

I. FONDAMENTS

EUGEN SIMION: *EXEGI MONUMENTUM*

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Abstract:

This text is a reminder that October marks one year since the passing of Professor Academician Eugen Simion, a prominent figure in Romanian culture. The article pays tribute to the efforts and achievements of Eugen Simion’s work and legacy, exemplified by the verses of the Latin poet Horace, “*exegi monumentum aere perennius*”. It highlights the significant contributions of this exceptional personality of Romanian culture and literature, emphasising Eugen Simion’s reputation as one of the most esteemed literary critics and historians, essayists and theorists in the field of literature. He is considered the (theoretical) founder of biographical genres (journals, correspondence, memoirs). His activity as an editor, preface writer, author of monographs and promoter of national-scale projects yielded important results, including *Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române* ‘The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature’ (DGLR, two editions), *Cronologia vieții literare românești 1944 – 2012* ‘The Chronology of Romanian Literary Life 1944 – 2012’ (CVLR, 60 volumes) and the facsimile reproduction of Eminescu’s manuscripts (notebooks) (38 volumes). A university professor and member of the Romanian Academy and president of this high forum between 1997 and 2006, Eugen Simion also became a member of seven other academies in the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Greece, Moldova, Spain and Serbia. Some of his books and studies were translated in Belgium, Switzerland, France, Germany, the United States, Serbia and Hungary. The unexpected loss of Professor Eugen Simion left a vast literary project unfinished, deprived now of the infectious energy and enthusiasm of its initiator. These projects are currently being continued and completed by researchers at the “G. Calinescu” Institute of Literary History and Theory of the Romanian Academy, where Eugen Simion served as director.

Key words:

Eugen Simion, literature (criticism, essay, literary theory), personality, European Academies, literary projects, fundamental works.

I. 18 October marked one year since the passing of the Professor Academician Eugen Simion into eternity. Despite his departure from the real world, the image of the Professor continues to shine in the sky of our memories, with the brightness of a polestar.

1. In a speech delivered at the beginning of this year, on National Culture Day, the President of the Romanian Academy, Academician Ioan-Aurel Pop, wanted to remind everyone that over a decade ago Eugen Simion was the initiator of the official celebration¹ of Mihai Eminescu's birthday (15 January) as the "astral day of Romanians". The Professor would have turned 90 in the third decade of May 2023.

2. The irreparable sadness caused by the fact that the honouree was not among his friends and admirers was mitigated by the cultural and scientific events organised to honour his memory. The Romanian Academy, the National Foundation for Science and Art, "G. Calinescu" Institute of Literary History and Theory, the magazine "Caiete critice", the National Museum of Romanian Literature, the Academy Library and the "Eugen Simion" Cultural Centre in Dumbrăveni (Suceava) paid their deserved respects².

¹ The Romanian Parliament (legislative process at the Chamber of Deputies) passed Law no. 238/7 Dec. 2010 regarding the declaration of 15 January as the Romanian Culture Day, published in the Official Gazette no. 831/13 Dec. 2010.

² Organised jointly, but also as separate scientific and cultural events, the proceedings of 25-26 May were opened with a festive assembly held in the auditorium of the high Forum of science and culture. The great departed was evoked by Ioan Aurel Pop, president of the Romanian Academy, Thierry de Montbrial, member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (France), Academician Mircea Martin, honorary member of the Romanian Academy, His Eminence Ioan Robu, academician, honorary member of the Romanian Academy, Lucian Romaşcanu, Minister of Culture, Prof. Dr Ioan Cristescu, director of MNLR, Ioan Pavăl, mayor of the commune of Dumbrăveni (Suceava). The evocations and interventions continued at the FNSA headquarters, with such speakers as Jean-Jack Askenasy, honorary member of the Romanian Academy (Israel), Sorin Alexandrescu, honorary member of the Romanian Academy, Academician Mihai Cimpoi, Academician Valeriu Matei, the writer Virgil Tănase (France). Over the course of the two days, "G.

