

*Alexandru Davila – The Project as Work of Art.  
The Father Complex*

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**Abstract:** Taking as a central focus the complex figure of the famous Romanian playwright Alexandru Davila, this paper follows the line of his life and career, from his aristocratic origins to his family relations and from his revolutionary activity as an intransigent theatre director to the plays and literature he wrote. A special accent is put on his best text, *Vlaicu Vodă* [*Prince Vlaicu*] a historical play, classical in its construction but very modern due to the psychological refinement manifested by the protagonist, as well as from his doubly meaningful physiognomy – he was a voivode in times of dark adversity, but also, from an archetypal perspective, a tragic hero of certain historic immutabilities. Forced to act prudently under the threat of a catastrophic failure, Vlaicu capitalized, in a refined manner, the experience of the Romanian people itself, which had become accustomed, due to the hardships of history, to keep silent and endure in expectation of an occasion appropriate for action.

**Keywords:** Alexandru Davila, *Vlaicu Vodă*, the National Theatre in Bucharest, Romanian theatre

Alexandru Davila was born on February 12, 1862, in Gloești, county Argeș. His father, General Carol Davila, had an uncertain origin, probably Italian, if not French, and, according to a legend, was the son of Hungarian pianist Frantz Liszt and a countess. His mother, Ana (born in Racovița), was one of the last voivodes. No wonder that some would later call Al. Davila – *The Lord*.

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For a short time (in 1882), he taught old French literature at “Elena Doamna,” a girls’ orphanage, where he would stage performances together with his pupils. He would marry one of them, Hortensia Keminger, in 1885, but the marriage would be dissolved three years later; the former lady Davila would play a nefarious role in Odobescu’s tragically ended life. And, without intention, she would make it so that a wave of accusations, suspicions, and slander would come down upon her first husband. It was presumed that she had eased Davila’s fraudulent access to the unpublished manuscripts of the author of *Doamna Chiajna*. From this an entire scandal ensued.

Yet no one could contest that the Lord had theatre in his blood. It was almost destined for him to become the head of the National Theatre (and, thus, the general director of theatres). And his directorship made history in the development of our modern theatre. He was a reformer, convinced of the necessity for several structural modifications. The severity of his measures would set off an entire chain of reactions. Also contributing to this was his manner of defiance with aristocratic arrogance, as well as his many outbursts, which could have been explained due to his authoritarian, impulsive, and irritable nature. As a strong hand, however, he would endure vilifying attacks and campaigns, but also protests such as those that took place in the National Theatre square, on March 13, 1906, when the “Frenchman” Davila was requested to no longer allow performances in French on the country’s foremost stage. A moral author of the latter turbulences, if we may call him so, was Nicolae Iorga.

Al. Davila, referred to as “the man of theatre” by Ion Lovinescu, one of the actors, was proficient in everything. He could have been an electrician, a technician, in charge of stage props, a painter, and even a tapestry worker. He inaugurated the tradition to open each season with a Romanian play, he balanced the repertoire by making room for vernacular texts, (?). He sought to temper the vainglory of the main actor, “sacrificed” – as in the case of Antoine or Irving – for the unitary ensemble. With an unfailing flair, he supported a great number of young actors, including Lucia Sturdza Bulandra, Marioara Voiculescu, Maria Giurgea, Tony Bulandra, Gh. Storin, and Ion Manolescu. The latter would follow him when, after his first directorship (February 1, 1905 – March 13, 1908), he would put together a distinguished theatre company called the Davila Company, officially inaugurated on August 1, 1909. Three years later, he rejoined the administration of the National Theatre (October 8, 1912 – January 4, 1914), demonstrating more tact and a spirit for collaboration, but also the same ambition to carry out his programme of reforms. Finding himself under constant harassment once again, he would definitively file his resignation.

