



BRIDGING CULTURES AND CHALLENGING PREJUDICES: THE RELEVANCE OF VASILE ALECSANDRI'S *BALTA-ALBĂ* IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract

In *Balta-Albă*, Vasile Alecsandri delves into the cultural tensions between Eastern and Western Europe during the 19th century, using the journey of a French architect to Romania as a lens through which to explore issues of identity, cultural exchange, and prejudice. Through the architect's evolving perception of Wallachia—initially seen as a wild, uncivilized land—Alecsandri critiques Western Europe's romanticized and often ignorant views of the East. The story serves as both a literal and metaphorical exploration of how cultural perceptions shape our understanding of what is "civilized" versus "barbaric." The narrative's embedded structure, alternating between the architect's story and a local's perspective, further highlights the complex interaction between Western and Eastern cultural identities. By challenging assumptions and presenting a nuanced portrayal of Romanian society, *Balta-Albă* pushes readers to reconsider simplistic cultural divides. In a contemporary world still grappling with issues of cultural prejudice and identity politics, Alecsandri's work offers a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy and critical thinking in bridging cultural gaps.

Keywords: *Vasile Alecsandri, Pașoptism, short prose, embedded narration, prejudice*

INTRODUCTION

Vasile Alecsandri (1821–1890) was a Romanian writer, known in the literary world for his patriotic and romantic poetry, as well as his literary works inspired by ballads. His literary legacy does not revolve solely around lyricism; Alecsandri also wrote captivating historical plays, comedies, and even short prose. Considering his contribution to the literary space, he is regarded as one of the most important figures of 19th-century Romanian literature. Vasile Alecsandri had a deep and influential relationship with Pașoptism, a cultural and political movement associated with the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian principalities. His role in Pașoptism was both literary and political, as he actively contributed to the movement's goals of national unity, modernization, and cultural revival. By analyzing his works, one can better understand the historical and social climate of the Romanian people, from their struggles to their mentality. One social issue that stands out in his short prose *Balta Albă* is the prejudice of Western civilization against Eastern Europe. Using a humorous episode, Alecsandri brings to light an important issue: the clash between two mentalities. Through this, multiple concepts stand out: how ignorance can mislead people who visit a new space, cultural contrasts, the duality of language, and social critique.

The *Pașoptist* movement, named after the 1848 Revolution in the Romanian principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), was a significant cultural and political movement that played a crucial role in the development of modern Romanian identity. The term “Pașoptism” derives from the word *pașopt* (from the Romanian *pașoptiste* meaning “forty-eight”), as it was closely associated with the events of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, which were driven by demands for national independence, liberal reforms, and social justice. On a cultural level, the Pașoptist movement was deeply transformative. It marked the beginning of modern Romanian literature and thought, reflecting the broader European trends of Romanticism and liberalism while simultaneously seeking to assert a national identity separate from the influence of the Ottoman Empire, Russia,

and other foreign powers that had long dominated the region. Pașoptism was about more than just literary innovation; it was a movement of cultural revitalization that aimed to bring Romania into the European intellectual and political fold. The movement sought to modernize Romanian literature by introducing new literary forms, ideas, and genres from the West. Writers like Vasile Alecsandri, Mihail Kogălniceanu, and George Coșbuc were at the forefront of this effort, producing works that emphasized national identity, folk traditions, and the struggles for social and political change. Pașoptism saw the rise of literature as a tool for promoting national unity, education, and progress. Focusing on the literary space, the Pașoptist writers were strongly influenced by the ideals of national independence and unity, which were central to the revolutionary movements of the time. They pushed for social reforms, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the abolition of feudal privileges, and the modernization of Romanian society. Their works often celebrated the Romanian peasantry, folklore, and history, while also advocating for the country's integration into the broader European intellectual currents. The movement was profoundly shaped by Western European ideas, especially those coming from France and Germany. Pașoptist writers were influenced by Romanticism, liberalism, and Enlightenment ideals, incorporating these into their literary works. They looked to Paris, in particular, as a cultural and intellectual center and were keen to bring Romanian literature in line with European standards. The use of Western literary models helped elevate Romanian literature's status in the European literary world. Moreover, the movement was not purely cultural—it was deeply connected to the political context of the time. The 1848 revolutions across Europe had a direct impact on the Romanian principalities, with intellectuals and writers becoming involved in the struggle for political and social change. The Pașoptist movement, therefore, was not only a literary movement but also a political one, advocating for greater political freedom, the establishment of democratic institutions, and the improvement of the social fabric.