3. On Romanian Language Day, 31 August, under the now well-known title *Eugen Simion 90*, the great figure of culture was honoured in Chişinău (Republic of Moldova) by Romanians from both sides of the Prut River. Academicians Mihai Cimpoi, Mircea Martin, Valeriu Matei, poet Ion Hadârcă and Ioan Pavăl, the mayor of Dumbrăveni commune (Suceava), contributed to the event. On that occasion, the monograph *Eugen Simion, om al întregului cultural*, written by Mihai Cimpoi and Eugen Simion, *Texte despre Basarabia*, edited by the same Mihai Cimpoi, were launched.

4. This year, on 28 and 29 September, the National Foundation for Science and Art (FNSA), the Romanian Academy, the French Institute, the French Institute of International Relations, the Royal Academy of Economic and Financial Sciences - the Institute of Spain, in partnership with Bucharest City Hall and the National Museum of Romanian Literature (MNLR), organised the 20th edition of the Symposium *Penser L'Europe (Penser L'Europe, Penser Le Monde. Séminaire dédiée à la mémoire du Professeur Acad. Eugen Simion)*. The event, held at the FNSA headquarters, focused on the man who was the soul of these meetings, Academician Eugen Simion, who, together with Thierry de Montbrial and Academician Maya Simionescu, launched the vast project *Să gândim Europa (Penser l'Europe)*³.

Calinescu” Institute of Literary History and Theory organised *Colocviul Eugen Simion – modelele criticii literare*, with international participation, during which the forty reports were delivered by professors and researchers from major university centres (Bucharest, Cluj, Iaşi) and from abroad (University of Calabria, Italy). *Sala de lectură “Eugen Simion”* (“Eugen Simion” Reading Room) was inaugurated at the Academy Library. The materials available to readers (usual library) come from Eugen Simion’s personal library, with volumes donated by his daughter, Prof. Dr Mihaela Constantinescu from the University of Bucharest. The journal “*Caiete critice*”, whose founding director was Eugen Simion, devoted a 180-page triple issue to him. On 15 June 2023, the scholar’s figure was the theme of the Colloquia organised at the “Eugen Simion” Cultural Centre in Dumbrăveni.

³ Professor Eugen Simion believed that the duty of the prominent intellectuals of this country is to meditate on Romania’s advances towards Europe, a tradition which gave rise to what the European friends of the Foundation referred to as “Clubul de la Bucureşti” (“The Bucharest Club”). The topics chosen covered issues of morality, metaphysics, reflection and dialogue on the future of Europe. The large international attendance and the prestige of the invited personalities turned *Penser l'Europe* into the most important Romanian academic event. The Club’s annual meetings gathered academicians and great scholars such as Thierry de Montbrial (France), Jaime

5. To commemorate the one-year anniversary of the departure of Eugen Simion, the journal DICE (*Diversité et Identité Culturelle en Europe*) dedicates its October issue to him in the form of a commemorative feature. Other texts, primarily related to the work of the great scholar, are due to appear in the December issue of RITL (“Revista de Istorie și Teorie Literară”), which reserves a substantial number of pages for him. The publication was edited by the Institute led by Acad. Eugen Simion from 2007 until his death on 18 October 2022. Therefore, the events, commemorative activities and scientific sessions carried out throughout 2023 attest, without the need for further arguments, to the constant appreciation shown to the great scholar. In other words, all of the above represents a sum of the acknowledgements that this “model of existence” called Eugen Simion has always enjoyed: admiration shown for a life lived with dignity and without compromises; passion for his work and the spirit that animated it, exemplifying personal devotion to work and truth⁴. Among other things, Professor Simion’s proverbial severity aimed at an aspect invoked in various contextual situations, concerning our Adamic destiny⁵, a painful truth on which we must, once and for all, decide: “The truth is that we must abandon this tradition, if it is a tradition, and follow the one that teaches us that the intellectual energies of a nation should not be squandered. Otherwise, as Maiorescu said in an aphorism that we often repeat but systematically forget,

