

THE PIED POETS

Contemporary Verse of the Transylvanian and Danube Germans of Romania

selected and translated
by
Robert Elsie
(1989)

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INTRODUCTION

The *Pied Poets* is both an anthology of the most recent poetic activity of the German-speaking minority from the Transylvanian and Danube (Banat) regions of Romania and a commemorative monument, a somewhat frivolous poetic tombstone if you will, marking the passing of a literature and culture. This volume does not set out to be a comprehensive anthology of German-Romanian literature, but an introduction for the English speaking reader to the so-called 'fifth German literature' (after that of West Germany, East Germany, Austria and Switzerland) which has come to an end after five centuries of existence.

The German population of Romania, which still constitutes the second largest national minority in that country (after the 1,700,000 Hungarians), comprises two traditionally distinct groups: the Transylvanian Saxons (*Siebenbürger Sachsen*) in the centre of the country, and the Danube or Banat Swabians (*Donauschwaben* or *Banater Schwaben*) on the western border with Yugoslavia.

The German minority of Transylvania are the descendants of colonists invited to settle there in 1150 AD by the Hungarian King Geza II "to defend the crown." Although called Saxons, from a linguistic point of view they are of Moselle Franconian origin, stemming not from Saxony but principally from the Moselle, northern Lorraine, Luxembourg and Flanders. In Transylvania they founded a number of cities and about 250 smaller settlements, and in 1224 were granted special privileges under the 'Privilegium Andreanum' of King Andrew II. The Lutheran reform movement introduced by Johannes Honterus was widely followed in Transylvania. In their fortified churches (*Kirchenburgen*), the 'Saxons,' albeit more than once impoverished and decimated by marauding hordes, managed to withstand both the Ottoman Turks spreading Islam and the Viennese bent on imposing the Counter-Reformation, and to maintain their bastion of German Protestant culture over the centuries. In 1940, there were still 250,000 German speakers in Transylvania, though evacuation, deportation and emigration during and after the Second World War have now reduced their numbers to well under 150,000.

The Danube or Banat Swabians settled in the eighteenth century in Banat, the frontier region (formerly governed by a 'ban') between Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania. They originated primarily from southwestern Germany as the name Swabian indicates. Their first settlements were established in 1722-1726 under Emperor Charles VI of Austria, followed by waves of emigration under Maria Theresa in 1763-1770 and under Joseph II in 1782-1787 to repopulate Habsburg territories devastated by war and epidemics. The Treaty of Trianon in 1919 divided the region among Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary. The population of Banat nevertheless remained very mixed with a distinct German element. Of the three countries, it is only in Romania that a substantial German-speaking minority still exists. In 1939 there were 450,000 Danube Swabians. They now number less than 150,000. Prominent among the Danube Swabians are the German 'Weltschmerz' poet Nikolaus Lenau (1802-1850) born in Csatád (Lenauheim) and Tarzan himself, Johnny Weissmuller, whose family came from Freidorf.

Romania was the only country in Eastern Europe not to expel its German minority after the Second World War. The Germans there are now recognized as an official national minority (or cohabiting nation), and benefit at least from the same rights as the Romanians themselves. During the 1980s, however, when the Ceausescu dictatorship was driving the country into a state of political and cultural isolation and economic ruin, emigration of the two groups to West Germany increased dramatically. By the end of the 1980s, almost all

Germans living in Romania desperately longed to leave the country which had become a living nightmare of fear and repression, but very few were allowed to do so. Many of those who were able to emigrate were bought out discreetly by the West German government at up to DM 11,000 per person. Germans and Jews were cynically referred to as Romania's top export articles, and not without reason perhaps. Though many of the older people understandably chose to stay put, the steady drain on the younger population, coupled with inevitable assimilation, whether natural or actively encouraged by the authorities in Bucharest, brought about stagnation in virtually all spheres of German cultural life in Romania. With over fifty percent of German-Romanians now living in the West, the Christmas 1989 revolution and political opening up of the country after so many years of darkness will no doubt result in a further rapid increase in emigration.

The effects of the period of stagnation have been particularly dramatic on German literature which in Romania enjoys a tradition going back many centuries. Ernest Wichner states unequivocally in his preface to a recent anthology of poetry and prose that the end is in sight.

"The generation of authors now in their thirties and forties constitute the last German writers in Romania. It is becoming obvious that their numbers have fallen below the critical mass essential for the cultural survival of the German minority there. As opposed to the early seventies, when a dozen or so young authors all began publishing at the same time, there is hardly a young German-language author left with enough linguistic competence to be worthy of support." (Das Wohnen ist kein Ort, Texte und Zeichen aus Siebenbürgen, der Banat und den Gegenden versuchter Ankunft. in: Die Horen, Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und Kritik 147, Hanover 1987, p. 5)

The impact of German-Romanian literature in the twentieth century has not been entirely marginal, despite its peripheral situation. Indeed, twentieth-century German literature as a whole has to a good extent been the creation of fringe groups in political, social or geographical isolation from the mainstream. Paul Celan (1920-1970) born in Czernowitz, for instance, is among the leading German poets of the twentieth century. The integration of the many other Jewish writers into the German mainstream was always ambiguous, most of them living, nolens volens, in some sort of periphery. During the Nazi dictatorship of the thirties and forties, most other German writers of talent found themselves in exile, whether external or internal. Changing borders and the post-war division of Germany and Europe forced many writers to reassess their attitudes to the powers that be and many found themselves in the wrong spot. It is this forced introspection and an awareness of one's difference which have often contributed to the outbursts of creativity which German letters, especially in Romania, have always enjoyed.

The last twenty-five years are generally regarded as the zenith of German poetry in Romania, culminating a long tradition. The origins of German literature there lie in the High Middle Ages. Among 15th century works of note are the memoirs of Helene Kottaner of Brasov (Kronstadt) and the anonymous 'Türkenbüchlein.' Johannes Honterus (1498-1549), the reformer, introduced Lutheran German as a literary language in Transylvania and set up a printing press, the first one in southeastern Europe. The 17th century was the age of Protestant hymnists and pietist poets, among whom was J. Kelp (Kelpius) (1673-1708) who emigrated to Pennsylvania. The Romantic movement of 19th century Europe made its impact felt in Transylvania and Banat, too. The Banat newspaper 'Temeswarer Zeitung' (Timisoara Newspaper), founded in 1852, served as an important vehicle of communication for the German minority until 1949. German-Romanian folk songs and folklore material were collected and printed by numerous writers and scholars. Poetry of all genres, both in standard

German and in 'Saxon' and 'Swabian' dialects, was produced and published, together with short stories, novels and plays. Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn (1852-1923) portrayed the romantic pathos of village life among the Danube Germans in his classic 19th century novels. But it was Adolf Meschendörfer's journal 'Die Karpathen' (The Carpathians) published from 1907 to 1914 which first paved the way to a more cosmopolitan literature, in Transylvania in particular. Both German communities also began to show interest in their Hungarian and Romanian neighbours, and the veil of provincialism receded.

