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The inheritance of Ioan Alexandru The Hymns of Transylvania

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Abstract

As an angelic heritage left to the Romanian people for the glory of God, Ioan Alexandru renews the holy covenant of men with God. The poet's intent is to honor and praise the homeland together with his brave heroes fallen in the line of duty to defend the Romanian soul and the future generations. The patriotic belief of Ioan Alexandru is equalled only by the greatness with which the poet has so naturally expresses unique feelings of glory and gratitude.

Keywords

Transylvania, village, homeland, history, hymns

I. Introduction

The Hymns of Transylvania (written in 1976) strengthen the idea and intent of the poet Ioan Alexander of praising and recalling his ancestors and motherland. Being the successor of so many impressive historical figures, Ioan Alexandru writes and remembers especially of the fallen heroes on duty and brings them a last tribute through the beautiful evocations.

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The poet has a primordial duty towards these heroes, and history remains alive in the human soul, only if it is metaphorically lived through the beautiful hymns dedicated to his precious homeland.

The poems of the volume contain powerful messages of evoking styles and its impressive number of pages denotes the fact that Ioan Alexandru has a strong patriotic sense and at the same time, an unstoppable thirst in imposing this unique feeling in the hearts of men.

Having so much value and consideration for Transylvania, the poet calls the land “*the right hand of my soul*”¹, or “*the crown on the head of the Groom*”². The poet attributes Transylvania the status of God, the living source of history, the people chosen by him to live forever.

Ioan Alexandru follows the traditionalist lineage of his predecessors and in the whole volume we encounter serious tones, “*of an excessive traditionalism [...]*”³.

Like mentioned before, the volume is made up of so many beautiful and significance poems, and in the following, we will try to point out and explain some of the most impressive and beautiful hymns which are to be found in the volume *The Hymns of Transylvania*.

I. The Hymn of Lamb⁴

Following the other volumes of hymns, Ioan Alexandru makes use again of biblical symbols. In the hymn dedicated to the lamb, the Son of God is described as the savior of the nation. The Lamb is the symbol of Christ who came into the world to take our sins upon Him.

“With the lamb in the arms the old man left / From the village to the dawn on the road to the city / All put their hands on his head / The ones who are sick and loaded with sins / Washing themselves of so many mistakes / Wounded the air with their flesh / And the

¹ Ioan ALEXANDRU, “Elogiu Transilvaniei”, in: *Iubirea de patrie - Eseuri*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1978, p. 29.

² Ioan ALEXANDRU, “Elogiu Transilvaniei”, in: *Iubirea de patrie - Eseuri*, p. 29.

³ Nicolae MANOLESCU, *Literatura română postbelică. Lista lui Manolescu. Poezia 1*, Editura Aula, Braşov, 2001, p. 254

⁴ Ioan ALEXANDRU, *Imnul Mielului în Imnele Transilvaniei*, Editura Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1976, p. 18

lamb being feared by their helplessness / He's taken out in the night at wolves in the ploughland."

This description of the lamb to be sacrificed reminds of the image of the Savior crucified on the cross of Golgotha⁵. The significance of Jesus' crucifixion lies precisely in this eradication of our sins. The burden of the transgressions of men is hard on the shoulders of the Savior, but we have delivered ourselves through this proof of God's love for us, that of sending His only Son to crucifixion and death. Again, the theme of love and sacrificed lamb symbolically creates the biblical picture from the past.

II. *Peace*⁶

The poet also proposes a way of returning to nature / natural and simplicity. He is glad that the Desert is now a blessed and liturgical place, where man can rejoin holy communion with nature. It is a recovery of feelings towards nature and reinforces man's connection with it. Nature is holy because it comes from God, and He is present everywhere.

"Glory and goodness / And peace among men on earth / The desert has stopped and the sea is no longer / And the holy sun shines forever at noon. / Fir and oak forests / How do you fulfill without embarrassment! There the vultures have their dwelling place / Here is my place of living."

III. *Homeland*⁷

The first poem placed in the volume *The Hymns of Transylvania* offers the thematic approach. *The Homeland* of the poet is majestically opening the volume of hymns dedicated to Transylvania, his birthplace. The genre

⁵ Ivan EVSEEV, *Dicționar de simboluri și arhetipuri culturale*, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 1994, p.106.