Vasile Alecsandri, one of the prominent figures of the Pașoptist literary movement, aligns with the principles of this literary current, which marks the beginnings of modernity in Romanian literature. Pașoptism represents a period of profound cultural and literary transformation, a moment of redefining

aesthetic values and ideological orientations. This stage is essential for the crystallization of modern artistic consciousness and for the integration of Romanian literature into the European circuit of ideas and literary forms. One of the defining aspects of Pașoptist literature is its reorientation towards a new cultural center—Paris—which becomes a source of inspiration for Romanian writers. In this context, literature redefines its status by adopting a Western model based on fictionality, artistic consciousness, and aesthetic pleasure. These characteristics contribute to the affirmation of modern national literature capable of competing with established European models. The literature of this period has a pronounced militant character, being deeply influenced by the political imperatives of the time. Pașoptist writers actively engage in promoting national ideals, such as liberation from foreign rule and the achievement of national unity. Thus, literature becomes an instrument of propaganda and education, meant to instill in readers a sense of national belonging and a desire for progress.

In this context, Vasile Alecsandri's short story *Balta-Albă* represents a relevant example of travel prose, a true narrative gem that can be interpreted as a fictionalization of the paradigm shift defining Romanian literature from this period onward. The orientation towards the Western cultural model is evident both thematically and stylistically, and the text reflects the modernizing tendencies of Romanian literature. From a compositional perspective, Alecsandri's story follows multiple narrative patterns, demonstrating remarkable structural complexity. Firstly, it employs the framed story technique, a narrative strategy that allows for multiple perspectives on the events being recounted. Secondly, it makes use of the "foreigner fiction," exploring the encounter between different cultural identities and its impact on the narrator. Thirdly, the text incorporates elements of the travel journal, offering a subjective perspective on the places and people encountered, thus contributing to the creation of an authentic and captivating atmosphere.

Therefore, the story *Balta-Albă* perfectly illustrates the fundamental directions of Pașoptist literature: the modernization of literary discourse, the orientation towards Western models, and the integration of Romanian literature into a broader cultural context. Vasile Alecsandri succeeds in creating a work that, while anchored in national specificity, aligns with European literary

trends, thereby strengthening the status of Romanian literature in the modern era.

At first, the text seems to follow a simple narration of a man's journey in East Europe. A young French architect, traveling through the East, shares his recent experiences in Wallachia, a region whose existence he was previously unaware of. The architect's journey begins with a trip along the Danube, where he is struck by the "wild beauty" of the landscape. Upon reaching Brăila, he decides to interrupt his journey to the East to explore the Wallachian plains, hoping to find adventures and unique experiences. At the French consulate in Brăila, he hears about Balta-Albă, a pond reputed to have miraculous properties, attracting thousands of people seeking healing. Determined to visit Balta-Albă, the architect embarks on a journey filled with mishaps in a primitive carriage, pulled by weak horses and driven by a scary coachman. The trip is marked by accidents and discomfort, culminating in his arrival at a village where he feels foreign and lost. He is surprised by the bizarre appearance of the dwellings and the hostile reception from the dogs. At Balta-Albă, the architect is amazed by the mix of poverty and luxury, European and Romanian attire, and the gathering of people seeking healing. He enters the pond and is taken aback by the uninhibited behavior of the bathers. Overhearing a conversation in French, he joins a group of young men who explain the wonders of the pond. Together with his new friends, the architect explores the surroundings, partakes in a traditional meal in a peasant's house, and takes a ride on an improvised "steamboat" on the pond. In the evening, he attends a ball in a grand hall, where he is delighted by the elegance and European manners of Romanian society. By the end of his journey, the architect remains uncertain whether Wallachia is a civilized or wild country, reflecting on the complexity and contradictions he has experienced.

The literary work "Balta-Albă" by Vasile Alecsandri uses this exact journey of the French architect to Wallachia to explore the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe in the 19th century.