The Klingsor Circle named after the literary periodical Klingsor published between 1924 and 1939 was associated with the works of Karl Bernhard Capesius, Heinrich Zillich and Erwin Wittstock. Nowadays one can no longer speak of two separate German literatures in Romania. Since 1945, the literary traditions of the Transylvanian and Danube Germans have merged and their intellectual centre is no longer Brasov (Kronstadt), Cluj-Napoca (Klausenburg) or Timisoara (Temeswar), but Bucharest where the literary magazine 'Neue Literatur' (New Literature) has been published since 1956. Among the classical authors of 20th century German poetry in Romania are Oscar Walter Cisek (1898-1966), Alfred Margul-Sperber (1898-1967) and Wolf von Aichelburg (1912-).

Though one must not forget that Transylvania is geographically closer to the Crimea, Istanbul and Asia than it is to Berlin and Munich, German-Romanian literature has always been an essentially Central European literature. Many a dour Lutheran pastor in the fortified churches at the foot of the Carpathians would indeed have shuddered at the thought of being in the heart of the Balkans. This dichotomy (some would call it collective schizophrenia) has often been more a source of disorientation than a blessing.

Has there ever really been a German Romania? Ernest Wichner thinks not. The ancestors of the German Romanians once set off with pioneer fervour to "go east, young man" in order to found a better Germany. The road was beset with the stumbling blocks of history, politics and economics. Now the present generation is returning to its origins, some with the naive expectation of bringing back a better Romania with them. What awaits them in West Germany, the promised land, is no more than reintegration into the mainstream from which they originally fled. German Romania, if it ever did really exist, may now rest in peace.

Be this as it may, it would be misleading to envisage German-Romanian literature as brooding nostalgically on the problems of exile or preoccupied with socio-political issues and the loss of its quaint folklore traditions. Its contemporary verse, almost disappointingly bereft of local colour, mirrors a whole gamut of familiar human emotions and intellectual pursuits, and is surprisingly in tune with the Western world. It is to be hoped that in this volume, the English-speaking reader may recognize and enjoy these subtle, remote and yet hardly alien reflections of a vanishing world.

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Robert Elsie
Olzheim/Eifel, West Germany, 1989

Oskar PASTIOR

(1927-)

Pastior was born in 1927 in Sibiu (Hermannstadt) in Transylvania where he attended school until 1944. After five years of deportation in the Ukraine following the end of World War II, he returned in 1949 to his native city. He began studies of German language and literature in Bucharest in 1955 and worked from 1960 to 1968 as an editor for the German-language services of the Romanian radio network. In 1968 he emigrated via Austria to West Berlin where he presently lives. Pastior's playful poetics have given him a reputation as one of the few contemporary German writers with a genuine sense of humour. He has published over seventeen volumes of verse and translations (Tristan Tzara, Francesco Petrararch, Viktor Khlebnikov and Urmuz), plus plays for radio and 'acoustic poetry'.

The shiver poem shivers at the thought that it consists of a linguistic process capable of affirming that a thought process has consolidated itself in it to such an extent that in its linguistic process the shiver poem shivers at the thought of shivering the shiver poem is silly to think so because how can you shiver at the thought of shivering

1973

If the street sweepers in Reschinar have either two right or two left legs, that means that Reschinar is a long way away from other mountain villages. The swing of their brooms over generations has bent their standing leg to their fencing leg or rather shortened and stretched them to a double legato, a pose reminiscent of the Folies Bergères but which should rather be appreciated as a feudal antifeudal relic. The backward theory of sunken culture doesn't work for them, on the contrary, the serene syncretism manifest in the choreographic exercise of their professional compulsion marks the crossroads of latent movements from the Carpatho-Pannonian to the Catalanian sphere of influence, both of which are vaulted, and vice versa. It is the Dracula version, which they themselves refer to as nonsense, which first transplanted their equipment into the salons. A material musical process that really goes to heart.

1975

Of all the epistemological affairs I keep poor records of, many are missing, but even the forms themselves are negligently incomplete.

1975

In the first line the poet imagines a sex organ in the second line the poet imagines the lack of a sex organ in the third line the poet imagines how the reader imagines a sex organ in the fourth line the reader imagines how a sex organ imagines the poet in the fifth line a sex organ imagines how the reader imagines the lack of a sex organ in the sixth line the poet imagines how the poet imagines the lack of a poet in the seventh line the lack of a reader imagines a sex organ in the eighth line the lack of a sex organ imagines how the lack of a sex organ imagines a sex organ in the ninth line the lack of a poet imagines a sex organ in the tenth line a sex imagines an organ this poem is not pornographic and takes its appeal from the title
NOVEMBER

1973

Nikolaus BERWANGER

(1935-1989)

Berwanger was born on 5 July 1935 in Freidorf near Timisoara (Temeswar) in Banat. From 1952 to 1969 he worked as an editor for the Bucharest German-language newspaper "Neuer Weg". From 1969 to 1984 he was editor-in-chief of the Banat newspaper "Neue Banater Zeitung" and became secretary of the Romanian Writers' Union. From 1972 to 1975, a period of political thaw in Romania, he was involved in the literary circle 'Aktionsgruppe Banat' (Banat Action Group). He emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1984, living in Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart where he died at the beginning of April 1989. He is author of numerous volumes of poetry and prose both in standard German and in Danube Swabian dialect.

In memoriam L.

A wooden cross ready for a museum
 Village sign gone without a trace
 Dogs off a-roaming
Houses bereft of window-sills
 Skulls in a mass grave
Cherries withered on the branches
 Hardly any fruit this year down on the heath
Petroleum lamps instead of light-bulbs
 Progress we praise thee
A family photo in the attic
 Photostudio C. Richter of Linz
 Where are the robust wife and frightened-looking husband
Remnants of wreaths at the cultural centre
 The mice dancing a polka
Village library locked up like a cell
 Not just for stock-taking
I give a hefty tug at the bell-cord
 My call remains unanswered
Grass covers the cemetery
 Rest in peace, inhabitants of L.
Sheep stare at a picture of Christ in the living-room
 Patient animals what could you possibly make
Of a globe and a geography book in the school courtyard
 Who tomorrow will show me where L. was.