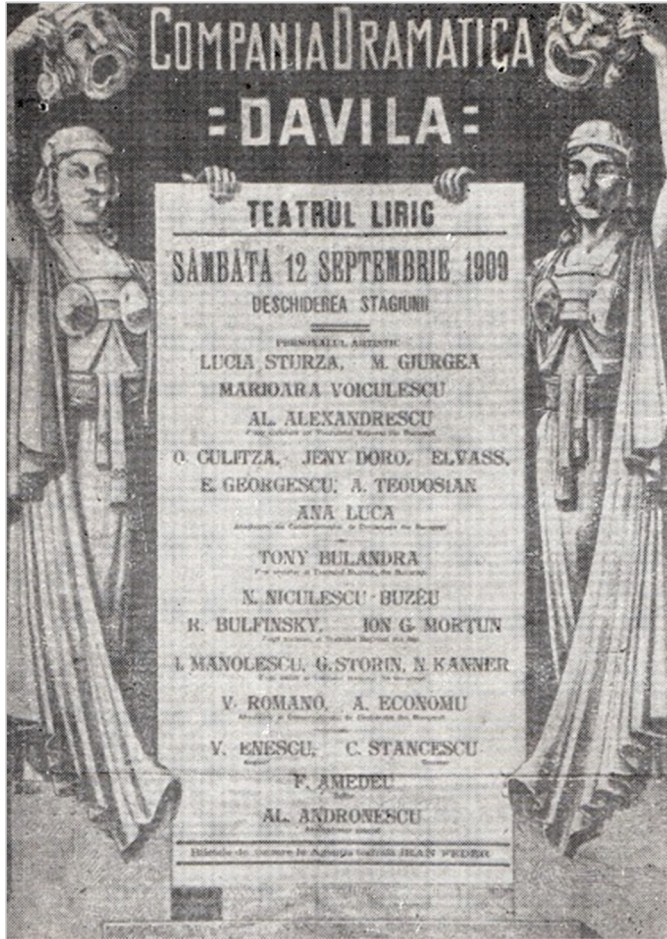


Fig. 1: The general poster of the Davila Theatre Company

He would unwind with genteel and sporting activities. But on April 5, 1915, his assassination was attempted by a servant of bad manners. In “Cronica,” Tudor Arghezi wrote an obituary<sup>2</sup>, which showed that the news of his death had spread. Thanks to his robust physique, Davila survived the attempt (he would die on October 19, 1919, in Bucharest), but he would be confined to an armchair for the rest of his life, unable to write and speaking with great difficulty.

<sup>2</sup> Tudor Arghezi, “Alexandru Davila,” *Cronica*, I, no. 6, 1915.



Fig. 2: Compania Davila, with Lucia Sturdza at Al. Davila-s right, 1909

It was an irony of fate that only during these years of suffering he found more time for literature. He dictated articles, verse, sketches, and memoirs, published in *Rampa*, *Scena*, and *Gândirea*; part of these collaborations would be republished in his "recollections," *Din torsul zilelor* (in three volumes). The peculiarity of this controversial and long-contested writer, however, came from the fact that, having authored a masterpiece of our historic theatre, the rest of his literary production, with minor exceptions, seemed to belong to an amateur. Sometimes a poet, in *Vlaicu Vodă* and maybe even in *Sutaşul Troian*, was no more than an agile technician of the verse. Part of his poetry is suitable for recitals – during social affairs, gatherings or on stage. Certain stanzas of the drama *Vlaicu Vodă* feature a melodious trait that echoes the lyricism of Vlaicu's tirades:

Duh al neamului ce ştie dulcea vorbă de dor, ce sună  
 Din pojghiţă de mesteacăn doina, cântec bătrânesc,  
 Ce pricepe şi ce simte ce e datina străbună,  
 Pavăza şi călăuza sufletului românesc."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Spirit of the people who knows the sweet sound of longing, rung/ From within birch bark by the ballad, old song,/ Who understands and feels the ancient tradition,/ Guardian and guide to the Romanian soul".

His individuality was much better outlined as the man of theatre. According to him, theatre, as a manifestation of the beautiful, ought to have initiated an ascension of the spirit – as a response, of course, to the exaggerations of naturalism. Furthermore, the theatre ought to have been the mirror of Nature and of the human soul (*Romanul și drama*), reflecting not reality as such, but the illusion of reality (*Sufletul curat*). Obeying the dogma of the three unities, Davila accepted innovation, but only within certain long-established structures. His fundamental principles are the coherent logic of the conflict, as well as conciseness and clarity, as these were illustrated in classic tragedy.

Merging the performance review with theoretical discussions, Al. Davila was an honest chronicler of drama (who saw sincerity as the integrity of criticism). He was indulgent only apparently, and desired not to be blinded either by grudges or prejudice. He liked Caragiale (the comedies, not *Năpasta*), but he was reluctant towards Hasdeu (*Răzvan și Vidra*) and Delavrancea (*Apus de soare*).