In Vasile Alecsandri's short story *Balta-Albă*, the author employs the literary technique of embedded narration, structuring the text in such a way that it tells not one but two interwoven stories. This narrative approach enhances the complexity of the text and allows for a multifaceted exploration of themes such as cultural exchange, identity, and literary modernity. The first story, also

referred to as the frame narrative, establishes the context in which the second story is told. The action takes place in Iași, during an evening gathering, approximately one month before the moment of narration. The events are recounted from a first-person perspective by a witness-narrator who is present in the company of several friends. Among them is a young French architect, a figure who symbolizes the influence of Western cultural space. This character serves as a bridge between Romanian and Western European intellectual traditions, highlighting the broader cultural shifts of the period. The second story, which is embedded within the first, is recounted by the young French architect himself. His narrative presents his journey to the Orient, thus shifting the focus from the local setting of Iași to a more expansive and exotic backdrop. Like the frame narrative, this embedded story is also conveyed in the first-person, making the narrator both a storyteller and a participant in the events he describes. This technique of using a character-narrator to recount personal experiences lends the text an added layer of authenticity and immediacy, drawing the reader into the vivid world of the protagonist's travels. By employing the structural device of embedded narration, Alecsandri effectively creates a dialogue between different cultural and geographical spaces. The contrast between the familiar setting of Iași and the distant, unfamiliar world of the Orient underscores the broader themes of cultural exploration and adaptation. Additionally, this narrative construction reflects the modernizing tendencies of Romanian literature during the Pașoptist period, as it aligns with European literary conventions and expands the scope of national storytelling. Ultimately, *Balta-Albă* exemplifies the innovative literary techniques characteristic of Pașoptist literature. Through the interplay of these two narratives, Alecsandri not only engages with contemporary aesthetic and ideological concerns but also integrates Romanian literature into the broader European literary framework. The structural sophistication of the text, combined with its thematic richness, solidifies its place as a pivotal work within the movement's literary canon.

The French architect initially admits his ignorance about the existence of Moldavia and Wallachia, revealing a common Western European perspective that often overlooks or marginalizes Eastern European regions. His journey becomes a "discovery" of these "beautiful parts of the world," suggesting an encounter with a previously unknown or disregarded culture. The reader explores this unknown territory through the lens of this character. Influenced by

his ignorance, we tend to believe his ideas, to be just as surprised as he is when he steps into Wallachia. What should be noted is that from the beginning of the text, it is emphasized how he is ignorant and that he is harshly judging this unexplored part of Europe. He is not merely a vessel through which the narrative is told, on a larger scale he becomes the symbol for what multiple people believed at the time: relentless prejudices against East Europe. Furthermore, the fact that he does not have a name, accentuates the idea that he reflects a general perspective, not a particular one. The protagonist's initial imaginings of Wallachia as a "sort of desert" inhabited by "wild beasts" and "wandering people" reflect Western stereotypes about the "Orient" or less-known European areas. This contrasts sharply with his eventual experiences of encountering a "very pleasant" society, and later, European-style social events. Throughout his travels, the architect is continuously confronted with cultural contrasts that challenge his initial assumptions. For instance, he finds that the mode of transportation is primitive, yet he is assured that it is an experience he will remember. He encounters both "savage beauty" and unexpected comforts. It is clear to realize, while reading the text that he is unable to fully emerge himself in this new experience, because of his prejudice and judgment o criticize various aspects which make up this space. The narrative plays with the theme of civilization versus barbarity. The protagonist fluctuates between viewing Wallachia as a wild, uncivilized land and recognizing its unique form of civilization. The presence of European fashions and manners alongside more "primitive" living conditions creates a sense of cultural ambiguity. The young French architect in *Balta-Albă* is not merely an artist; he is also a foreigner, a representative of a different cultural space—one that is grand, ancient, and rich in tradition, specifically that of France, and by extension, Western Europe. This dual identity makes him an intriguing character within the narrative, as he embodies both the artistic sensibility of his craft and the cultural assumptions of his homeland.