Gil Aluja (Spain), Geronimo Moscardo (Brazil), Jacques de Decker (Belgium), Jean Askenasy (Israel), Radivoje Konstantinovic (Serbia), Mohamed Laichoubi (Algeria), Mihai Metzeltin (Austria), Joaquim Gironella Coll (Spain), Serge Fauchereau and Virgil Tănase (France), Gisele Vanhese (Italy); among the outstanding personalities of the Romanian Academy and of Romania, we can mention Academician Ioan-Aurel Pop, Monsignor Ioan Robu, Academician Răzvan Theodorescu, Academician Alexandru Zub, Prof. Petre Roman, Academician Bogdan Simionescu, Academician Cristian Hera, Academician Valeriu Ioan Franc and so on.

⁴ Eugen Simion’s motto was: “I would like people to say about me: here is a man for whom the truth exists”.

⁵ “Poets justified our ‘Adamic’ vocation through the metaphysical fibre. We are all of a sudden, right in the midst of the struggle, possessed by a cosmic idleness and eventually the feeling of uselessness weighs us down. And then we leave the church walls unfinished until some Negru Vodă appears with a group of craftsmen and starts the work all over again” (*Analele Academiei Române*, 1997 *Proiecte fundamentale ale Academiei Române (Anexa 2, p. 97.)*).

‘we will consume the block of marble to make caricatured figures, and we will no longer have sufficient material or time to free the body of the goddess from the amorphous matter’, that is, the fundamental work”⁶. We cannot find a more fitting analogy or equivalence, more fully meaningful, for this unjustly unexpected posthumousness than the Horatian verse: *exegi monumentum aere perennius*⁷.

II. Some may argue that these carefully chosen moments and events have had (almost) no relevant echo in the mass media, social media or online information networks that determine the agenda of our daily lives. The reality is more complex and unfortunately dramatic, as our media consistently and regretfully confuse two terms, celebrity⁸ and personality, false and true elites⁹.

1. Giving almost exclusive priority to events associated with *delirium* and sensational incidents that saturate the social space with tragic news or macabre facts, the public information industries preferentially cultivate celebrity with the use of Botox-like injections (read: *advertising*). However, true celebrity, in the correct understanding of the synonym attributed to this notion, is on the verge of disappearing. None of the responsible factors in this vital field of national-scale communication seem to be bothered by the fact that celebrity is the ephemeral attribute of fleeting audiences and models, as long as it brings profit. Since the contribution of elites and the status of their celebrity only represent a factor of prestige, the media has established a general rule to ignore personalities from the spheres of culture, science, medicine, economics, whose exceptional accomplishments provide a credible

⁶ *Idem*, p. 98.

⁷ Horațiu, *Ode*, III, 30, 1. (i.e., ‘I have built a monument more lasting than bronze’).

⁸ Celebrity draws attention by bringing to the foreground the luxurious lives, successes/gains or disappointments of artists, singers, representatives of major sports, people from the fashion industry or from advertisement, online influencers or other human *species*, such as the ill-famed or the ‘book of records’ type of success hunters, all of whom generically referred to as “stars”.

⁹ In this regard, see the interview given by the Academician Ioan Aurel Pop, president of the Romanian Academy, to the “Lumina” newspaper, 1 Oct. 2023: “Fără educație riscăm barbarizarea” (i.e., without education we risk barbarisation).

and, one could say, necessary alternative to the (always dishevelled) image displayed here.

2. The media show no interest in perpetuating national culture and identity, in nurturing the literary language and our “image” in front of other peoples. Far from becoming ephemeral, fungible or airy, the status of elites, in other words, of personalities, consolidates its position and value in the immortality of space and time, which might be a good definition of our national (cultural, artistic, scientific) heritage, with a view towards universality. Eugen Simion belonged to this category, we repeat, even during his lifetime, and that is precisely why we considered it necessary to make a clear distinction between *renown* and *celebrity*, the latter being intensively publicised in today’s acultural society.