Fig. 3: Al. Davila in *The song of the Swan*

In what concerned acting, he insisted upon “dramatic intuition,” as well as upon diction, which ought to have seemed natural, not boring or exaggerated (*Regisorul*). In disagreement with Diderot’s paradox, he viewed the actor as an “animated puppet,” which may seem similar to Gordon Craig’s “actor-marionette,” but which different from the latter by emphasizing the importance of the puppet’s “soul.” (*Păpușa însuflețită*) The “puppet,” which is to say, the actor, was understood as more than a human being. Indeed, the latter represented all of humanity, a microcosm (*Sufletul curat*). He believed that the actor should embody precisely the character envisioned by the author, with special attention to the spiritual (“Adrisantul necunoscut”).

Constantly discussing the truthfulness of acting, Davila implicitly supported the primacy of the text. The director, understood as the author’s “spokesperson,” was invited to become an ardent defender of the work of art, having no right to modify neither text, nor meaning. Otherwise, the critic believed that the performance would become a jumble, especially if the décor was being replaced with drapes and other such things (*Regisorul*). As such, we may safely conclude that Al. Davila, with all his freedom of spirit, was in fact conservative.

Throughout his literary creation, nothing announces or later confirms a play such as *Vlaicu Vodă*, the moment of grace of an outstandingly capricious inspiration. Almost all of his dramatic texts are nothing more than light improvisations, destined for social performances: Only a “catchphrase” here and there sends to *Vlaicu Vodă* or to *Sultașul Troian*: “Domnul [...] una-i cu domnia.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the following call to wisdom:

Căci nu face o lăscăie  
Lupte, bătălii, războaie,  
Ca să-nfaptuiești un drept.  
Ca să treci peste hotare,  
Dând popoare la popoare  
Și să faci o țară mare,  
Fii mintos, fii înțelept.”<sup>5</sup>

Or an enumeration of words reminiscent of those encased in voivode Vlaicu’s tirades: “Doruri, vise, năzuințe.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “The lord [...] is one with his dominion”.

<sup>5</sup> “For combats, battles, wars/ Are worth a trifle/ In bringing justice./ To cross the borders,/ To join people with people/ And unite a kingdom,/ Be smart, be wise.”

<sup>6</sup> “Longings, dreams, hopes.”

Only the tragedy *Sutașul Troian*, of which Davila wrote a single act (*Rampa*, 1911), is worthy of the author of *Vlaicu Vodă*. The former was, in fact, a continuation of the before-planned trilogy *Mirciada* (or, in its initial version, *Român Grue*), which should have included *Vlaicu Vodă*, *Dan Vodă*, and *Mircea cel Bătrân*. The former two were never written. This fixation with the position of a virtual playwright is curious! One might say, literarily speaking, that marked by a father complex, Davila wanted to demonstrate that he was a playwright by any means necessary. His projects for comedies and dramas, translations that remained only manuscripts, they all seem to indicate a bizarre case of sterility or perhaps a rapid exhaustion of his creative potential.

The centurion Troian, a character designed in dimensions which aspired to be monumental, was a relentless defender of the idea of *lordship*: “Domnul trece, domnia rămâne.”<sup>7</sup> The classic dilemma – which also interferes in *Vlaicu Vodă* – between duty and feelings is resolved through the agonizing victory of duty, with all its interior struggle. The catchphrase of the old soldier is set in stone: “țara, datina și sfânta lege.”<sup>8</sup> The ancestral custom... “Sfânta cruce, țara mumă, datina și Domnul lor.”<sup>9</sup> The line suggests, through ideation and resonance, the play which will make the topic of our discussion below.

In one of his poems, *Pe un album neînțeput*, Al. Davila looked upon his own destiny with lucidity: “Vezi că ursitele așa m-au făcut;/ Tăgădui să fiu, sau neștiut.”<sup>10</sup> Contested he was indeed, beyond measure! Denigrations, violent assaults, trials... Tudor Arghezi and Al. Macedonski denied even that he was a writer. Ilarie Chendi refused to offer him any positive appraisal during the premiere of the play *Vlaicu Vodă* (February 12, 1902). Through various insinuations, but also using some arguments that seemed to make sense, others still (N. Ținc, Caion, Petre Locusteanu) attempted to accuse him that he had plagiarized one of Odobescu’s manuscripts. This was, as Arghezi put it, a “ritualistic murder.” And strangely, Davila defended himself inaptly.