From this perspective, he carries with him the stereotypes specific to the civilization he represents. His understanding of Eastern Europe is shaped by preconceived notions rather than personal experience, a fact evident in his initial belief: "*I was convinced that from the German border to the Black Sea lay nothing but European Turkey.*" (Alecsandri, 1947: 19). This statement illustrates his perception of the region as a vast and undifferentiated territory, lacking the complexity and

individuality he might ascribe to Western nations. This limited perspective reflects the broader Western European tendency to exoticize and simplify the lands beyond their immediate cultural sphere. His perception of Wallachia undergoes an evolution throughout the narrative. Initially, he is entirely unaware of its existence. Later, he assumes it to be a mere extension of European Turkey, reinforcing the notion that all territories outside the dominant European powers belong to a monolithic and unfamiliar "other." Finally, he begins to see Wallachia as an exotic space, distinct yet still foreign. His imagination paints it as a desolate wilderness, "*a kind of desert swept by flocks of wild beasts and nomadic people, much like the heart of Africa.*" (Alecsandri, 1947: 19). This description is telling, as it equates Wallachia with a distant, untamed land, reinforcing the belief that it is a place untouched by civilization. The young French architect's perspective epitomizes the Western European gaze upon Eastern Europe in the 19th century—a gaze marked by assumptions of primitivism and an eagerness to frame unfamiliar territories as spaces of adventure and mystery. His expectations of encountering a world populated by bands of outlaws and wild animals highlight the romanticized and sometimes condescending view Western travelers often held regarding regions they deemed peripheral. This notion aligns with broader colonial-era attitudes, in which the unknown was often perceived as an opportunity for exploration and conquest. Through this portrayal, Vasile Alecsandri critiques these preconceived notions and engages with the broader discourse on cultural identity and perception. The contrast between the architect's initial expectations and his eventual experiences in Wallachia serves to expose the constructed nature of Western stereotypes about the East. By presenting this evolution, Alecsandri not only deconstructs the foreigner's misconceptions but also asserts the uniqueness and richness of Romanian cultural identity within the European context. Ultimately, the young French architect functions as a lens through which Alecsandri explores the interplay between Western and Eastern perspectives. His journey from ignorance to a deeper, albeit still limited, understanding of Wallachia reflects a broader commentary on the necessity of cultural exchange and the dismantling of superficial assumptions. The text thus serves not only as a literary work but also as a commentary on the power of perception in shaping historical and cultural narratives.

The journey undertaken by the young French architect in *Balta-Albă* is emblematic of the deeper meanings conveyed by the text. His route—Paris, Vienna, the course of the Danube, Giurgiu, Brăila, and finally Balta-Albă—illustrates a gradual transition from the familiar Western European world to the unfamiliar and enigmatic Eastern European landscape. This geographical progression mirrors the protagonist's psychological and cultural evolution as he confronts his preconceived notions about the lands he explores. Balta-Albă holds an ambiguous status within the narrative. The protagonist first hears of it from the French consul in Brăila, who describes it as a miraculous body of water, capable of performing wonders. However, Balta-Albă functions more as a mirage than a concrete destination; it contains the promise of an extraordinary experience, igniting the traveler's imagination. Ultimately, though, this promise remains an illusion, serving only as a pretext for embarking on the journey. The true purpose of the expedition is not to reach Balta-Albă itself but rather to experience the journey, to engage with this new and unfamiliar civilization that awaits exploration. The young traveler sets out with a set of expectations shaped by his readings of travel literature. However, these expectations are progressively dismantled throughout the journey. This process of disillusionment serves two key functions: it acts as a parody of the traditional travel journal, including its emphasis on adventure, and it exposes the stereotypes that initially motivated the journey.

The journey to Balta-Albă can be divided into two distinct phases, each marked by a contrast between anticipation and reality. This phase takes place under the cover of night and is characterized by the stark contrast between the traveler's expectations and the reality he encounters. At every stage, his assumptions are overturned: instead of a comfortable carriage, he finds a crude means of transportation; instead of being received as an honored guest, he experiences indifference or confusion; instead of an elegant resort, he finds a crude, rudimentary settlement; instead of an inn offering warm hospitality, he must settle for much rougher accommodations. With the arrival of daylight, the traveler is finally able to perceive the new world around him. However, even in the light of day, his expectations remain unfulfilled. His new objective is no longer to confirm his initial fantasies but rather to capture the essence of this space.