1979

Advertisement

I prefer
The naked
Truth
A thousand times over
To the
Winter fashions 1978
In the
Quelle catalogue¹

1979

¹ Quelle: West German mail-order catalogue which circulates at exorbitant prices in Eastern Europe (transl. note).

Dry eyes

These days
I cry honestly only
When I see
That someone
Is bursting
With illusions.
When death
Robs me
Of my best friend
I take off
My hat
In respect
But my eyes
Remain dry

1979

Snow White open your eyes

We are living
In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
Is in an
Intensive Care Unit
The first violin
Only weeps electronically now
We are living
In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
Is in an
Intensive Care Unit
Impudent cancer cells
Are making love
In our souls
We are living
In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
Is in an
Intensive Care Unit
The conscience of too many
Is clean
Because they never use it
We are living
In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
Is in an
Intensive Care Unit
Hypocrisy
Is our morning prayer
We are living
In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
Is in an
Intensive Care Unit
We are authorized at any given time
To hold the same opinion
We are living
In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
Is in an
Intensive Care Unit
Giants squash us
Like ants
We are living

In an age of dwarfs
Snow White
When are you finally going
To open your eyes

1979

Images of an absurd June

During the day the sun squeezes
The last drops of sweat out of our pores
And slips out in the evening without a passport
To the duty-free nightclub of a Western metropolis,
With political cabaret but no terrorist threat
And laughs in our drowsy faces the next morning.

The moon announces with a sombre countenance
That it intends to turn its back on us
For quite a while soon in protest against
The neo-colonialist intentions of some,
Which, given the scarcity of energy nowadays,
Could no doubt lead to an
Uncontrollable population explosion.

Just before midnight the great army
Of tiny celestial bodies rehearses an uprising,
Its solidarity with the glorious proletariat,
Under the sage leadership of the evening star.
On the Milky Way all the drive peters out
And in anger and despair they spit at
Capitalist and socialist space ships.

The Romanian News Agency Agerpres
Is authorized to announce
That every country
Independent of its size and strength
Has the sacred right
To solve its internal affairs
Without intervention from abroad.

It goes on to state
That Sunrise Industries,
Responsible for the manufacture
Of blinkers in all hues and colours,
Has fulfilled production limits
Ahead of schedule by three times over
Those of the last five-year plan,
Without relying on imports at all.

1983

Honestly

It is no made-to-order lip service
I honestly love this country

With its childish immaturity
With its inclination to self-glorification
With its untamedness
And I pardon it all
Because you can still pardon here

1982

Late joy

Your embrace
Has a rare
Bouquet
Memories
Are aroused within me
Of grapes
Harvested
After the first frost

1980

Claus STEPHANI**(1938-)**

Writer and poet from Brasov (Kronstadt) in Transylvania. He was born on 25 July 1938 and studied German language and literature in Bucharest (1960-1965) and thereafter journalism. He was deputy editor-in-chief of the Bucharest German-language literary magazine "Neue Literatur". Stephani is also a well-known ethnographer and has published a number of volumes of German-Romanian folk tales.

Marmatia²
(excerpt)

Enter this land
Cautiously
Where rainclouds
And wind
Under the
Smoky roof
Of mountains
Make their home
Where dogs
By day
Growl
In their slumber
In doorways
And wolves
In the last light of autumn
Report
The arrival of winter
Where girls
Coming
From distant forest
Homes
Wash
Their knees
In the evening
At the dark river
Wischau
Enter this silent land
Cautiously
The echo
Of your words
Is following you
Will pounce
Be you silent
Upon you

1975

² Marmatia: Latin name for the Maramures district of northern Romania (transl. note).

Biography

If you are sensible
Said father
I'll buy you
A new heaven

If you are sensible
Said Mary
You may
Look after my flowers

If you are sensible
Said the comrade
I'll place
A vowel in your ear

If you live a bit more
Sensibly
Said the doctor
(saying it calmly and
At an advanced age)
You will live
For a long time

Since then
I've been living for a long time

1975

Pompeii, via Stabiana

Day after day
The stones await
Pre-booked tourists

Who arrive at ten
On the dot
With beautiful dogs
And expensive wives
Some piss
On the columns
Others smile
Cameras click

At eleven the bus departs
Antiquity is left behind
Silent and steadfast.

1983

Poetry club

Tell me who
Your critic is
And I'll tell you who
You are
Or:
Tell me who
You keep company with
And I'll tell you
The reason why.

1985

Fortified church in Transylvania

Lodgings
For bats
Hanging
Unauthorized
Like open umbrellas
In the armpits of walls.
When tourists come by
They crochet
Their legends,
Laughing softly,
With pigeon manure.

1973

Anemone LATZINA

(1942-)

Latzina was born in Brasov (Kronstadt) in Transylvania on 17 February 1942 and studied German language and literature in Bucharest from 1962 to 1967. Since 1969, she has been working for the German-language literary magazine "Neue Literatur" in Bucharest where she presently resides. She is the author of much verse and translations from Romanian, Hungarian, English, French and Bulgarian.

In the morning

In the morning I shower
The night from my body.
I want to make it difficult for myself.
I listen to the radio.
I listen to the radio.
I listen to the radio.

In the morning I paint
The darkness out of my face.
I want to make it difficult for myself.
I read the newspaper.
I read the newspaper.
I read the newspaper.

In the morning I comb
The dreams out of my hair.
I want to make it difficult for myself.
I take a look at the people.
I take a look at the people.
I take a look at the people.

1970

July 13, 1974

Gal (as Frieder calls me) I said to my
self this morning in the shower brushi
ng my teeth gal you're now on to your
fourth set of teeth (milk-teeth water-
teeth beer-teeth schnaps-teeth) and an
yway Peter that blond guy was here yes
terday and said he wanted to do an ant
hology and you should send him some po
ems he can PUBLISH but you've gotta wr
ite them first OK write a poem for Pet
er that blond guy on GROWING OLD that'
s a good subject when you're over thir
ty (you've got to be young enough to h
ave something to say about growing old
) OK gal I say you're not getting any
younger and think this could be a poem
or better still a HIT or something but
I'm already sitting in the streetcar a
nd this woman comes along and nudges m
e and says move over (I didn't think w
ith my short hair that anyone would ta
ke me for a) young man so I can put my
bag down and INTERRUPTS me in my best
ideas about growing old now they're go
ne now I can't say anything about grow
ing old this woman has BOTCHED UP EVER
YTHING and how are you supposed to say
anything about anything anyway when so
meone always comes along and BOTCHES U
P THE BEST IDEAS....