*Vlaicu Vodă* was a classical construction in a romantic décor. The modernity of the play resulted from the psychological refinement manifested by the protagonist, as well as from his doubly meaningful physiognomy – he was a voivode in times of dark adversity, but also, from an archetypal perspective, a tragic hero of certain historic immutabilities. Forced to act prudently under the threat of a catastrophic failure, Vlaicu capitalized, in a refined manner, the

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<sup>7</sup> “The lord passes, the lordship remains”.

<sup>8</sup> “The country, tradition, and the holy law”.

<sup>9</sup> “The holy cross, the mother country, tradition and their Lord”.

<sup>10</sup> “See that the fates made me so:/ Denied to be, or otherwise unknown”.

experience of the people itself, which had become accustomed, due to the hardships of history, to keep silent and endure in expectation of an occasion appropriate for action.

Abonament No. 18. Abonament No. 18.

**TEATRUL NAȚIONAL**  
**SOCIETATEA DRAMATICA**

**MARTI, 12 FEBRUARIE 1902**  
SE VA REPRESENTA PENTRU PRIMA ORĂ :

**VLAICU-VODĂ**

Dramă în 5 acte și în versuri de D-nu ALEXANDRU DAVILA.  
Decoruri noi de D-nu ROMEO GIROLAMO. — Costume noi de D-nu ILIE BERGHER

**DISTRIBUȚIA:**

Vlaicu-Vodă . . . . . D-nu Const. I. Nottara	Baldovin . . . . . D-nu F. Simionescu ×	D-nu F. Simionescu ×
Rumin Grue . . . . . N. Soreanu ×	Părcălabul Curjei . . . . . Z. Băraan ×	Z. Băraan ×
Mircea Basarab . . . . . Ar. N. Demetriad.	Solul sârbesc . . . . . F. Bulandra ×	F. Bulandra ×
Coastea Mușat . . . . . Ion Petrescu ×	Moș Neagul . . . . . Th. Petrescu	Th. Petrescu
Banul Miked . . . . . V. Leonescu ×	Un căușel . . . . . A. Barbelian ×	A. Barbelian ×
Spătarul Dragomir . . . . . V. Cernat ×	Anteîul boer . . . . . St. Decu ×	St. Decu ×
Groza Moldoveanul . . . . . P. Sturza ×	Al doilea boer . . . . . A. Barbelian ×	A. Barbelian ×
Prea Cuviosul Nicodim . . . . . G. Achille ×	Al treilea boer . . . . . R. Castriș ×	R. Castriș ×
Pala Italianul . . . . . Aurel Petrescu ×	Anteîul moșnean . . . . . P. Ciucuretti ×	P. Ciucuretti ×
Baronul Koliany . . . . . I. I. Livescu ×	Al doilea moșnean . . . . . R. Castriș ×	R. Castriș ×
Vlad Dobzeanul . . . . . G. Mărculescu ×	Un boier bătrân . . . . . P. Ciucuretti	P. Ciucuretti
Manea . . . . . I. Constantinu ×	Clara Dómna . . . . . D-ra Agata Bărescu ×	D-ra Agata Bărescu ×
Aldea Algiu . . . . . G. Mădan ×	Domnița Anca . . . . . Titi Gheorghiu ×	Titi Gheorghiu ×
Român Herescul . . . . . M. Geanau —	Sanda . . . . . M. Voiculescu	M. Voiculescu
Murgul . . . . . V. Maximilian —	Un copil de casă . . . . . Ir. Bărbulescu —	Ir. Bărbulescu —

*Boieri. — Ostași. — Moșneni, etc.*

Dámnele cu pălărie nu sunt admise în staluri. — Un vestiar special este pus la dispozițiunea dómnelor.

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Casa este deschisă în toate zilele de la orele 10—12 a. m., iar în ziua de spectacol de la 10—12 a. m. și de la 4½—10 seara.

Biletete se găsesc chiar de acum la casa Teatrului și la Hall de -l'Indépendance Roumaine.

Imprimeria Statului.

Fig. 4: The poster of the first performance of *Vlaicu Vodă*, at the National Theatre in Bucharest, 1902



Placed at a vague time (around the 1370s), the action takes place at Curtea de Argeș, the capital city of Țara Românească. Following victorious battles against the king of Hungary, Louis I, which were thwarted by Lady Clara, Vlaicu's stepmother, the latter found himself forced to retreat; moreover, he left behind his sister and brother-in-law as hostages, which greatly restricted his ability to act.

