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The Critical Essay in Interwar Romania: Between Literary Criticism and Cultural Nationalism.  
G. Ibrăileanu, Paul Zarifopol, E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu

This paper analyses the avatars of cultural nationalism in the works of four Romanian essayists after 1918’s unification. I am interested in expanding the approach of the Encyclopedia of the Essay edited by Tracy Chevalier (1997), regarding the status of the critical essay in Eastern Europe, where it had a specific ideological dimension concerning nation-building and nationalism. In interwar Romania, the essay was the most common form of written discourse in the fields of literary studies and social criticism. In this context, I am interested in describing the nationalist ideology which these works are indirectly conveying. In writing about Romanian culture and literature, the essayists employ national myths of origin and contribute to the symbolic production of a collective identity. “Dacianism”, Latinity, orthodoxy, ruralism, ethnicity, modernity - are the main concepts of the Romanian culture debate, and their defense or dismissal in the writings of the essayists quoted above delineates the intellectual framework of interwar Romania. I have chosen for exemplification four different personalities of the period: G. Ibrăileanu (Spiritul critic în cultura românească – The Critical Spirit in Romanian Culture, 1909), Paul Zarifopol (Din registrul ideilor gingăşte – Excerpts from a Catalogue of Fine Ideas, 1926; Artiștii și idei literare române – Romanian Artists and Literary Ideas, 1930), E. Lovinescu (Istoria civilizației române moderne – The History of Romanian Modern Civilization, 1924-1925), G. Călinescu, Specificul național – The National Spirit, 1941). Each of them creates a version of Romanian cultural tradition that defines a specific way of understanding the present and the past.