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Is college education some unnecessary stress for poets?

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Abstract

The biographical research that we ran on 50 eminent Romanian poets (scanning 140 years, from 1850 to 1990) comes up with a figure of 44 (88%) cases of psychopathology and invites the gruesome conclusion that psychopathology and (poets') creativity are inexorably connected, that psychopathology although not sufficient is necessary to make an eminent poet. Now, given that psychopathology is most likely to be inherited and has little to do with the environment (educational institutions included) we are led to another unpleasant conclusion, viz. poetry has little to do with college education. College won't ruin the "frame," but neither will it help.

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1. Introduction

In a recent within-family study by Cosman & Pîrvu [1], referring to the case of Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), the national Romanian poet was found to have an impressive history of "tainted blood," much like what Jamison [2] found in Tennyson and Byron. What is it? The authors come up with the grim conclusion that psychopathology and poetry are, so to say, soulmates. To make a long story short, there were 11 siblings in the poet's family: three died in

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infancy or early childhood (27.27%); a fourth one died in his teens and we have no way of knowing what he may have developed in terms of psychopathology. As for the other seven, a staggering figure (63,64%) by all means, they all had a psychiatric history – and we can take the liberty to assume, just for the sake of the argument, that this figure might well have risen to 100%. Furthermore, three of the siblings (27.27%) committed suicide.

2. Hypothesis

Various other studies by Cosman [3], Lăzăroiu [4], Juda [5], Martindale [6], Trethowan [7], Schildkraut, Hirshfeld & Murphy [8], Post [9, 10], Ludwig [11, 12], Andreasen [13, 14], Enăchescu [15], Cosman & Pîrvu [16], without always saying that much, infer that psychopathology and creativity (with the highest percentage in poetry) are so much related – going as high as 87% in poets [11] – that we can safely presume that a poet will not be a poet unless there is some kind of “fine madness” in himself. Yes, your reading is correct, “himself” is not readily followed by “herself,” the sad discovery, as you will shortly see, being that poetry does not seem to be, in any way, “women’s land” – at least as far as Romanian poetry is concerned.

3. Material and method

Working on the above-mentioned hypothesis we made our choice of eminent Romanian poets, which proved to be a complex, time-consuming task, compelling us to consult the seven-volume *Dictionary of Romanian Literature* and George Călinescu’s *History of Romanian Literature* to begin with; and then a never-ending retinue of literary histories and monographs by Titu Maiorescu, Vasile Lovinescu, Nicolae Iorga, Tudor Vianu, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Șerban Cioculescu... and what not.

Prior to such extensive readings, however, we were faced up with this unpleasant task, to draw boundaries: 1850 because it would be next to impossible to find any reliable data before this year in terms of psychiatric illness, and 1990 because one has to put at least a one-generation temporal distance (≈ 20 years) so as to get an objective view. The “unpleasantness” of the task now comes clear because we were obliged to leave aside illustrious names like Costache Conachi and the Văcărescu on the one hand, and such Iași-based poets as Cezar Ivănescu (1941-2008) and Mihai Ursachi (1941-2004) on the other hand. At long last we came up with an abundant list of (really) eminent poets – “all of the Romanians are poets” is the famous statement of Vasile Alecsandri, the unrivalled star of Romanian poetry until the divine advent of Mihai Eminescu. The really nasty part of our job came forth at this point. Had we used aesthetic criteria only, it would all have been Russian roulette. The lucky winner seemed to be the idea to let cultural criteria in, to join the team. And so, paying due reverence to the founding fathers in the first place and weighing out the cultural significance of this or that name we drew the conclusion that a figure like 50 might well be satisfactory. We do regret not going any further, but we were afraid of losing control. So, fifty it is, and it is a number as good as any other.

4. Results

And the winners are, for:

- **psychiatric illness** Grigore Alexandrescu (1810-1885), Dimitrie Anghel (1872-1914), Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967), George Bacovia (1881-1957), Ion Barbu (1895-1961), Geo Bogza (1908-1993), Dimitrie Bolintineanu (1811-1872), Dan Botta (1907-1958), Emil Botta (1911-1977), Ion Caraion (1923-1986), Paul Celan (1920-1970), Mihai Codreanu (1876-1957), George Coșbuc (1866-1918), Aron Cotruș (1891-1961), Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972), Leonid Dimov (1926-1987), Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), Barbu Fundoianu (1898-1944), Radu Gyr (1905-1975), Ion Heliade Rădulescu (1802-1872), Șt. O. Iosif (1875-1913), Nicolae Labiș (1935-1956), Gherasim Luca (1913-1994), Al. Macedonski (1854-1920), Adrian Maniu (1891-1968), Virgil Mazilescu (1942-1984), Ion Minulescu (1881-1944), Sașa Pană (1902-1981), Miron Radu Paraschivescu (1911-1971), Perpessicius (1891-1971), Ștefan Petică (1877-1904), Ion Pillat (1921-1975), Nichita Stănescu (1933-1983), Dimitrie Stelaru (1917-1971), Vladimir Streinu (1902-1970), Al. O. Teodoreanu (1894-1964), Constantin

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