At this point, the voivode adopted, with the great cunning of a skilful player, a tactics by means of which he could contradict those around him, who had begun to suspect him of treason. Wearing a mask of devoutness and false humility, he assumed the ingrate role of an impotent lord ("domn fără domnie și voivod fără norod"<sup>11</sup>) who was fearful and half-hearted, as well as easy to manipulate by the fierce Lady Clara. Thus, he was able to hatch a plan that he would put into practice with infinite precaution. To defeat the surrounding adversity, he would require not only an iron fist in a velvet glove<sup>12</sup>, but also great talent for acting. The Wallach leader was, indeed, a refined actor, virtuous in the art of simulation and duality, obedient when necessary, a cajoler with a hidden tint of irony, able to control his every gesture and word, to pause for effect, and knowing when to be quiet and when to emphasize his own eloquence with a warm voice. As such, Vlaicu could only be the creation of a man of theatre, which Davila was and Odobescu was not<sup>13</sup>. No one considered this fact during the "lawsuit" brought up against the former.

The unity of time, which calibrates the rhythms of the drama, was conferred by the three obsessive days that Vlaicu always invoked. This was the interval wherein, freed from captivity, the hostages looked to return to the country safely. The apparent obedience of the lord deceived, with some measure, the vigilance of Lady Clara, but not entirely so, as the woman (falling in the same typology as Lady Chiajna, from Odobescu's eponymous novella, Răzvan's wife Vidra, from Hasdeu's "dramatic poem," or Ringala from Victor Eftimiu's eponymous play) did not lack instinct:

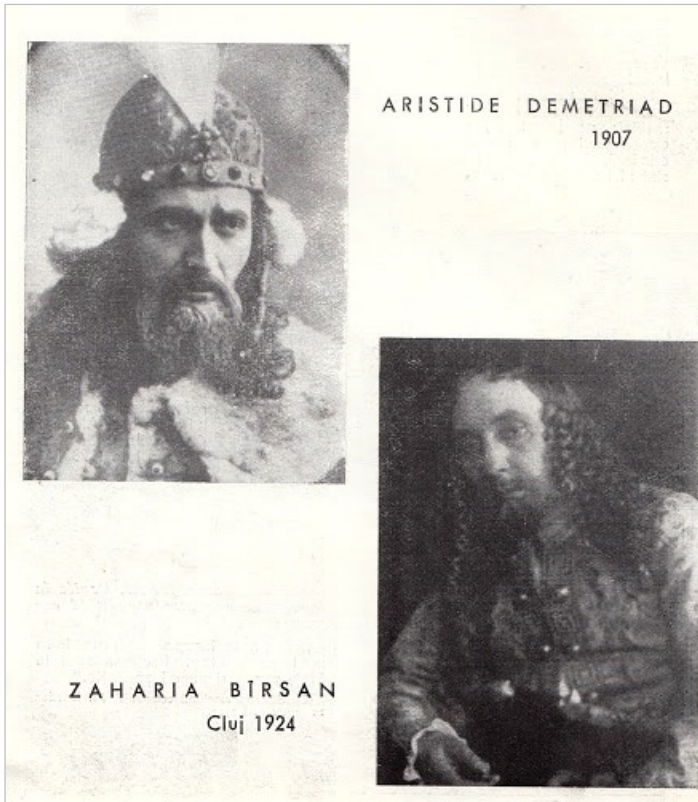
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<sup>11</sup> Lord without lordship and voivode without a people.

<sup>12</sup> According to G. Călinescu, Vlaicu was the embodiment of Prince Machiavelli on Romanian soil. See *Istoria literaturii de la origini până în prezent*, second edition, edited and prefaced by Al. Piru (București: Editura Minerva, 1982) 579.

<sup>13</sup> This was also a text with much to offer for actors: C. I. Nottara, Aristide Demetriade, Zaharia Bârsan, G. Vraca, G. Calboreanu, G. Popovici.