What he encounters is a hybrid civilization—one in which Western elements blend with both Eastern and indigenous influences. This fusion creates a striking tableau, one that defies categorization. As he observes:

What can I tell you, gentlemen, in the end? I do not think there is another spectacle in the world that could impress me more than the sight of that new town, which, with the slightest wind, was in danger of collapsing into ruins. On one side, its picturesque misery; on the other, the luxury of the carriages rushing along the lakeside. That mixture of all contrasts compelled me to believe at times that I was on an island in Oceania, and at other times in a European capital, and thus I could not determine with certainty whether what I saw was a dream of my imagination or real things. (Alecsandri, 197: 25)

This description encapsulates the core theme of the narrative: the juxtaposition of grandeur and decay, of progress and stagnation, of the West and the East. The traveler's uncertainty—his inability to distinguish between reality and illusion—suggests that the space he inhabits is one of transition and transformation. It is neither fully Western nor wholly Eastern but rather an evolving cultural amalgam. These repeated disappointments reveal the traveler's lack of understanding of the world he has entered. They highlight the gap between the Western perception of Eastern Europe and its lived reality. The common thread among all these disillusionments is the traveler's gradual realization that his imagined version of the East—romanticized and shaped by adventure literature—does not align with reality. The journey to Balta-Albă ultimately serves as a metaphor for the traveler's—and, by extension, the reader's—confrontation with preconceived notions. The gradual dismantling of expectations highlights the limitations of Western perspectives on Eastern Europe, challenging simplistic and exoticized representations. Through this nuanced depiction, Alecsandri not only critiques the stereotypes imposed upon Romanian space but also asserts its complex and dynamic cultural identity. The text thus operates on multiple levels: as a travel narrative, as a critique of Western misconceptions, and as a broader meditation on the fluid nature of cultural boundaries.

The final impression left upon the young French architect in Vasile Alecsandri's narrative is one of ambiguity, reflecting the complexity of his journey and its implications. A literary geographical analysis of his travels

provides deeper insight into the meaning of his expedition toward the Orient, ultimately forming a narrative map that extends beyond mere geographical coordinates. The journey consists of locations that are either mentioned (Paris, Vienna) or serve as direct settings for the action (Brăila, Balta-Albă, Galați). These chosen places delineate a narrative trajectory that begins from two of Europe's great metropolises: Paris, recognized as the cultural capital of Europe, and Vienna, the emerging political and scientific hub of the continent. This structured movement across space highlights the protagonist's transition from the familiar European cultural epicenters toward the unfamiliar and seemingly exotic Eastern periphery. Additionally, the story constructs a hydrological network of port cities along the Danube—Vienna, Brăila, and Galați—emphasizing Romania's deep-rooted connection to the major European centers. This geographical pathway serves as a means of asserting the Romanian culture's European identity, underscoring its historical and cultural ties to the West. The Danube, a vital artery of communication and commerce, becomes a metaphor for the permeability of cultural boundaries and the exchange of ideas between East and West. Therefore, the significance of Alecsandri's story is multifaceted. On one level, it asserts Romania's place within the grand European cultural tradition, reinforcing the idea of intellectual and artistic belonging to the Western world. On another level, it fictionalizes a paradigm shift in cultural orientation—one that increasingly looks toward a new center: Paris. This shift symbolizes a larger movement within Romanian literature and intellectual thought, embracing modernity while simultaneously reevaluating traditional influences. In this broader context, the literary and cultural contributions of figures like Costache Negruzzi must also be considered. As one of the rare cases in Romanian literary history, Negruzzi embodies the intersection of local traditions and European modernity, serving as a key figure in shaping national literary identity. His works, much like Alecsandri's, reflect the tension between a peripheral cultural space and the desire to integrate into a broader European framework. Ultimately, the narrative journey undertaken by the young French artist in "Balta-Albă" is not merely a geographical expedition but a symbolic exploration of identity, perception, and transformation. Through his evolving impressions and experiences, the story encapsulates the fundamental literary

and cultural shifts that define 19th-century Romanian literature and its quest for a place within the wider European canon.

Metaphorically the main location in the text, as emphasized also by the title, Balta-Albă becomes the focal point of the meeting between the two civilizations and serves itself as a microcosm of the East-West dynamic. It's a place where over ten thousand people gather, seeking cures and displaying a mix of social classes and customs. The architect observes a blend of "Viennese balloons with harnesses unknown in our country; hats from France; frock coats with anterie; Parisian toilets with foreign and original costumes". This juxtaposition highlights the convergence and sometimes uneasy blending of Eastern and Western cultures.

The duality of this space is further highlighted by the use of language. In this literary work, language serves as both a barrier and a bridge. The protagonist's inability to understand the local language initially isolates him. However, his ability to speak French allows him to connect with others, particularly the educated Romanians who emulate Parisian culture. The exclamation "ah, c'est charmant! c'est adorable! c'est original!" encapsulates the allure and exoticism that Wallachia holds for a Westerner.

