring "tough content". The "documentary library" could be consulted by the scientific staff of the university and by students if they received a teacher's recommendation. Records of these books have been removed from the public file, but the books have remained in the library's storage. (Costea et al, 260-261)

Returning to the three selected articles on Hamsun, the fact that no article was published from 1947 until 1969 does not seem so striking when considering the dynamics of censorship in communist Romania. "România Literară" (Literary Romania), an important cultural and literary magazine, published this first article under communism in 1969. *Hunger* is closely analysed by Alexandru Sever, a Romanian writer and playwright of Jewish origin. (Zaciu et al, 2002, 223) He emphasises the novelty of this work. He gives a detailed analysis on the state of starvation by explaining the hero's fight to cope with it. "A man was starving and this was precisely the question: why must he starve? [...] the first serious attempt to

remain within the sphere of humanity begins with the refusal of leaving it behind.<sup>2</sup>" (Sever, 1969, 22) The author of the article provides a deep understanding of the reasons behind the hero's illogical acts. Although he has been treated as a social outcast, he still clings to a sort of integration, a self-framed acceptance, because he needs to remain among people in order to survive, in order to keep his human nature alive. "Just like another Robinson, isolated in his hunger, once thrown out of society's boundaries, one recreates it [society], but in an inner space; in order not to lose contact with humanity, its mere illusion becomes enough."<sup>3</sup> (ibid.) His fight with starvation is in fact a fight for regaining his human nature by striving to keep as much of it as he can. It is in fact a quest for identity in an estranged environment that he ultimately has to leave in order to find himself.

Hunger is more than a painful sensation. It is a moral dimension. It is the tool of alienation. [...] A starving man is a lonely man. The city, however large and populated around him, is a desert. Hunger is the generic name of the need for shelter, peace and affection.<sup>4</sup> (ibid.)

Three years pass until a new Hamsun reference occurs in the Romanian cultural printed press. The article from 1972 is in fact the Romanian translation of a well-known appreciative fragment that Henry Miller wrote about Hamsun. According to Gary Michael Dault, Miller wrote a lot about Hamsun in *The Books in My Life* and also in *Plexus*. He is also quoted in the foreword to a French pocket edition of *Mysteries*. Miller actually refers to Hamsun as "the Dickens of my generation". He calls *Mysteries* "closer to me than any other book I have read" and the "strangest" book he had ever read. He admits he once tried to write like Hamsun and failed. Nevertheless, Miller remained fascinated by the Norwegian writer, stating: "How grateful I feel that life has given me the chance to discover Knut Hamsun's work so early and to meditate on it today as when I first read it. His admirers form a vast congregation worldwide; I am only one of its members."<sup>5</sup> (Miller, 1972, 19)

Here it is interesting to note the contact culture mediating the process of information. More often than not, the original text was written in English (it belongs to Henry Miller). As it has been mentioned above, the information was used again in a French pocket edition of *Mysteries*. What happens on Romanian soil is that Romanians have approached it, either in its original version or in its French translation. As stated in the incipit of this research, Romanians were dependant on

<sup>2</sup> "Un om murea de foame și întrebarea tocmai asta era: de ce trebuie să moară de foame? [...] prima încercare serioasă de a rămâne în sfera umanității, începe cu refuzul de a o părăsi."

<sup>3</sup> "Ca un alt Robinson, izolat în foamea lui, o dată naufragiat dincolo de hotarele societății, omul o recreează, numai că o recreează într-un spațiu interior; pentru a nu pierde contactul cu umanitatea îi este suficientă chiar și iluzia ei."

<sup>4</sup> "Foamea e mai mult decât o senzație dureroasă. E o dimensiune morală. E instrumentul unei înstrăinări. [...] Un om înfometat e un om singur. Orașul, oricât de mare și de populat în jurul lui, e o sahară. Foamea e numele generic al nevoii de adăpost, de liniște și de afecțiune."

<sup>5</sup> "Cât de recunosător îi sunt vieții că mi-a permis să întâlnesc aşa devreme opera lui Knut Hamsun și să meditez astăzi asupra ei la fel ca și prima oară când am citit-o. Admiratorii săi formează de-a curmezișul lumii o vastă congregație, eu nu sunt decât unul dintre membri."

foreign sources of information. The so-called cultural “compromise” Moretti mentions was more than welcome in the sovietised Romania of the 1970s.