Eu, ce port și pentru tine mândra stemă basarabă  
- Grea povară, pentru care biata-ți frunte e prea slabă  
Eu, ce sunt spre mântuirea ta ș-a-ntregului norod,  
Eu de viță palatină, eu, soție de voievod,  
Eu, pavăza domniei, sufletul ce duce țara,  
Eu, puterea, eu, stăpâna, în sfârșit, eu, doamna Clara,  
Am ajuns de râsul lumii, ș-al boierilor, ș-al tău,  
Înfruntată, dosădită, o batcojură, eu! eu!<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 5:** Two great actors who interpreted Vlaicu Vodă's part:  
Aristide Demetriad and Zaharia Bârsan

<sup>14</sup> "I, who wear for you the proud emblem of Bessarabia/ - The arduous burden, for which your head is much too weak/I, who shall redeem you and the people,/I who am of palatian strain, I, wife of the lord,/ I, the guardian of the lordship, the soul who bears the nation,/ I, strength itself, I, the lady, finally, I, Mrs. Clara,/ Have become the laughing stock of the world, and of the boyars, and of you,/ Chided, persecuted, a mockery, me! Me!"

Hungarian of birth and a Catholic fanatic, the stepmother was an exponential character, illustrating in her furious arrogance the expansionist tendencies of the Hungarian Empire. Such tendencies made use of the forceful argument of military power, but also of the strategies of Hungarian Catholic propaganda, with its temptations of the west, where light and science were to be found. But was light not indeed coming from the West?...

The political insinuation of Catholicism naturally provoked the response of people who observed the Orthodox faith. *Custom in Vlaicu Vodă*, was therefore understood as the spiritual grounds for the existence of a people (“Ține datina străbuna ca credința-n Dumnezeu”<sup>15</sup>). Lady Clara ignored it with gruffness, and considered it to be a bondage of progress, which might have set one thinking, if she had truly cared about such progress<sup>16</sup>. After all, how could the profound soul of a people, its dreams, aspirations and longings, be taken from it?... With a fervor pushed to grandiloquence, governor Mircea revolted:

Nu se sfărâmă veacurile ce-au trecut!  
 Și cu veacurile acelea datina ni s-a făcut.  
 Doamnă, datina străbună e mai mult decât o lege.  
 Domnul ce-și cunoaște țara, din chiar traiul ei culege  
 Obiceiuri de tot felul, trebuințe de-orice soi,  
 Năzuințe, doruri, vise, ure, patime, nevoi  
 El le cerne, le frământă, le topește, le strecoară,  
 Și le toarnă, ca-ntr-o matcă, în cuvânu-i către țară.  
 Din aceste vorbe-nalte ale domnilor români,  
 Timp de veacuri, neamul țese datina de la bătrâni./  
 Pruncul de la sân o soarbe-n fiecare strop de lapte;  
 Leagănul, în care doarme, i-o șoptește-n blânde șoapte;  
 I-o mai spune vechiu basmu de bunică povestit;  
 Doina lung i-o cântă-n frunză când e vârsta de iubit;

<sup>15</sup> “Hold on to the ancient tradition as you do to your faith in God”.

<sup>16</sup> “Ce e datina? O lege! Zi-i o lege strămoșească/ Bună în vremuri, dar ce poate să nu se mai potrivească/ Celor ce cu propășirea s-au născut la vremea lor./ Datina e o cătușă pusă propășirii la picior./ Voi, în granițele voastre, de cu veacuri îngrădiți,/ Că schimbându-s-a la față lumea, nici nu bănuțiți/ Și-n voi înșivă privind-o, v-ați închipuit, firește/ Că de stă pe loc românul, nimenea nu propășește.” (“What is tradition? A law! Call it an ancient law/ Erstwhile good, but which might fit no longer/ For those borne out of progress./ Tradition is a manacle on progress./ You, barred through the centuries within your borders,/ Have no idea the world has changed/ And as you watch it, you of course imagine/ If the Romanian sits still, then no one else progresses.”) And yet another line to be considered: “Dar eu vreau, din adormirea-I, țara voastră să v-o-ndrept.” (“But I will, from its slumber, your country to set straight.”)

Arcul, ghioaga din perete pururi i-o aduc aminte;  
 O citește-n pomenirea de pe lespezi de morminte.  
 Și sub pajera cu cruce, dezmiardându-și visul său,  
 Sufletul i-o face una cu credința-n Dumnezeu.<sup>17</sup>

Grandiloquence, however, did not chase away the lyricism of the fragment.