3. Eugen Simion’s personality was characterised by a distant but sunny affability. When he spoke in public, where he was rarely invited, in radio-cultural and television shows, Eugen Simion’s elitism was displayed through firm attitudes, never wavering, with the speaker always animated by an interest in the general welfare. The tone of his discourse was calm and affable, revealing self-control, punctuated by eloquent pauses, followed by judgements of a moralising nature that targeted the state of affairs in culture, society and the politics of our contemporary governors. In his habitual behaviour, one constant was his fair, impartial judgement, sometimes sharp but sincere towards the interlocutor. Eugen Simion’s actions and “writing” left a strong impression everywhere: among collaborators in the institutions he led and those who had the opportunity to meet him at congresses, conferences, colloquia and similar gatherings, where they could admire the clarity of his ideas, the critical judgements and the originality of the assertions made in his endeavours. The same sentiment was shared by many others, audiences and spectators from the large anonymous family of literature lovers, because it was in the pages of his books that they found the favourable environment for nurturing the most inventive ideas, spreading like travelling seeds through spores.

III. Numerous examples, gathered from the cultural fields in which he manifested himself, support this evidence: no fewer than three generations of students listened to his lectures as a professor, both in the country and abroad¹⁰, during the half-century he served the Bucharest *Alma Mater*; the four volumes of *Scriitori români de azi*¹¹ are equivalent to a history, the first one of Romanian literature from the period 1944-1989. The volumes of literary criticism and history written between the 1970 and 1980 include the great writers in exile (Eliade, Ionescu, Cioran).

1. Eugen Simion was a literary critic and a historian of the highest prestige¹², a theoretician¹³, an editor¹⁴, a creator of literary monographs¹⁵ and anthologies of texts¹⁶, an essayist¹⁷, a memoirist, an author of diaries¹⁸, which he established among the (literary) genres of biography. His most valuable

¹⁰ He was a Romanian language lecturer at the Université Paris IV Sorbonne between 1970 and 1973, and, from 1992, a visiting professor at the École Normale Supérieure de Paris (Fontenay-aux-Roses). In 1974 he earned a scholarship in the Federal Republic of Germany.

¹¹ *Scriitori români de azi*, Editura Cartea Românească, (I – 1974, II – 1977, III – 1983, IV – 1989); followed by many reissues, the latest one dated 2020, printed by Cartea Românească as well; *Dimineața poezilor* (1980, 1996, 1998, 2000); *Secolul al XIX-lea în doi chibzuți și un vizionar mistic: Nicolae Bălcescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Ion Ghica* (2020).

¹² He was a five-time winner of the literary criticism prize awarded by Uniunea Scriitorilor (Writers' Union).

¹³ *Întoarcerea autorului* (1981, 1993, 2005); *Genurile biograficului*, (2002, 2006); *Ficțiunea jurnalului intim*, (I-III, 2001).

¹⁴ Mihai Eminescu, *Proză literară* (1964, in collaboration with Flora Șuteu), Mihai Eminescu, *Poezii* (1991), E. Lovinescu, *Scrieri*, vol. I-IX (1969-1982), Lucian Blaga, *Ce aude unicornul* (1975), Mircea Eliade, *Proză fantastică*, vol. I-V (1991-1992), Tudor Vianu, *Cunoașterea de sine*, (1997, 2000), G. Călinescu, *Fals jurnal*, 1999, *Nichita Stănescu, Opere* (2002).

¹⁵ *Eugen Lovinescu, scepticul mântuit* (1971), *Posteritatea critică a lui Lovinescu* (Tracus Arte, 2017), *Mircea Eliade, un spirit al amplitudinii* (1994, 2001), *Mircea Eliade, nodurile și semnele prozei* (2005), *Tânărul Eugen Ionescu* (2006, 2009), *Ion Creangă, cruzimile unui moralist jovial* (2011), *Cioran, o mitologie a desăvârșirilor* (2014), Alexandru Odobescu. *Un romantic erudit și anxios, iubitor de reverie clasicizante* (2022).

¹⁶ *Portretul scriitorului îndrăgostit. Marin Preda* (2010), *Recurs la natură*, 2022.