1974

Lament for all I've lost to this wide world

Where are the fingernails
I cut at the Hotel Royal, Budapest?
Has the Danube carried them away?
Oh, and the butts of the many cigarettes
I smoked at Schillerstrasse 16
In Freiburg im Breisgau?
What happened to the bottles of Perrier
Drunk on the first floor of the Residence Lyon
Not far from Place de la Bastille?
Do traces of my peeling skin
Still linger among the stones
On the beach at Yalta?
The onion skins
In the canals of Amsterdam and Venice,
Are mine still floating there with the rest?
I lost a pencil in Tallinn,
Is someone else using it?
Who knows what happened to the rotten bananas
I threw into the garbage in Rome
At the Campo dei Fiori market.
Have my tickets for the Vienna streetcar
Now turned to ash? I wonder where.
And my corns in a bathtub in Brussels?
And my footprints in the Hamburg snow?
Are my bills from the Café Odeon in Zurich still being kept?
What happened to the filling I lost in the French bread in Nice?
What has happened to the hair I dumped
Into the garbage shoot at the May Flower in Iowa City, USA?
And my tender bones, my charred lungs,
My saturated liver,
Where will they rot?

1983

In July 1977

It's an established fact now
A poem is a prison
In this great freedom of ours,
In its cell sit
Suspicious figures, figures of speech,
Shady thoughts,
Seedy images
Among them are informers too,
The punctuation marks,
A question mark is enough
To uncover a plot,
Yes, a poem is a prison
And we are sentenced
For life
To take from it
What we need to survive,
Bread and water.

1977

Frieder SCHULLER

(1942-)

Born in Cata (Katzendorf) near Brasov (Kronstadt) in Transylvania, Schuller studied theology and German in Sibiu (Hermannstadt) and Cluj (Klausenburg). From 1968 to 1972 he was cultural editor of the German-language weekly "Karpaten Rundschau" and from 1972 to 1978 worked for the German section of the Sibiu (Hermannstadt) State Theatre. He now lives in the Federal Republic of Germany and is the author of four volumes of verse.

Indian summer in a department store

Indian summer in a department store
Fruit falling on escalators
Leaves into cash registers

Cheaply dies
What is dear to me.

Rummaging around in boxes
Full of Schiller, Heine, Mörike, Hebbel
Editions of classics, brand new
Disinfected in their own stall
And released by the East upon the West

Quality work, German and undivided
And dead thank God
That's how they got across the border cheaply.

1980

Perhaps I'd take my coffee mug

Perhaps I'd take my coffee mug
If suddenly
The time came
To go
Because memory takes
Its gruesome time for everything else.
This would be my poem,
Jotted down for the cloudy day
When I suddenly got my passport
For West Germany or anywhere.

1979

Franz HODJAK**(1944-)**

Born in Sibiu (Hermannstadt) in Transylvania on 27 September 1944, Hodjak studied German language and literature in Cluj-Napoca (Klausenburg) where he presently works for Dacia publishing company. He is a prolific writer of verse and is also author of prose, children's literature and translations from Hungarian and Romanian.

Scope

The freedom
Which gives us
Scope
Day by day
Is always as great
As the scope
We give
To freedom
Day by day

1974

Reiner Kunze³

He is not a crane operator,
He knows nothing of welding methods
Nor does he hold a trowel
In his hand

And yet

Construction sites
Are not foreign to him

And yet

What he builds, he builds slowly,
He builds on trust

He helps
From the other side of the light:

Where in the shadow
Of the scaffolding
Tenacious weeds
Still shoot up
With much ado

There
He putters about

Weeding
With the double-edged word.

1974

³ Reiner Kunze (1933-): German poet and writer (transl. note).

At the cemetery

Reading on the tombstones
The names of all the good people
Who have departed this life,
I wonder

Where are the bad ones buried,
Or do they live on eternally among us?

1976

Advice

Be careful in dealing
With books

Go out into the street
Enter the factories
Take the streetcar
Attend meetings
Visit museums
Go into offices
Go into shops

Decipher glances
Study habits
Read dreams
Learn to interpret silence properly
Study greetings
Read cardiograms
Read faces

Do not trust
Second-hand truths

1976

Ovid in Exile⁴

Forgotten by the seven hills by the lofty skies
Over the Tiber by the shadows of the pine trees forgotten
By the festive gardens erased from the memory
Of the Roman forum forsaken by connoisseurs and patrons
Abandoned by the last spark of joy by name and
Reputation abandoned by all hope abandoned even
By the ultimate, by humour

Only enemies remain faithful

1976

⁴ The Roman poet Ovid (43 BC - 17 AD) was sent into exile in 9 AD to Tomis (Constanza) on the Black Sea where he died (transl. note).

Upon reading poems by Weinheber in view of his success in the Thirties⁵

His poems say a lot
His poems leave a lot unsaid

Why were his poems honoured?

1976

⁵ Josef Weinheber (1892-1945): Austrian lyric poet (transl. note).

Transcending borders

Wulf Kirsten and I are drinking beer,
He's in Weimar and I am here.

1981

Villon's arrival in heaven⁶

Esteemed Commission
I feel reborn.

During the trip I was so shaken by angel wings
That I completely lost conscience.

I waited the prescribed five full weeks
In draughty stairwells, unheated hallways and corridors.

I was finally let in up the back stairs
Through the staff entrance.

A saint, probably of the eighth degree, took me
Into a two-storey Neo-Baroque cloud.

I was searched for unwelcome earthly goods,
Turned inside out to the very bottom of my soul.

Out of a cowl, as if from a loudspeaker,
Issued the new ten commandments in a celestial pitch.

With ten times ten long-stemmed gladioli
I filled out all the forms to the best of my ability.

On leaving the bath I exchanged my sense of smell
For a broad-brimmed halo.

Scenes from the ninth circle of hell
Appeared at all the beds on large umbrellas.

Five candelabra immediately saw through my first dream
In which I accidentally spoke to fat Margot.

I was refused entry into the famous colonnade
In the myrtle grove because of my short wings.

