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MIHAI POP
by
Gail Kligman

Masters in Philosophy, Bucharest, 1929;
Advanced studies in Prague, Bonn, Warsaw,
and Krakow; Ph.D. in Slavic Philology,
Bratislava, 1942; director of the Institute
of Ethnography and Folklore, Bucharest, 1950-
1974....

In 1907, Mihai Pop was born in Glod, a tiny, desolate village in Maramures, today situated eight kilometers from a cement road, the nearest indication that the "modern" world is indeed accessible. It is more difficult to imagine how Pop made his way from this isolated enclave to Bucharest than it is to later discover him travelling from the Romanian capital to the other capitals of Eastern Europe. Travel is a valued tool of the anthropologist. Fortunately, Pop's curiosity and insight insured that he continued to travel throughout his life, broadening his own knowledge and contributing to the understanding of the complexities of culture.

His first ethnographic experience was in Fundul Moldovii in 1928 when, as a member of D. Gusti's rural sociology group, Pop studied problems of oral literature. It was during this trip that his collaboration with the musicologist C. Brailoiu began. Many field trips ensued. Another important field research occurred in 1939; then Pop worked with the sociologist A. Golopentia in Plasa Dimbovnica, Arges, on socio-economic differentiation among villages.

In between these years, Pop found time to study in Czechoslovakia where he was exposed to the Prague School of Linguistics. He was particularly influenced by R. Jakobson and P. Bogatyrev, and structural-functional analysis of folklore.

The 40s were very significant for him: his doctorate was finished in 1942; in 1949, he and the ethnomusicologist Hari Brauner collaborated to establish the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest. Pop remained director of the Institute from 1950-74. When asked to comment, in retrospect, upon his influence on Romanian anthropology, ethnography, and folklore, Mihai Pop--with a characteristic twinkle in his eye--responded: "Nimica-ca nu ma asculta nimeni." (None--because no one listens to me.) In actuality, under his guidance, the Institute flourished, and became one of the finest ethnographic institutes on the continent. Pop initiated ambitious programs for fieldwork. Procedures for the collection of data and the organization of the archives were established; to these ends, Pop introduced the usage of technical aids such as film and tape. He was also responsible for the systematization of data, the development of typologies for popular literature and music (tales and ballads, in particular). Along

more analytic lines, Pop encouraged new approaches to the study of social processes and meaning; he stimulated the study of folklore as a cultural act, incorporating semiotic perspectives into the interpretive process. Throughout, Pop generously shared his access to the international scholarly literature with members of the Institute, and with his students. (Pop's linguistic facilities have contributed to his breadth of knowledge; he is conversant in French, Italian, English, German, Hungarian and all of the Slavic languages.) He succeeded in attracting foreign researchers to Romania, opening doors for Romanian colleagues, as well as for us.

But being director of the Institute did not curtail his academic pursuits. In 1963, Pop became a Professor at the University of Bucharest. He was also an editor of Revista de Etnografie si Folclor until 1980. Subsequent international appointments have included: resident fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies of the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford; corresponding member of the Austrian Anthropological Society; member of the executive board of the International Association for Semiotic Studies; member of the executive board of the International Center for Semiotic and Linguistic Studies, Urbino; President of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore. The sojourn at Stanford's Center for Advanced Studies was significant to Pop's ongoing intellectual development. There he became familiar with American socio-cultural anthropology. Later on, due to the continued influence of Jakobson, and of Levi-Strauss, he explored French structuralism. Pop has also been a visiting professor of anthropology at the University of Marburg; at Berkeley, 1974; Michigan, 1975; the College de France, Paris, 1976; and U.C.L.A., 1984.

Pop's bibliography attests to the diversity of his pursuits. More recent additions include two books, one on Romanian oral literature (Pop si Ruxandoiu, Folclor Literar Romanesc, Bucuresti: editura didactica si pedagogica, 1976), and one on traditional customs (Obiceiuri Traditionale Romanesti, Bucuresti, 1976). The latter reflects Pop's most enduring personal and professional interest spawned in the '30s by reading Bogatyrev's Rites et Croyances: the study of calendar and life-cycle rituals. Presently, he is interested in the "symbolic meaning of ritual structures and signs" with special emphasis on funeral customs and ancestor worship in Romania, and Southeastern Europe in general. Other primary concerns are semiotics and text analysis.

Perhaps more than anything, Pop's invaluable contribution to Romanian ethnography as well as to the Romanian-American cultural exchange has been his enthusiastic approach to life and scholarship. His optimism expresses a basic joie de vivre that is both encouraging and contagious. Pop's retirement from academia will be deeply felt by those who have had the privilege to know him and to work with him.

Pop's reknown is not, however, confined to academic circles; his contributions to the world of knowledge are recognized by the Moroseni themselves. They too are proud to join in the celebration of the achievements of one of their own. The following strigatura (shouted rhyme) was

composed by Suzanna Balea (from Ieud, Maramureș) in his honor. It is a fitting testimony to a dear friend and respected colleague to whom we dedicate this volume:

Să înflorească violă
Și Mihai Pop să trăiea
Să trăiea cu sanatate
De bine să aibă parte
C-o învățat multă carte
Multă carte o învățat
Cinstea ne-o adus la sat
La sat și la întreg județi
Cinstea ne-o adus la tăți
Ca el i om de ști-ință
Și noi avem multă cinste
Frunză verde moieran
Mihai Pop i Moroșan
Moroșan de cela iute
Ne aduce laude multe
Ori și unde o plecat
Numai cinstea o căpătat
Că frunzucă verde din cordru
El i omu tare lotru
Și amu prinde a 'bătrînii
Și nouă tot dragu ne-ar și
Nouă și la întreaga lume
Că i un om cu voie bună
Și dacă părul ți-o albit
Tot de lumea ți iubit
Și de noi iubit a și
Cite zile a trăii

La mulț, ani!

May the violet blossom
And Mihai Pop live long
May he live in good health
And good fortune be his lot
For he has studied much
Much booklearning has he had
And brought us honor for the village
For the village and the entire county
Honor has he brought us all
For he is a man of science
And we are proud
Green leaf of marjoram
Mihai Pop is from Maramureș
A Moroșan, sharp and quick
He brings us praises many
Wherever he has gone
Only honor has he received
Little green leaf from the forest
He is a very clever man
Now he is beginning to age
And to us he will still be dear
To us and to everyone
Because he is a man of good will
And if his hair has grayed
Our love still remains
And he will be loved by us
As long as he lives

To many years!