⁶ Ioan ALEXANDRU, *Pace în Imnele Transilvaniei*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1976, p. 249.

⁷ Ioan ALEXANDRU, *Patria în Imnele Transilvaniei*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1976, pp.7-8.

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of patriotic poetry is described in the title, but the poet makes a top-level synthesis of the patriotic, revolting feeling that he is experiencing. He does not shout emphatically the love for his country, but humiliates himself in the harsh hills. “*Of course I find it hard /To say the word that is right*”⁸, he begins the discourse, expressing from the very first lines with pressure in his soul of which he wants to escape through the poetic sharing. The homeland resembles his mother. The maternal comparison is somewhat natural, the land from which he was born offers the analogy of maternity. But the following verse describes an almost painful contradiction: “*To praise her great/ I feel mercy and shame*”. Pity for the sufferings lived by both the mother, through the very birth itself, seen as the peak of suffering to give life, and the homeland through the same perpetual state of restraint to which it was subjected. But the poet does not remain indifferent, he becomes not only merciful, but full of compassion for the sufferings, he assumes the guilt through “shame”. Shame of not being able to change anything, of not being able to help, and the feeling of ultimate devotion becomes almost divine to his motherland. The visual image continues in the second stroff, where he sensitively describes the homeland’s beauties from the perspective of the sequence of hours and seasons, night and day, “The Night Paragon”, “The North Wind”. Man inhabits this undefended nature, but not just any man, but the “man of humanity”, who handles the “gentle flocks” and works the field to have food. The farmer himself is the beast of heaven; the comparison becomes ancestral. And the verse, “*And the patois is soundless for eternity*”, places the supreme relationship at the level of immortality. The patois, seen as a language of communication, is the identity of a nation. Through the gesture of humanity’s companionship with the sky and the plough, they all become a unitary symbol of the Romanian people.

The thrifty farmers are exalted as heroes of past wars: “*Peasants being skinned alive / Good martyrs with gentle faces.*” They also defended these lands by the invaders who wanted to take their liberty, and their deeds were deeply impregnated in the land of the “holdings beneath the moon”. The war is strongly suggested in the verses: “*Wherever the plough penetrates the earth / You give a helmet and a Land made bones.*” The poet’s humility in front of these unknown heroes is expressed in the verses: “*Of course I should call all my ancestors by their name.*” The need to remove them

⁸ Ioan ALEXANDRU, *Patria în Imnele Transilvaniei*, pp.7-8.

from anonymity becomes a necessity, which, unfortunately, the poet can not face, and says with humility: “*But the age is tight and we are here / With babies from the beginning of the world.*” Time passes over the soldiers’ dead bodies, history remembers them as a whole, faceless and nameless, and contemporaries have to carry on their lives further built on the sacrifice of the unknown. The mother-land is invoked, in a firm promise to honor the memory of her defenders. The man of humanity will still defend his mother-land, “*how long the stars will glow in the sky.*”

The record changes with the assumption of the protection of the native territory, the voice of the poet becomes hard, the verse as a curse: “*Axe that raises my hand / Be so-fast and serene / As lightning can break it / Before hitting the root.*” The tool in his hand becomes a weapon, the root to be defended at all costs is the symbol of origin, of the concrete territorial attestation of the people in these lands. And the soldier becomes even more vigilant: “*The ears in the mountains watching the waking / Be so-eternal and awake / That the eagles should feel it coming in / Out of the settlements in the settlements in the sun at noon.*” With all the senses awakening, he must be awake to hear the enemies who want to violate the territory.

The last stanza brings out an exhortation to the other peers, the patriotic feeling is mandatory to live and the repercussions of the holy mission. The holy duty to protect the country is mandatory, as “*The homeland begins in its body / And grows in the others, in harmony.*” We are born with the moral duty to protect our origins, the ancestral lands, built on the sacrifice of the forefathers, and we must provide the survivors the mission to defend their homeland. And this must be done naturally, “*in harmony*” with one another and with nature, as the poet says.