At the meteorological office we had great fun
Making bags out of our eardrums.

I had my right eye installed as a lens
For God's omnipresent telescope.

⁶ François Villon (1431-1463): French poet (transl. note).

The other I donated voluntarily
For the perfection of my own bliss.

Gentlemen, I am honestly amazed at your heavenly order,
I therefore regard my presence here as an error.

I would ask you to consider that I might one day, scoundrel
That I am, collapse under the weight of your kindness.

1977

Autobiography

Comrade,
What can I say?

I was born
At curfew time during the blackout

Shortly afterwards the house was expropriated

That I like the Expressionists and firm breasts
Is doubtless more important
Than the past
Of my relatives

All the schools I attended
Were after nineteen forty-four

More revealing than all my memberships,
I believe, are
My books

I maintain close contacts
With the enlightenment, seascapes and lost illusions

In the evening I listen to the news,
I really am interested in politics

I maintain a fixed address
Simply to get electricity bills, newspapers,
Royalties,
Summonses

What I believe in? Not in salvation
By either the arms build-up or by resurrection

You see, the horizon is hazy
Just like your ideas
About me.

1983

Savonarola⁷

How silently decisions are made!
As you obviously read your newspaper
Invisible rings are perhaps already
Closing around your ankles.

Speak the direction of your thoughts!
You know that you are only strong as an adversary.
Silence is a carpenter of crosses,
And the grass is gradually growing in your mouth.

1983

⁷ Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498): Dominican monk and political leader in Renaissance Florence (transl. note).

Daily routine

Each day is a
Book

We flip through it
Looking for pictures

In the evening we put it away
Unread

1976

Rolf Frieder MARMONT

(1944-)

Marmont was born in Brasov (Kronstadt) in Transylvania on 4 December 1944. He studied German and English in Bucharest from 1963 to 1968 and worked there as a speaker for Radio Bucharest and as reader for Kriterion publishing company. On 11 April 1988, he emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany and now works for a publishing company in Hanover.

Spacious seconds

Seconds
Are as big
As barns
With room for truckloads
Of life:

Somewhere up in the far north
An old Eskimo is feeding his hungry dogs.
In a mansard
A woman is combing her hair and singing.
A fisherman is staring dreamily
Into his empty nets again.
A boy is writing to his girlfriend.
A child is crying.
A tree is dying.
Another is blossoming.
The poet
Is forgetting his poems.
Others are on strike.
The scales of night
Are slowly rising.
Slovenly old hags are bickering at the fish market.

Seconds are as big
As barns.

1974

Dobruja⁸ realm of shades

Weary land,
Divested of history.
In the web of things not much more than
Thistles of glass
Between the dunes
And silence,
Sun-drenched.

A bevy of gulls
Plunges behind the horizon,
Accompanied by German sounds,
"Mutter" and "Vater".
What remains
Are the unshakeable dialectics
Of Pontian surf,
An omnipotent and soporific singsong.

Can you too, brother,
Feel the gag in your mouth,
The grain of sand under your eyelid,
The subtle pang in your chest?

1984

⁸ Dobruja: area of Romania between the lower Danube and the Black Sea (transl. note).

Children

They came in the morning
With little hands
To comb the vineyards
For snails

But found only
A few silver coins,
Roman ones.

Hanging their heads
They returned home in the evening.

1974

Johann LIPPET**(1951-)**

Lippert was born in Wels, Austria on 12 January 1951. In 1956, his family returned to Romania. From 1970 to 1974 he studied German language and literature in Timisoara (Temeswar) where he was a member of the literary circle 'Aktionsgruppe Banat' (Banat Action Group). He also taught German for several years and was active at the German State Theatre in Timisoara. In 1987 he emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany and lives presently in Heidelberg.

Onetime spate of suicides in the family
(according to my great-grandmother and my grandmother)

And I believe
There's been
A change of thinking among them
Because they whitewash the trees
On holidays
And hang out flags,
For a long time
They had no other flag
But the flag of death
Hanging from the church when someone had died,
And the flag was black.
They said
Suicide ran in the family
Because many of them had committed suicide,
The daughter of the brother
Of my great-grandmother
Hanged herself out of love for a man,
All those who've committed suicide
In our family
Have hanged themselves,
My great-grandfather
Hanged himself,
He was a hussar
So my great-grandmother told me,
He hanged himself
When someone punched him in the face
And they took away the ploughs, harrows and the seeder
He had ordered from Switzerland,
So my great-grandmother told me,
He took a rope
And held his time fast with it
And they buried him
Because they'd given the doctor two hundredweight of wheat
And he signed a Christian death certificate,
So my great-grandmother said,
Another girl in the family
Hanged herself
Out of love
And they buried her
A virgin,
She had run home from the dance
In her stockings
Because her parents didn't like the boy
She'd been dancing with,

She took a rope
And held her love fast with it,
Someone else in the family
Hanged himself,
So grandmother told me,
Because he was tired,
He severed his veins with a big knife
And hanged himself with severed veins,
He took a big knife and a rope
And held his weariness fast with it,
Three other people in the family
Hanged themselves,
They were already old,
They took a rope
And held their old age fast with it,
I believe there's now been
A change of thinking among them,
No one's hanged himself
For decades
Because of ploughs, harrows, seeders
Out of love
Out of weariness
Out of old age,
They whitewash their trees on holidays
And hang out flags.

1974

My neighbour makes a poem for me

"You're lucky,"
Says my neighbour,
"You've got time on your hands to think about life,
You can keep accounts of your worries and expectations.
You can write a poem for your own pleasure
Or words of sorrow on your disappointments.
You can extricate yourself with the turn of a phrase
If they ask too many questions."

Yes, I admit
Life is getting more difficult,
Death is getting easier.

1984

Weekend. The head

On this weekend afternoon
My neighbour trudges up the steps of the stairwell
With a pig's head in his shopping net.
The snout rummages through the land.

1984

Also - an Ars Poetica

Always being forced to make confessions
(it is more painful to extract the nail from your flesh
Than to have it hammered in),
Always being forced to relinquish oneself
(more chilling awaiting evening
Than the cock's crowing at dawn),
Always being forced to begin again
(more frightening are my daily thoughts
Than that which is said

In making confessions,
In relinquishing oneself,
In beginning again),

Always being forced to justify oneself.
More lethal.