¹⁷ *Moartea lui Mercurio* (1993), *Fragmente critice* (8 vol. 1997 - 2000, 2022), *Recurs la natură* (2022).

¹⁸ *Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii. Jurnal parizian*, 1977 (ed. a VII-a, def. 2019), *Sfidarea retoricii. Jurnal german*, 1986 (ed. a II-a, def. 2019), *Un jurnal intim de acum patru decenii (Jurnal danez)* (Caiete critice”, nr.-ele 11, 12 (2008) - 1-3, 4 (2009).

contributions in the fields of literary theory and criticism have been translated into other cultures¹⁹.

2. Last but not least, he was a coordinator of school textbooks, a coordinator and a preface writer of editions²⁰, an architect of international events. The *Penser l'Europe* and *Pleiade* Collection are cogent certifications and so are other major projects (*Dicționarul general al literaturii române* (DGLR), *Cronologia vieții literare românești 1944-2012* (CVLR), *Caietele Eminescu*, see note 12 *infra*), initiated by the great late professor. Eugen Simion's work is so vast that many wonder when the Professor ever found the time to create it. The answer was given on one of his anniversaries, when he stated: "Every day I do a lot of things, all of which come down to one: literature!". When choosing the topics of the first *International Colloquium*²¹

¹⁹ *Imagination and Meaning. The Scholarly and Literary Worlds of Mircea Eliade* (The Seaburg Press, New York, 1982, co-author), *Élmények kora, vallomások kora. Párizsi napló* (1983), *Die Mitte der Welt: Aufsätze zu Mircea Eliade* (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1984, co-author), *The Return of the Author* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, SUA, 1996), *Le Retour de l'Auteur* (L'Ancrier Editeur, France, 1996), *Mircea Eliade: A Spirit of Amplitude* (East European Monographs, Boulder, Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 2001), *Mircea Eliade, romancier* (Éditions Oxus, Paris, 2004), *Umoranje demon teorije* (Apostrof-Rading, Belgrad, 2004), *Le Jeune Eugène Ionesco* (Editions L'Harmattan, Paris, 2013), *Cioran, une mythologie de l'inachevé* (Editions Le Soupirail, Paris, 2016), *Rumunski Egzistencijalizam* (Filip Visnjic, Belgrad, 2016), *Mladi Eugen Ionesko* (Novi SAD, Serbia, 2018), *Cioran* (Novi SAD, Serbia, 2019).

²⁰ Coordinator of the *Opere fundamentale*, in *Pléiade* format. Launched in 2000, this collection currently includes 300 volumes (complete critical editions by Romanian writers). To an overwhelming extent, the introductory studies, prefaces etc. to these volumes are signed by Eugen Simion; coordinator and partly author of *Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române* (1st edition vol. I-VII, 2nd edition, revised, enlarged and updated I-VIII vol.), compiled by the institutes of research of the Romanian Academy; coordinator of the project regarding the complete facsimile reproduction of *Mihai Eminescu's Manuscripts* (2004-2009, 38 vol.); coordinator of *Cronologia vieții literare românești* (1944-2012) 60 volumes published so far, printed by CVLR 2001-2012); coordinator and partly author of the *Enciclopedia literaturii române vechi*, București, 2018; coordinator of the Project *Caietele (manuscrite) Eminescu* (38 facsimile volumes).

²¹ The Colloquium *Eugen Simion-modelele criticii românești*, 25-26 May 2023, organised by the "G. Calinescu" Institute of Literary History and Theory in partnership with the Romanian Academy, the Philology and Literature Department, The Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, The Romanian Academy Library and the "Eugen Simion" Cultural Centre (Dumbrăveni).

dedicated to the personality of the great man of culture, it was necessary to abandon some of the thematic areas that were among his constant concerns. These are to be the subjects of future *Colloquia*, which will take place every two years.