The story gently critiques both Eastern and Western perspectives highlighting the misunderstandings and biases that shape cross-cultural perceptions. The French architect's initial ignorance and stereotypes are mocked, but so too are the sometimes superficial attempts to imitate Western culture in Wallachia. The chaotic mix of modernity and tradition reveals the complexities of cultural identity in a region caught between East and West. However, the critique does not stop there; Alecsandri also satirizes the sometimes superficial and exaggerated attempts within Wallachia to imitate Western customs, as if adopting European fashion and mannerisms could instantly elevate the region's status in the eyes of the West. This tension between self-perception and external validation underscores the deeper identity crisis faced by Wallachia and, more broadly, by many Eastern European societies during that period. Rather than presenting a simple contrast between civilization and backwardness, Alecsandri reveals a nuanced reality: a society neither fully Western nor purely Eastern, but one shaped by both influences, struggling to define itself in a rapidly changing world. Vasile Alecsandri's *Balta-Albă* presents an insightful cultural critique that holds an enduring relevance in

the exploration of Eastern and Western European identities. The short story doesn't just narrate the experience of a French architect traveling through Wallachia; it illuminates the deeper tensions between cultural assumptions, prejudices, and the complex realities that lie beyond stereotypes. This literary work, much like others within the *Pașoptist* movement, engages with the sociopolitical climate of the time, offering an evolving perspective that critiques the ignorance and superiority often displayed by Western Europeans towards the Eastern lands.

The architect's journey is a reflection of a broader historical narrative—the interaction between Eastern Europe and Western Europe during the 19th century, a time when Romanian society was caught in the tension of modernization and national identity formation. Alecsandri presents this tension with both humor and critique, using the architect as a symbolic representation of Western attitudes toward the East, which were often steeped in ignorance and romanticized misconceptions. The journey becomes not just a physical passage but also a metaphorical journey into the layers of cultural exchange, identity, and self-discovery. On a deeper level, *Balta-Albă* highlights how cultural perceptions shape the way individuals, and entire societies, define what is considered "civilized" versus "barbaric." Through the architect's evolving understanding of Wallachia, Alecsandri invites readers to reflect on their own prejudices and assumptions about other cultures. The architect's initial judgment of Wallachia as a wild, untamed land filled with "wandering people" and "wild beasts" contrasts sharply with the experiences he encounters—moments of cultural sophistication interspersed with rustic charm. This contradiction serves as a critique of Western Europe's narrow, exoticized view of the East and ultimately demonstrates the complexity and diversity of the Romanian experience, challenging readers to reconsider simplistic cultural divides. The structure of *Balta-Albă* also plays a crucial role in its cultural impact. By employing embedded narration, Alecsandri adds depth to the exploration of cultural clashes. The story of the French architect is framed by a second narrative told by a local in Iași, which introduces an additional layer of cultural perspective. This narrative device not only enriches the story but also symbolically reflects the duality of the cultural experience—Western vs. Eastern—as the architect moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from ignorance to understanding. The framed

structure underscores the modernizing tendencies of Romanian literature and its growing integration into European intellectual circles. It also represents the collective shift towards a more sophisticated and self-aware national identity, one that is shaped by engagement with both internal traditions and external influences.

In light of the contemporary moment, works like *Balta-Albă* are more important than ever. In today's globalized world, where cultural exchange and prejudice still shape our understanding of the "Other," Alecsandri's work offers an essential lesson in empathy, critical thinking, and the danger of reducing complex identities to monolithic stereotypes. By illustrating the absurdity of the architect's initial assumptions, Alecsandri challenges us to reflect on our own views of different cultures and the way these views are shaped by historical narratives. Moreover, the story's exploration of modernization—of blending Western influences with Eastern traditions—mirrors current global conversations about cultural hybridity, identity, and the evolving role of national literature within the broader scope of world literature. In essence, *Balta-Albă* exemplifies the enduring power of literature to not only mirror the complexities of a particular moment in history but also to provoke deeper reflections about the ways in which culture, identity, and perception are interconnected. The story transcends its historical context, resonating with contemporary readers who continue to grapple with similar issues of cultural prejudice, identity politics, and the pursuit of modernity.

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BIONOTE

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