

THE FORERUNNERS

ALEXANDRU MACEDONSKI (1854-1920)
and the *Literatorul (Literature Maker) Magazine (1880-1920)*.
The Modern Spirit. The New Aesthetics. Symbolism.
Eugen Lovinescu and the Theory of Synchronism.
Urmuz (1883-1923). The De-construction of Language
and Literature. The Eruption of the Absurd

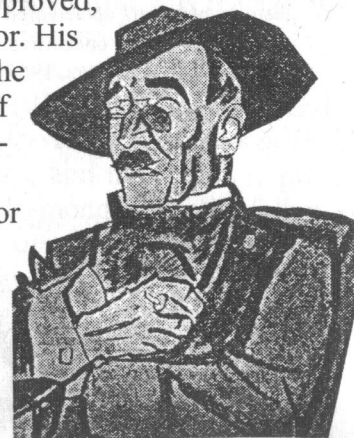
The end of the 19th century and even the beginning of the 20th century were dominated by Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889). He was called “the last great European Romantic”, and his work is actually a repertoire of the Romantic aesthetics: emphasis on the determined; a rhetoric of the poetic discourse often built on antithesis; refuge in history. He was one of those creators who both open the way for the others that come to literature after him, and closes it to similar experiences. With Eminescu, the Romanian poetic language had been established. Now it could go further.

Alexandru Macedonski was the man who took that task upon himself. A very interesting poet and very important to Romanian literature, but one who had the bad luck to be a contemporary of Eminescu and of his immediate posterity. He is of the family of poets who build themselves. Sometimes this is done against their own nature. Attached, through his soul, to traditional values, he is taken, by his own poetic mind, toward other horizons. **Modernism made its entrance in Romania through the personality and work of Alexandru Macedonski.**

In his magazine, *Literatorul*, Macedonski proved, especially in theory, to be a tremendous innovator. His subjects: the enlargement of the poetry domain, the complexity of the modern soul, the value of words in poetry, symbolism, and instrumentalism.

Following the spirit of his time, he demands for poetry the right to mix beauty with ugliness. In his vision, a poem “is a chaos of spirit and matter, of crying out in distress and of mad laughter.” “From the sublime to trivia, this is what should be done.” The Romanian poet is always in the footsteps of Baudelaire,

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who described these to be part of the realm of beauty: “the transitory, the furtive, the contingent,”¹ and who spoke of modern heroism and beauty.²

In an environment dominated by tradition, hostile to any innovation suspected of corrupting the original soul, Alexandru Macedonski, like a new Don Quixote, undertakes a tough battle in the name of modernist ideas. He is the first to present the symptom that modernism mostly begets: **consciousness precedes creation**. Edgar Allan Poe’s *Philosophy of Composition* arouses the talent of Baudelaire; and the thoughts of Rimbaud on poetry (see his correspondence) precede his poetry; equally, Marinetti’s poetic texts are illustrations of his own theoretical position. Poetry becomes a “form of culture”. It opposes to the classic reason and to the Romantic sensitivity, to discourse and to feeling, its own creative approach, justified by itself. Preceding creation, consciousness cannot, however, be separated from it. These are the two sides of creation that have to be considered together. Sometimes it goes so far that theoretical texts (manifestos, programs, the texts on the “poetic art”) have no equivalent in the creation proper, or they are based on it. **Meta-literature begins to take over literature**.

A creative character, Alexandru Macedonski boasts to be the first in Europe to use free verse, which he calls “symphonic” or “Wagnerian,” he manages to homologate in France the invention of the “mother-of-pearl paper”, uses colored writing, thus putting into printing practice Baudelaire’s *Correspondences* and the synesthesia suggestions of Rimbaud’s *Voyelles* (*Vowels*). In his literary circle, Macedonski acts like the king of poetry, and offers his disciples, at the end of an initiatory ritual, (counterfeit) precious stones of his own making. The pages of *Literatorul* and the circle bearing the same name hosted many poets who later became important names of modern poetry in Romania. Symbolism was making its entrance in Romanian literature and it responded better, at least for a while, to the expectations of the new generations of poets. The new aesthetics fought against imitation (*mimesis*), against bad taste, against familiarity with life and with the reader’s taste, actually, **against the reader**. At the beginning of the century, Macedonski was, of course, considered a representative of modernism in Romania, because there are many verses of his work that had already been published by 1899 in Marinetti’s *Poesia* magazine of (1909). When the young Tristan Tzara – who signed Samyro at the time – , Ion Vinea and Marcel Iancu, who definitely wanted to pass as innovators and reformists, founded their own magazine in 1912, they called it *Simbolul* (*The Symbol*). Even later, at the zenith of the avant-garde adventure, the representatives of that movement kept intact their admiration for certain symbolists, among whom Ion Minulescu³. With him, symbolism definitely enters into Romanian literature, but its practice becomes impossible and obsolete because Minulescu had already unveiled the mechanics of symbolist poetry. His courageous acts made the avant-garde admire him: that admiration was manifest on several occasions. A note published in the first issue of *Integral*

welcomes his new book this way: “Mr. Ion Minulescu is to the Romanian new generation what Guillaume Apollinaire was to the French new generation.” Tudor Arghezi⁴ is also a “master,” admired by the avant-garde. In fact, in his small but notorious magazine, *Bilete de papagal* (*Parrot Tickets*), almost all future futurists published their work.

Note, also, for the cultural environment of the time, the contribution of literary critic Eugen Lovinescu⁵. He endorsed the theory of the synchronization of cultures, and that placed him close to the positions of the avant-gardes, which he made favorable comments about. The *Sburatorul* magazine (1919-1922; 1926-1927) and the literary circle bearing the same name, which actually took over from Macedonski’s circle, were the peaks of the Romanian modernism.