1984

Every evening

Every evening
My thoughts collect
At the door.
Then they take their shoes off
So that they can come to me
Silently
Without making any dirt.
I watch them,
Their beauty,
The elegance of their ideal bodies,
And then quickly open the window.
Through the window escape the ideal visions
While I pick up the dirty shoes
At the door.

1972

Werner SÖLLNER

(1951-)

Söllner was born in Horia (Neupanat) near Arad and studied physics, German and English in Cluj-Napoca (Klausenburg). He worked for a publishing company in Bucharest until 1982 when he emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany. He presently lives in Frankfurt. Söllner is the author of seven volumes of verse published in Romania and Germany.

Life. An example

A book with pictures and photos of Nâzim Hikmet⁹
Falls into my hands:

Nâzim the revolutionary, unshaven, a coarse
Woollen scarf wrapped around his neck; Nâzim with Russian
Ballet teachers (is he learning how to change his step
Through history?); Nâzim as a child; Nâzim as a
Young naval cadet on the Red Islands; Nâzim in a martial
Mood in Anatolia; Nâzim
Staying abroad with friends, travelling
Peacefully, fleeing from Kemal; Nâzim
Lapping up the sun in prison in Hopa,
In Bursa, in Istanbul, Çankiri, and again in
Bursa; Nâzim on a hunger strike, Nâzim
Breaks the bread of his freedom
With Paul Robeson, Julius Fucik and Pablo Neruda
(they are all long-since dead); Nâzim
Fleeing across the Black
Sea, in Moscow, Berlin, in
Sofia and Peking, in Poland
Suspecting nothing, in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary, in France;
Nâzim with a broken heart at death's door
Rewriting the book of hours in Prague, experiencing his
First evening in Rome, inquiring mysteriously about
Paris, reporting from Havana, enjoying the disadvantages
Of exile, describing revolutionaries
As romantics (what would Nâzim have done
In a real revolution?); Nâzim shaving
In front of the mirror, Nâzim enjoying nature, falling in love
At the age of sixty, Nâzim cooking, being serious,
Reading the newspaper, Nâzim a candid look
At the future, laughing aloud, then closing
His eyes.

1980

⁹ Nâzim Hikmet (1902-1963): Turkish revolutionary poet and dramatist (transl. note).

Right through this house

There runs a border line. On one side love,
On the other side death, the concepts
Getting mixed up, each in turn, until language
Becomes mute, until the heart shatters
Into a thousand glass eyes. Then come the moles,
Amphibians, to get the human beings moving at last,
Help them walk on their own hind legs. May they
Set off to wherever they came from
And there build a better world than this one
Created by God or the Emperor of China or
Capital in its present form. May they
Make a lot of money and live in equality.
May their hair fall out on their road to
The future when at last it will become clear
That there are no heads under it at all, except perhaps
To camouflage the hole in which the iron
Bird sits which in German we call the soul.

1986

Departure

To die drunk like
The ancient poet Nedim.¹⁰
In classical metre, headfirst
Into the Golden Horn. There, among the car wrecks
And poisoned fish, there
He died, no more
Than an exegesis
Of history.

1976

¹⁰ Nedim (1681-1730): prominent Turkish poet of the 'Tulip Age' who died during the Patrona uprising in 1730 (transl. note).

Wall, nail, picture

(for C. M.)

My poem is a nail
In a wall.

On it hangs my poem,
A picture of the wall
With the nail in it.

1976

William TOTOK**(1951-)**

Totok was born on 21 April 1951 in Comlosu Mare (Grosskomlosch) in Banat and studied German and Romance philology in Timisoara (Temeswar). He was a member of the literary circle 'Aktionsgruppe Banat' (Banat Action Group) during the liberal period of the early seventies. In 1975-1976 he spent eight months under political arrest and was unable to publish for several years, working among other things in a brickyard. From 1979 to 1982 he taught German in Tomnatic (Triebswetter) and worked thereafter for the Timisoara German-language newspaper "Neue Banater Zeitung". In 1985 he was fired for political reasons and emigrated to West Berlin in 1987.

Workers at the brickyard

Hands full of noise
And out of the press soft quadrangular clay drips
Like pearls.
Fingers grab at the cool substance,
The engine howling passionately.

The chimney-stack fans black smoke mixed with sweat
Into the sky
And tearful eyes
Gaze towards the sun
Bathing in a pool of clouds.

Rays filter back into the press house
Through gaps in the old wall.

Only a sweaty human arm grabs bricks
Again off the swift conveyor-belt.

1977

Anna Espresso, Váci St., Budapest, July 27th 1979

It's windy out
And time reclines on the white chairs
Of the café
I sip my bitter coffee
An old man joins me
The whole century flashing in his eyes
He listens in surprise
To what I have to say
About the country I come from

Yesterday I bought Osip Mandel'shtam's poems
And told the old man about the poet's life
He asks what I live on
What I write about and how much I earn
There are things you cannot understand
I finally say

Then we go for something to eat
Anything'll do I say
My money's beginning to run out

1979

Departure

I cut winter up into little pieces;
Only in the train compartment is it warm.
Your hand waves.
The tracks gleam faintly, just
Before departure the locomotive shrieks.
Your hand freezes.
I carry the fragrance of your skin in my pocket.
It's become so quiet beside me.
Your womb, your breasts - my homeland
Slips away in the melting snow.
Your hand hangs motionless in the window.
Your image walks beside me.
I cut it up into little pieces;
Only in my room is it warm.
You wave like the wobbly hands of my clock.

1984

Seasons

The time has come,
The guards are rattling their keys
Behind your back.
There's nothing else to miss.
The branches of the trees are cracking
Under the snow,
It's quiet in the barns.
Your eyes
Are now two burnt-out light-bulbs.

Petroleum seeps into the sand.

1984

Normal day

Your face
Is hidden in the fog

Some unsuspecting official
Drives by

Nothing looks suspicious
But your subtle blink

1984

The flag

I'm still holding
The flag and think
It might come in handy
If I freeze.

1983

Rolf BOSSERT

(1952-1986)

He was born in the industrial town of Resita (Reschitza) in the Banat mountains on 16 December 1952. He studied German and English in Bucharest and for four years taught German in Busteni. He then returned to Bucharest, working for the "Friedrich Schiller" German cultural centre and from 1981 on for Meridiane and Kriterion publishing companies. In 1984 he applied for emigration, the result of which was that he lost his job, was refused authorization to publish and disappeared as a public person. In the same period, he had several unpleasant encounters with the Romanian secret service shortly before he was able to leave the country with his wife and two sons in December 1985. Bossert committed suicide in Frankfurt on February 17, 1986, leaving behind two thin volumes of verse (*Siebensachen* 1979 and *Neuntöter* 1984).

