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# F O C U S

IOAN-AUREL POP

## Professor Declan Kiberd



IOAN-AUREL POP and DECLAN KIBERD

### **Ioan-Aurel Pop**

Member of the Romanian Academy, rector of Babeș-Bolyai University, director of the Center for Transylvanian Studies.

**D**ISTINGUISHED MEMBERS of the Senate,  
Dear vice-rectors and deans,  
Dear fellow colleagues,  
Honored guests,

The honorary title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* is granted by all prestigious universities in the world to prominent figures whose achievements and high status transcend their own academic environment and become representative for their fields both nationally and internationally. Usually, universities set demanding criteria for awarding this high honorary title. Yet today we are standing before a special example of surpassing the criteria of Babeș-Bolyai University! It gives me great pleasure to welcome Professor Declan Kiberd from Notre Dame University (USA) and from the University College Dublin (Ireland), who has fully committed his teaching and research career to the Irish literature in English, to Irish literature and to the field of Irish Studies.

The “Focus” section is devoted to Irish Professor DECLAN KIBERD, to whom Babeș-Bolyai University granted on 16 March 2017 the title *doctor honoris causa*.

The Irish professor has greatly contributed to the development of literary history, criticism and theory. He has created and managed institutions, he has had an active role in the development of Irish Studies within our university. Having opened new avenues of thought in the field of contemporary Gaelic (Celtic) studies worldwide, he has a special affinity for the Romanian school of excellence and for the Department of English Language and Literature of Babeş-Bolyai University.

This kinship might come across as paradoxical or surprising, yet that is not the case, as there are various connections and common traits bringing together Romania and Ireland, many of which too seldom, if at all, occur to us. First, there is the non-centric location of the two nations at the extremities of the continent; and, as is often the case, there is an attraction and even similarities between extremities. Then there is the basically quasi common Celtic inheritance. Everyone knows that the Celts (the Gaels) were located in the Western part of Europe and infused the formation of such modern nations as the Irish, the Welsh, the Scots, the Bretons, etc., but also of Romance nations such as the French, the Spanish, and even the Italians. The indigenous element, pre-Roman for the French, Spanish, and Portuguese—analogous to our Dacians—is Celtic. But the Celts—by way of two distinct tribes—reached the area of Central and Eastern Europe during the time of King Burebista (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.). Coming from the west, they constituted a menace for the polity established by Burebista. They were defeated, but not before settling—some of them—among the Getae and Dacians. In this respect, Maramureş County is a representative example, as until recently the Romanian cemeteries were still featuring Celtic crosses. Therefore, it is not unlikely that, beyond the cultural and civilization contaminations, the Romanians might have inherited a Celtic substratum, a Celtic DNA! Remoteness has obviously altered and affected the continuity and intensity of relations between Ireland and Dacia/Romania, and yet they have always been, be it latently, defined by other similarities. Ireland has a proud diaspora, and the Irish living abroad are even more numerous than those living on the island! Of late, Romania has also developed a large diaspora. There are many Romanians who lament this phenomenon which they interpret as a scattering, a waste, a drain on vital energies. To forestall such negative outlooks I always resort to the example of the sea peoples—among which the Irish—who always traveled far from their home and never became alienated. Quite the contrary, it seems like the Irish body has emerged even stronger, fortified through the diaspora, with a renewed reflection of its value and reconnecting with its roots. The Irish diaspora has even preserved features that the indigenous Irish have lost, an aspect observed by Professor Kiberd.

There are many things we need to learn from him about erudition, perseverance, knowledge and the communication of roots. Professor Kiberd is not a proponent for Ireland, but a messenger of this very culture and civilization. We must learn from him not only how to do our job earnestly, but also how to share the honor of promoting the spiritual assets of a creative, diligent and resourceful people. All his efforts support the idea of dialogue, communication and interculturalism. And where else could this idea be more poignantly expressed if not right here in our own university and in Cluj, where study programs are designed around so many languages, where one will encounter all the major Christian denominations of Europe, where the Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque flourish next to Byzantine art and wood carving?

Professor Kiberd, thank you for the privilege of being our colleague and partner in dialogue, thank you for your role as a mediator between cultures and languages, for your efforts in helping us to achieve our institutional mission, for your professional stature paired with a generosity that has assisted our specialists in their endeavors to develop the field of Irish Studies and to bring forth the message of our university to Ireland. We are happy that from now on you will be our official advocate, our ambassador for this place in a world that highly treasures and respects you!

*Gaudeamus igitur!*