The year 1972 sees not only an article, but also a translation of a short story. The detail of utmost importance is that the short story has actually been translated directly from Norwegian. In fact, it is the first direct translation of a work by Hamsun in Romania, by a person who was mastering Norwegian, at least from what the ongoing research has revealed (Valeriu Munteanu knew Danish and this eased his first “direct” *Hunger* translation in 1967)<sup>6</sup>. “Fiul Soarelui” (Solens Sønn) is the title of the short story. The translation belongs to Sanda Tomescu Baciu<sup>7</sup>. It was republished in 2005 in the first anthology of Norwegian short stories in Romania, authored by her. Tomescu also translated directly one of Hamsun’s novels, *Children of the Age*, in 1989. It must be mentioned that she wrote an article in 1988, “Knut Hamsun, the Forerunner of the Modern Novel”, in which she approaches *Hunger* from the point of view of its impact on the modern novel. She also made several other contributions to Hamsun research in Romania, but these shall be analysed in further studies.

Hamsun is again mentioned by Sorin Titel in a 1982 article entitled “Soarele nordului” (The Sun of the North) in “Secolul 20” (The 20<sup>th</sup> Century), a cultural magazine edited by The Writers’ Union of the Socialist Republic of Romania. The main point in his enquiry is that Norwegian literature redefined European peasantry at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a new and uncommon understanding of human nature. Nevertheless, similarities to Russian literature are pointed out:

The Nordic novel has not only offered us a new setting, but also a new essence, an understanding of man and his drama from a so far unknown perspective. The discourse on man is bestowed with unusual accents through the books written by Knut Hamsun, Sillanpää or – more recent – Karen Blixen, although it comes, so to say, as an extension to some already known voices – we are referring once again to the great Russian writers.<sup>8</sup>  
(Titel, 1982, 262)

The article goes further by laying emphasis on Hamsun’s *The Growth of the Soil* as a masterpiece which impresses by its apparent simplicity:

<sup>6</sup> See the list of translations.

<sup>7</sup> Founder of the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in 1991. The program initiated and coordinated by prof. Dr. Sanda Tomescu Baciu started with 12 students. The number of students has significantly increased, presently registering a total of 500 graduates. She is also member of The Writers’ Union of Romania, a renowned translator with several distinctions in this field, including the latest, Eta Boeriu prize, for the translation of “Vizionare” (original title: “Visning”) by Lars Saabye Christensen. Her contribution to spreading Norwegian culture in Romania has been acknowledged through a plethora of prizes and distinctions. [http://www.norvegia.ro/News\\_and\\_events/culture/Dr-Sanda-Tomescu-Baciu-wins-Eta-Boeriu-prize-for-translation-of-Norwegian-book/#.VmIMJHYrLIU](http://www.norvegia.ro/News_and_events/culture/Dr-Sanda-Tomescu-Baciu-wins-Eta-Boeriu-prize-for-translation-of-Norwegian-book/#.VmIMJHYrLIU)

<sup>8</sup> “Romanul nordic ne-a oferit nu numai un decor nou ci și o substanță nouă, o înțelegere a omului și a dramelor sale dintr-o perspectivă necunoscută până la el. Discursul despre om capătă prin cărțile scrise de Knut Hamsun, Sillanpää sau – mai aproape de zilele noastre – Karen Blixen, accente insolite chiar dacă el vine, ca să zicem aşa, în prelungirea unor voci deja știute – ne referim din nou la mari scriitori ruși.”

When I first read Knut Hamsun's *The Growth of the Soil*, I remember being shocked by the ease, the discretion in actually celebrating both the greatness of man and nature, a nature that man was struggling with, coming out victorious in the end.<sup>9</sup> (ibid.)

A finer point he makes with respect to Hamsun concerns his political convictions, which have led the Norwegian state not to turn his ancestral home into a museum. Nevertheless, Titel's article is definitely not centred solely on Knut Hamsun. When references are made to him the aim is to frame the specificity of Norwegian literature, not to criticise his orientations in the political field. As a result, Titel arrives at the conclusion that Norwegians possess "a peasant consciousness". "It is a civilisation made by peasants."<sup>10</sup> (ibid.) Their cult for the sun has contributed to the development of a great literature.

Continuing this diachronic perspective on Hamsun's reception in communist Romania, one comes across the review for the first Romanian translation of *Chapter the Last*. The review follows shortly after the translation of the work in the same year, 1983. This review is penned by Irina Petraș, Romanian writer, literary critic, essayist, translator and editor (Zaciu et al., 2002, 692-693). She likens Hamsun's novel to Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. Taking into account the year of publication and the style, she writes: "[Chapter the Last] sketches in a phrase of remarkable suppleness, the same emotional or intellectual inflections that had exalted Thomas Mann as well."<sup>11</sup> After a professional incursion in the novel's universe, Petraș reaches the following conclusion about Knut Hamsun's writing style: "His direct, elegant prose, a natural chain linking of the author's and his characters' words, in a mixture of endless authenticity, exciting and comforting at the same time [...]."<sup>12</sup> (Petraș, 1983, 49)