Short poem on a little freezing bird

I'm freezing,
Said the little bird
And installed its nest
Under the protective garments
Of a scarecrow.

1974

Artists, critics & cabbage salad

You see, ladies and gentlemen, this is
My little finger
So thin you hardly notice it
Next is my ring finger
The iron ring is proof of my marital ties
With someone or other
 the next two
 - the middle and index fingers -
 are always up in the air
 sometimes together sometimes in a V
I don't know
Whether my thumb should be pointing up or down
 but
With all five fingers I dig
Into the salad-bowl
Because I love cabbage salad

1974

Golden age of fables

Lion and mouse
Engrossed in a discussion:
Which is easier to bite through?

Ropes said the mouse,
Necks said the lion.

At any rate
They got the hanged man
Down off the tree

(it was a feat:
The deadman no longer reeks to the heavens,
But among us).

1975

About my life

24 September 1977

I'm married and have two children my wife
Teaches German as a foreign language so do I we
Live in two rooms of a three-room apartment
The little room is seven point eighty-seven
Square metres the big room is nine
Point eighty-eight square metres
The biggest room in the apartment is
Fourteen point sixty-nine square metres
We don't use it it's locked and is
Empty most of the time but in the winter
An elderly couple uses it to save on
Firewood at home in their village families we don't know
often come over on weekends with their children
The mountain air's good for the kids the three-room
Apartment is situated in the beautiful mountain resort
Of Busteni kitchen bathroom and toilet are shared by
A lot of people only the balcony
Faces south it belongs to the third room
I'm not allowed to use it
I've written to the housing authorities
To the people's council
To the newspaper
I've called on quite a number of officials
Now I'm writing a poem
I have infinite confidence in the power
Of poetry

21 December 1977

This text hasn't been published yesterday the
Elderly couple got two rooms in a mansion
We got the key to the third room which goes
To prove that even unpublished poems can change
The reality from which they draw their inspiration
I intend to write more poems

1978

Season

Out into the pale day
We went, beechwards,
Past yards
Full of smoke: crematoria
For autumn's eyelashes.

Naked, golden eyes
Were watching us.

At night
Your hand sleeps
Next to me.

1982

Nightshade rift

They're standing outside the door
With hammers and chrysanthemums:
Not guests, not workers.
They're not the Russians,
They don't fly through the prongs
Of eternally complementary thoughts.
They love beauty,
Incongruities of style. But they're
Not the leather angels of the Lord.
They want your skin, my words.

1984

Confidence¹¹

The lead is sluggish.
Bullet still in the barrel.
And so we have time.

1982

¹¹ The text is written in the form of a Japanese Haiku (transl. note).

Richard WAGNER**(1952-)**

Wagner was born in Lovrin (Lowrin) in Banat on 10 April 1952. He studied German in Timisoara (Temeswar) where he took part in the liberal literary movement 'Aktionsgruppe Banat' (Banat Action Group). From 1975 to 1978 he taught in Hunedoara and from 1979 to 1984 worked as a journalist for the Brasov (Kronstadt) weekly newspaper "Karpaten Rundschau". In March 1987 he emigrated to West Berlin. Wagner is author of six volumes of verse as well as prose and children's literature. He is married to prose writer Herta Müller.

Dialectics

We grasped the situation
We resolved to change it

We changed it

Then others came along
They grasped the changed
Situation and resolved
To change it

They changed the changed
Situation

Then others came along
They grasped the changed changed
Situation and resolved
To change it

They changed the changed
Changed situation

Then others came along

1971

Words of the poet

Courage said the poet
Courage to deal in one's writing wheezed the poet
With certain negative aspects stressed the poet
Which are by no means representative of society as a whole
Conceded the poet
But which arise sporadically and spontaneously
Emphasized the poet has without a doubt
An exceedingly positive effect underlined the poet
And not vice versa added the poet deftly
On the development of society
Concluded the poet

1977

The waitress

She flits back and forth
Among the tables. Eyes pursuing her,
Hands calling her attention. She

Flits back and forth, steadies
Her tray, writes the bills, counts
Her money, has no change, says

Thanks, leans on the counter. Brings
Coffee, gets jittery, these guys.
Everything falls, all the words glance

Off her. Indifferently she flits by us,
Back and forth. Her voice is shrill.
Thanks, she says, thanks very much. Then

She returns to the counter,
With her empty tray, and now look,
Now she's doing it, that old gesture,

That country gesture
She hasn't forgotten yet. I stand outside
And can still see her in front of me.

1978

Question for Mandel'shtam¹²

Osip

Brother

We are oil in the works

Oh, if only we were oil on the fire

But we are

Oil in the works

Osip brother

When we move

It works worse

But it works

Brother

What else can

We do

1981

¹² Osip Mandel'shtam (1891-1938): Russian poet (transl. note).

Song

Work slept
Verse slept
Peace slept
The future slept
That was
When the Swiss Guard
Attempted
A coup d'état

Work awoke
Verse awoke
Peace awoke
The future awoke
That was
When the Swiss Guard
Attempted
A coup d'état

Work attacked
Peace
Verse attacked
The future
That was
When the Swiss Guard
Attempted
A coup d'état

Work became peaceful
Verse became futuristic
That was
When the Swiss Guard
Attempted
A coup d'état

1984

With the painter Lauterbach

They still keep coming
Without a search warrant.
They take the pictures,
Still keep taking the pictures
And the neighbours are still
Furious
Because, transporting the pictures,
They mark
The walls in the stairwell.

1987

The burning table
(from a postcard)

I sat
At the burning table
And wrote.
What I wrote
Didn't stop
The burning.
What burned
Didn't stop
My writing.

1987

I was a statue

I was a statue.
One balmy morning
I climbed down off my pedestal
To meet the man
Who has to dust me off
Every day.

Carrying a ladder on his back
He gave me a friendly look,
An accomplished smile,
And handed me
His cloth.

1973

Ernest WICHNER**(1952-)**

Wichner was born in Frumosliu (Guttenbrunn) in Banat in 1952. He studied German and Political Science in Timisoara (Temeswar) and West Berlin. In 1975, he emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany and has been living in West Berlin since 1976. He is the author of poetry, prose, essays, translations and criticism.

