

# CARMEN SYLVA AND VASILE ALECSANDRI – REFLECTIONS IN CORRESPONDENCE

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*Abstract: Vasile Alecsandri and Queen Elisabeth of Romania represent, across time, the model for a unique literary friendship. The poet became close with the Court – as one can see from Vasile Alecsandri's correspondence with the queen, who entered the world of literature under the name Carmen Sylva. Where Vasile Alecsandri's place in the history of Romanian literature is well-defined, so too does Carmen Sylva have her well-deserved place in the Romanian literary landscape.*

**Key words:** Alecsandri, Carmen Sylva, correspondence, folklore, reflections

Vasile Alecsandri and Queen Elisabeth of Romania represent, across time, the model for a unique literary friendship. The year 1875 is when the poet became close with the Court – as one can see from Vasile Alecsandri's correspondence with the queen<sup>1</sup>. September 12 of this year is the date of his first letter (published in *Oeuvres (Opere)*) in a long series of correspondence with Queen Elisabeth of Romania, who entered the world of literature under the name Carmen Sylva. Princess Pauline Elisabeth Ottilie Luise of Wied was born on December 29, 1843 in her parents' castle in Monrepos, next to the Rhine, where she received an education suited for her princely rank. She would go on to master French, English, Italian, Swedish and Romanian. Following long trips throughout Europe, she married the ruler of Romania, Carol I, in Berlin and Petersburg in 1869, and, a few days after celebrating her wedding, headed toward her new country.

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<sup>1</sup>V. Alecsandri, *Opere X, Corespondență (Oeuvres X, Correspondence)*, edition supervised, annotated and indexed by Marta Anineanu, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985, p. 877

Her first impressions of the United Principalities were more than satisfying:

“În toate orașele și satele mi se făceau primiri și ochiul nu mi se sătura de bogăția culorilor sub cerul orientului care era albastru ca peruzeaua și care dădea seara într-o culoare galbenă și strălucitoare, plină de pulbere de aur la apusul soarelui”<sup>1</sup> (“In all cities and villages, I was given special welcome, and my eye did not grow sated by the richness of colors under the eastern sky, which was as blue as turquoise and turned a shining yellow in the evening, covered in gold dust upon sunset”).

This first impression, which was so powerful and pleasant, would probably determine her to want to spend her whole life discovering the beauty of these places, of the people here and their folk culture.

She would become involved afterwards, among many other things, in the grand constructions from Peleş. This is also the moment where, upon finishing the construction of a villa in Sinaia, the queen invites Alecsandri, through Callimachi-Catargi, to create for her four lyrics in Romanian to place on the frontispiece of the building, according to a commonplace tradition in German and Swiss villages, whose inhabitants had inscribed on the façade of their houses, for themselves, but also for guests and passers-by, a maxim, a proverb, a prayer or a greeting. The queen’s request expressly aimed for lyrics written in a Romanian folk style, which Alecsandri knew so well.

The queen received an answer swiftly, because, on September 19, Alecsandri notified her of having received her letter and sent her a poem created under the impulse of a deeply felt exclamation from the received letter. The queen had not refrained from confessing an essential and natural wish for a being raised in the brisk air of the mountains of Germany that she had found intact in Sinaia: „Ah! Dacă aş avea brazii în oraş!” (“Oh! If only I could have the firs here in the city!”). Presented as a memory and, thus, in the name of an affectionate relationship – the poem *Dorul de brazi* (*Longing for the Firs*) resorts to a substitution, as the voice making the confession belongs to the poet herself. Alecsandri demonstrates that he has intuited the role of topos that the environs of Sinaia held in the sensitivity and poetic creation of the queen.

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<sup>1</sup> Carmen Sylva, *Poveștile Peleşului* (The Stories of Peleş), edition supervised and prefaced by Tudor Nedelcea, NOB Publishing House, Craiova, 1991, p. 4