A brief overview of the dynamics of Romanian translations can do much to enhance the perspective of Hamsun's image during the communist era. If one takes a closer look at the attached list of translations, 4 novels were translated during communist dictatorship: *Hunger* (1967), *Chapter the Last* (1983), *Mysteries* (1987), and *Children of the Age* (1989). Taking into account both the socio-political transformations Romania underwent and the harsh censorship and repression of the 1950s and 1960s, it is no wonder why, towards the turn of the decade when the communist regime began to shudder, the number of translations increased. The sources consulted reveal that both Valeriu Munteanu and Sanda Tomescu Baciu have made the translations directly from Norwegian. Munteanu had linguistic competence in Danish (hence the ease in approaching Hamsun in Norwegian), and Tomescu

<sup>9</sup> "Când am citit pentru prima dată *Harul Pământului*, de Knut Hamsun, în minte că am fost şocat de firescul, de discreţia cu care erau de fapt exalteate atât măreţia omului, cât şi a naturii, o natură cu care omul ducea o luptă plină de cerbicie, ieşind învingător în cele din urmă."

<sup>10</sup> "[...] o conştiinţă ţărănească. E o civilizaţie făcută de ţărani."

<sup>11</sup> "radiografiază, într-o frază de suplete remarcabilă, aceleasi inflexiuni sentimentale ori intelectuale care-1 incitaseră pe Thomas Mann."

<sup>12</sup> "Proza sa directă, elegantă, înlanțuire firească a cuvintelor autorului cu cele ale personajelor, într-un amalgam de nesfârșită autenticitate, incitantă și liniștită totodată [...]."

undoubtedly mastered Norwegian by completing her studies in Norway in 1980. These translations stand as great achievements for Romanian culture in its status as a peripheral culture.

### Concluding Remarks

This study enhances the understanding of Knut Hamsun's reception in the Romanian cultural printed press. So as to outline fluctuations in the author's reception in Romania all the way through 1989, special attention is given to the communist era in contrast to the interwar period.

The interwar period stands out as a blossoming age with respect to Knut Hamsun and his writings. A plethora of reviews, commentaries, and biographical articles were published by renowned names within the Romanian cultural life of the time. French and German were the mainstream cultures bridging Romanian-Norwegian intercultural exchanges. In contrast, the analysis of Knut Hamsun's reception in communist Romania was based on a small sample of relevant articles belonging to an already restricted corpus. This lack of material suggests a significant low ebb in interest in Hamsun, that was clearly influenced by the socio-political transformations occurring at the time. Despite this gap in the scholarship, the findings show that the information delivered was both relevant and comprehensive. Furthermore, the translations of Hamsun's oeuvre, though few in number, were made directly from Norwegian, instead of being mediated through the contact cultures of French or German.

As one comes closer to the present, a clear augmentation of interest in Knut Hamsun in the Romanian cultural press is noticed. The liberty of the press, subsequent to the fall of communism in December 1989, turned Knut Hamsun into an attention-grabbing subject once again. A trickle of reprints, articles in academic journals, and new translations heralded this return. The foundation of the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures in 1991 has resulted in various academic studies on Hamsun's authorship, most of them conducted by the renowned Romanian professor and Hamsun translator, Sanda Tomescu Baciu. Potential areas of future research could consist of analysing the bachelor theses concerning Hamsun, coordinated by professor Tomescu, or the lectures on Hamsun held by the many Norwegian professors visiting The Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures in Cluj. Overall, these results indicate a strong revival in the reception of Knut Hamsun in modern Romania. This new perspective has brought Hamsun's reputation out of the stagnation in which it had existed for several decades and opened the door for further studies in this field.

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The list of translations has been adapted from the one published by Sanda Tomescu Baciu in the article: “Knut Hamsun, The Artist and the Wanderer” in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Philologia*, vol. 55, no. 2, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Presa Universitară 2010.

In those cases where the contact language is not indicated, it has not been mentioned by the Romanian translation either.

**Summary:**

This paper outlines major directions in the reception of Knut Hamsun in the Romanian cultural printed press. The research is based on a plethora of articles in Romanian cultural periodicals spanning the years 1902–1989. The results shall be encompassed in a doctoral thesis on the same subject. The structure of the paper follows a chronological overview of the phases of his reception. Because the interwar period has been discussed in detail in other previous papers, focus shall be put on the communist era. The first oscillations occur between the years 1940–1947. As a result of the Stalinist regime, Hamsun is only portrayed in terms of his political views. Communism thus reduces his authorship to a minimum. A renewed interest emerges in the 1980s through a new series of translations and articles. This interest is then compounded with the founding of the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures in Cluj in 1991 and continues to the present. Articles from all of these time periods are evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively to acquire a holistic image of how Hamsun is received by Romanian culture.

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Reception Phases, Interwar Period, Communism, Oscillations, Nazism.