Slogan

All through the government quarter, happiness and us
Colourful soap bubbles
Over the helmeted heads
Of the night

1988

Trakl in exile¹³

We know that Trakl
Rejected Brecht's invitations
From his Californian exile,

Inscribing on them "Sebastian
Is asleep", the 54-year-old wrote
To his 49-year-old sister

Grete: "... it's all over, the brass dreams
Unwound, abandoned
All that seemed to be meaningful.

What once was dreams hangs large, tangible:
The words, Grete, the words...
I saw them as they came

Up the stairs and tried
To force their way in; to talk,
They said, they just wanted to talk

To me. But I, with a chain
On the door, remained inside
In silent anguish, was simply not there."

1982

¹³ Georg Trakl (1887-1914): Austrian poet (transl. note).

Horst SAMSON

(1954-)

Born on 4 June 1954 in the village of Salcîmi in the Baragan steppe of southeastern Romania where his family had been deported, Samson studied at the teacher training college in Sibiu (Hermannstadt) and at the Faculty of Journalism of the Academy of Social Sciences in Bucharest. He worked from 1974 to 1977 as a teacher, from 1977 to 1984 on the editorial staff of the "Neue Banater Zeitung" in Timisoara (Temeswar) and from 1984 to 1987 for the influential literary periodical "Neue Literatur" in Bucharest. On 6 March 1987 he emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany and now lives in Leonberg near Stuttgart. Samson is the author of four volumes of poetry published in Romania as well as of short stories and criticism.

Trip to Paris

Pont Neuf Comédie Française
Père Lachaise Champs Elysées

I'm here
Arrived without having left

Can't you see me from the sidewalk
Speeding through Paris
With my desk

Salut
The Dôme des Invalides calls out to me.

1980

Morning

The key turns in the lock
The door bumps against the wall
It closes with a thud
I hear you putting the milk bottles
On the kitchen table
(they clink gently like ice-cubes)
Then you come into my room
I'm back you say
And lay a stack of newspapers on the table.

1981

Punctual curriculum vitae

For my neighbour Hans on his 60th birthday

At night my neighbour Hans
Puts his steel helmet on
Sticks a prayer book
In his breast pocket
And drives a black NSU
Through a minefield near Narva
On towards Leningrad

At five in the morning
He's back

1982

Snow poem for Edda

The room for us
Between the headlines
 Is so constricting

Nothing is going to change very fast

I could throw my texts into the fire
Then make a confession and give up
 A wall would crumble

And afterwards I would still know who I am

In front of our door are mounds of snow
A lot of tiny lights
 I know that some go out every day

Winter is cold and long

1982

Meeting of poets in Sighisoara
(‘Vlad Dracul’ Restaurant)

The stones convene
The walls grow into the afternoon

Impaled Turks
Scream in the annals of history

The bloodthirsty Carpathian count
Lives

The hilltop castles the pointed roofs motionless
In the wind
The word which has come to a halt

A few still sway
Back and forth in the coffee cups

Now and then a poet raises his head
Out of the beer suds

In the streets
The vanquished dangle

1985

Isolation

for Franz Hodjak

Fewer now
We gasp for air
For more air
In long death-bearing nights
We sit around the stone table
Drinking the last coffee
We were saving
For a rainy day

And I tell you the poem
And you tell him the poem
And he tells me the poem
Which I then tell you

At daybreak we leap
Into the wine bottles
And drown

1985

Holidays at home

We go for a swim in our empty wallet
Hold jellyfish up against the twilight
Of the lamp

Laugh and sing, clap and dance
On the white linen tablecloth
Throw salt into the air like sand at the beach

Gently I kiss
Her brown skin

The sea roars on the radio
Its mighty waves breaking

The sun looks
Rectangular

And there's lots of Pepsi
On the screen

With crazy eyes
We sprint joyfully down the beach
Into the shrill cry of a seagull

1985

Winter morning

(for R. W.)

Motto:

*There you have it!
People love too loudly*

At four thirty in the morning
The snow crunches
Under the soles of our shoes
We are awake
Waiting for milk
And shiver in the frost
Next to me
Someone wishes
He had a milk cloud
In his fridge
All of a sudden
Two hundred people wish
They had milk clouds
In their fridges

On the other side the windows
Are still dark
Someone says
They're lucky
They're sleeping

How lucky they are
They're sleeping

1985

Winter poem for Sarah Kirsch¹⁴

North wind blows
Over to us out of books

Winter lies heavy
On the land

People are quiet and bundled up
In fur coats

Crows perch
In throats

Snow I think
Is a white fairy tale
That lies

1985

¹⁴ Sarah Kirsch (1935-): German poet (transl. note).

Federico

The world
Lonely and distant

The morning an inkling
Under hooves of light

At the reins of a dark horse
Federico comes in through the crack in the wall
Mountain grass in the sockets of his eyes
A fiery poem in his mouth
And shows me his wound the gaping guitar

With my texts, books and tapes
All spirited off
I follow him
Into the dark path of the gun barrel

1985

Subsequent remark about my birth

Under the motley sun
Of the Baragan steppe
I was born
Beside a thistle
Or on another day

I saw nothing at the time

So obscure and imprecise
Was the story
Of my birth

1985

Carmen PUCHIANU

(1956-)

Puchianu was born on 27 November 1956. After secondary school graduation in Brasov (Kronstadt), she studied English and German in Bucharest from 1975 to 1979. She now teaches at the Johannes Honterus secondary school in Brasov.

Postcard for Frank O'Hara

Distorted by crystal balls
Strange hands hang in my face.
I am not going to write
The postcard to Frank.
I'll paint it instead
As a still life
With an apple and a snake
Balanced on the scales.

1988

Timeless

Grant me the quiet
Hour of a midnight
Autumn,
The rusty rustle
Of timeless steps in the fallow grass.

Inevitably
Snow lies ahead for us all.

1988

Juliana MODOI**(1962-)**

Juliana Modoi was born on 8 August 1962 in Brasov (Kronstadt) and studied German in Bucharest from 1981 to 1986. Her first verse appeared in the Brasov weekly periodical 'Karpatenrundschau' in 1972. She is not only a poet but also an expert in the game of chess.

Village evening

The pale light of evening
Saunters through the streets
On buffalo hooves;
With a hand light as a feather
A shadow
Points at our house.
With a finger
In the air
It draws
The contours
Of tomorrow's guests.

1988

A mother's consolation

I am not allowed to weep
When it gets dark
For your child is listening
Within me.

1988

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