IV. *Vain Topa*⁹

The poet Ioan Alexandru, originally from Topa Mica, Cluj County, dedicated a poem to his native village, entitled *Vain Topa*. Like the poetry dedicated to birthplaces, the Topa of the poet, contains the word “vain”, referring to the nostalgia with which he returns to the memory of the holy village. His land rises “*clean and straight in my songs*”, the ideal image

⁹ Ioan ALEXANDRU, *Topa deșartă în Imnele Transilvaniei*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1976, pp.21-22.

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of the beginning, underlined by his poetic songs. The village becomes universal, by the way the poet places it in the dark skies of the night: *“There between the stars you have come to hide/ And you begin to shine from among them.”*

The nostalgia towards the past begins in the second stanza, when the poet expresses regret at the different existence of the village at the time when he says, *“you were the land”*. Referring to the fruit planted in a good land by the people who inhabited it, but unfortunately with the years they died and there are no others left to take their place: *“Your elders have all retired/ So no one can see and ask them”*. The beauty of nature is preserved by the descriptions of the blue dawn of the Apusians, but in this mythical landscape, the cemetery flashes in the night.

The native family atmosphere could not be completed without referring to the traditional Romanian holidays. In the twilight, with the sheep returning home, *“the air fumbles on feasts / And impoverished people are all together”*. The pain of loneliness is revealed by the nickname „impoverished people”, the poet’s mercy towards the fate of the parents left in the village, waiting for the children who come back home at least for the holy feasts.

The seasons succeed cyclically, setting up people’s lives. The sheepfold, a reason that often appears in his poems, is a symbol of natural cycling, they are associated with St. Elijah, *“in the middle of the summer”*. The verses *“The village smells of beloved oaks / And children eaten by poverty”* contain a dramatic note using the poverty symbol referred to, through the felled oak trees to keep fire in households. The stars of Transylvania “of humanity” keep a faithful watch at the liturgy of the hermits.

V. Joy¹⁰

The poem “Joy” expresses, as the title says, the joy of life and religious belief. Life is seen as a wedding, and the poet is grateful that he is allowed to be *“so long in the light”*, *“following the wedding ceremony in dance”*. Faith is the feeling that overwhelmed him, gratitude rises as a prayer, *“and the holy heaven on my arms to keep me”*.

¹⁰ Ioan ALEXANDRU, *Bucurie în Imnele Transilvaniei*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1976, pp. 25-26.

The Orthodox religious philosophy is expressed in the third stanza, when it invokes “*eyes and yarn in a meaningful way*” in order to be able to see and realize the miracle of life and resurrection. “*With a voice to be worthy and then/ To return to the land without death*”; the verse seems to convey the belief in life after death, and invokes the miracle of the resurrection of Christ, “*with death by death trembling*”.

His joy is dedicated to the relationship to the nature and the environment in which he lives in “light”. Divine commandments and prophecies have been heard, and the whole universe has been created after that will. “*The spring of the mountain concealed / Glorified in the morning in which / The splitting rod prophesied to you / That its purpose is shadow-shaking*”.

The spring, the symbol of water that appears frequently in the poetry of Ioan Alexandru, plays an important role, the role of a healing water, baptism water and human existence itself. The role of the water is “shadow-to-shiver”, the shadow has the role of constantly accompanying man, as the spring must feed the man, so he could survive.

The metaphor of the food develops after the metaphor of the water with the following: “*And the wheat in his straw is too tight / A commandment has been placed under his skin / That banishes it every year*”/ *Come out to the wind with the flame from rock.*” The natural growth of plants becomes a divine command, through which, even from a rock, the wheat feeds and the bread on the table increases. With the essential food on the table, man lives and the poet feels joy and gratitude.

The same cyclicity of the seasons and the production of food perpetuates also to the vineyard, which, although it rests in the winter, is pulled “*by the dust of the dust*”. Then it bakes “*In two days becoming ruddy and vivid / The third day, the Star of Fire / dripping in joy in his blood*”. The wine brings the family together to the wedding, to the joy, to the celebration of the harvest and to the birth of a child.

These poems reflect only a small part of the love that Ioan Alexandru has had to offer and learn the others. The poet, with his brilliant way of seeing and feeling the nature, our ancestors, the nature and the village tried to gather a treasure to be left to the world. Not only he had succeeded in accomplishing his mission, but his writings remain forever an eternal source of true and unsullied love for God, for the Creation and for the romanian people.