IV. The critical reception of Eugen Simion's work also contains a plethora of references, among which an expressive "word self-portrait" stands out, emerging from the strokes of his 3,000 articles, reviews and critiques that bear his signature. From within them, as well as from his published work, one can see the unmistakable portrait of this personality coming out. In addition to the images in the "mirror" of the Parisian, Berlin and Danish *Journals*, several tens of thousands of pages with *Journal* entries - known only very little and fragmentarily (therefore, not yet integrated into the metabolism of our literary life!) - are eagerly expected by the literati, who show signs of being unable to contain their curiosity.

V. In addition to the above, which is but natural in this respect, several monographs²² and homage volumes²³ were published during Eugen Simion's lifetime, ranging from the one written by Andrei Grigor to the impressive tome signed by Mari Diaconu. It is no wonder that, even during his lifetime, a statue was erected in the town of Dumbrăveni, where, in 2019, the *Eugen Simion Cultural Centre* was inaugurated. The merits are real and gather, to a not insignificant extent, reactions of hostility (envy, pleasure in seeking flaws, the cruelty of competition in the post-communist cultural space, the interest in standing out by attacking someone of great stature, personal medical issues,

²² Andrei Grigor, *Eugen Simion* (2000), *Eugen Simion: Vertical într-o lume agitată* (Chișinău, 2005), Vida Marinescu: *Eugen Simion sau excelența spiritului critic*, I-II (2009), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* (2007, 2020), Mihael Cimpoi, *Modelul de existență Eugen Simion* (2013), Marin Diaconu, *Eugen Simion – profil spiritual* (2014).

²³ *Manual de trudire a cuvântului: Eugen Simion '70* (ed. Nicolae Iliescu, 2003), *Eugen Simion '75* (ed. Lucian Chișu, Mircia Dumitrescu, 2008), *Eugen Simion '80* (ed. Lucian Chișu, Gheorghe Chivu, Andrei Grigor, 2013), *Eugen Simion. La ceasul împlinirii supreme* (Ed. Tracus Arte, 2018).

post-communist slandering of all kinds, and, hard to believe, the injustice of laws or the sometimes abortion of justice in the society we live in).

1. The cultural contributions and the value of his scientific works were widely recognised not only in the country but also abroad. He was a member of numerous scientific and cultural forums: the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences of France, the Academy of Athens, the Royal European Academy of Doctors in Barcelona (Spain), the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, the European Academy (London) and the Academy of Science and Art of Serbia. Among the numerous distinctions he received, we shall only mention the following: The National Order of the “Star of Romania” in the rank of “Grand Cross”; the Legion of Honour of France, in the rank of Officer; the Brazilian Order of “The Southern Cross”; the Gold Medal offered by the President of the Republic of Serbia.

VI. His merits, unanimously recognised in the field of literature and culture, are extended with those of a high-ranking government official who held public office. A topic like *Eugen Simion la Academia Română* (‘Eugen Simion at the Romanian Academy’) is currently absent from the approaches of contemporaries. Initially, we thought that investigating this new field of activity would keep us close to the paths already frequented - literary history and criticism, biographism - but these represent only a small part of the content of the Annals of the Romanian Academy, in which the major events organised or sponsored by the Romanian Academy are recorded day by day. The presence of the Professor among those considered immortal (through their work in their field of activity) was not purely decorative but, rather, left “traces” in history, with many direct consequences in the life of the highest scientific and cultural institution of the country. The extent of Professor Eugen Simion’s activity, in his capacity as an academician, then as the head of the Department of Philology and Literature, as the vice-president of the Romanian Academy, a role changed for two and a half terms into that of president of the high institution, could constitute the occasion for an extensive study entitled *Eugen Simion – om al faptei* (‘Eugen Simion - a man of action’).

VII. One final precaution: in the view of the foregoing, it is possible for the future reader to identify me as one of Professor Simion's zealots. I assure you as of now that this is not the case. My relationship with Professor Eugen Simion was far from smooth, on the contrary, it began almost as a conflictual one and, over the course of more than three decades, alongside numerous opportunities for intellectual satisfaction, it had its moments of tension, which does not prevent me from evoking his exceptional cultural "gifts" and paying this sincere homage to him.

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