From a space closed in by somber horizons and stalked by adversary, avaricious forces, Vlaicu could not help his own situation but by forming useful alliances meant to strengthen the freedom of the country and shielding the cross, the people and the land from aggressive factors. One of the alliances he planned was the marriage of Anca, his sister, with the Serbian poet Simon Stareț. However, Anca was loved by the young Mircea Basarab, who would go down in history as Mircea cel Bătrân. His character, in the play, was surprising. Cynical and lacking any scruples, he was driven by an ambition that abolished his sense of morality: “Cuget, inima și râvnă, vreau putere, vreau mărire! / Da, oricum, prin orice mijloc, prin trădări, prin răzvrătire / Vreau domnia, da orunde; vreau coroana, pe-a oricui.”<sup>18</sup> With a criminal impulse, he attempted to stab Vlaicu, but his dagger would instead pierce the chest of Român Grue, the devout servant of the lord. Unexpectedly and contradicting the logic of the play, the voivode absolves the reckless man, sufficiently punished by the pangs of consciousness and destined to have a distinguished life as an heir of Basarab. Mircea, therefore, would become his arm and protector.

The final monologue of Vlaicu Vodă mentions the struggles and pains of a persecuted country, and represents an unrestrained outburst of long-suppressed feelings:

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<sup>17</sup> “The ages past shall never shatter! / Of these ages too, tradition was born. / My lady, the ancient tradition is more than a law, / The lord who knows his country gathers from its very life / Customs of all kinds, uses of all sorts, / Hopes, longings, dreams, hatred, passions, needs / He separates them, mulls them over, melts them, and decants them, / Then pours them, like a mould, in his word to his country. / From these noble speeches of Romanian lords, / For centuries, the people weave tradition from the elders. / The infant sucks it from the bosom in every drop of milk; / The cradle where he sleeps tells it in gentle whispers; / The old tale by his grandmother tells it too; / The ballad sings it to him during the time of love; / The bow, the mace upon the wall remind him of it; / He reads it on the epitaphs of graves, / Under the cross and emblem, caressed by his dream, / The soul makes it one with his faith in the Maker.”

<sup>18</sup> “Thought, heart and desire, I crave for power, and for greatness! / Yes, in any way, by any means, betrayal, a revolt / I crave the lordship, yes, wherever; I crave the crown, from anyone.”

Chinuri? Tu vorbești de chinuri? Chin, a inimii bătaie?  
 Chin? O clipă de nădejde, o-mboldire, o văpaie  
 Ce se-aprinde cu-o privire, ce cu-o lacrimă s-a stins  
 Și din care numai rodul fără vlagă iese-nvins  
 Chinuri! Dar deșteaptă-ți mintea, dar te uită-n neagra zare!  
 De ești om, fă-ți ochii roată peste țară și hotare.  
 Chinuri! Dar privește sânul bieteii noastre moșii.  
 Numără, de poți, pe dânsul urmele de vrăjmășii,  
 Prin palaturi, prin colibe, jos, la șesuri, sus, la munte!  
 Despicate de cu veacuri, rănilor-i sunt încă crunte;  
 Sabie și foc, din vale, din deal, sabie și foc!  
 Ani de groază și de sânge mulți... de liniște, deloc!  
 Veșnic lupta pentru lege, veșnic lupta pentru nume  
 Mor flăcăii înainte de moșnegi și chiar de mume!  
 Roșul focului pe ceruri, roșul sângelui pe-ogor,  
 Dacă mor de fier sau pară, chiar ei nu o știu, dar mor;  
 Și murind, sărută sânul țării mume, căci îi doare  
 Plânsul ei bătrân pe-obrajii înc-a unui fiu ce moare! [...]

Iată chinurile noastre, și cu ele, doruri, vise,  
 Pe moșia strămoșească-n lung și lat, cu sânge scrise !  
 Iată chinurile mele, ale unui domn român,  
 Basarab, de sine vrednic și de numele-i bătrân [...].<sup>19</sup>

Not to be found in the text of the premiere (or in its first edition, from 1902), the previous 16-syllable lines (of Hugolian influence) were composed for the second edition, a piece of evidence that had its weight in the unfortunate “affair” of questioned authorship.

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<sup>19</sup> “Anguish? You speak of anguish? Anguish, the beating of the heart? / Anguish? A moment of conviction, an impulse, or a flame / Sparked merely by a gaze, extinguished with a tear / And wherefrom only barren fruit emerges / Anguish! But awaken your mind, gaze in the dark horizon! / If man you are, look round the country and the borders. / Anguish! But stare into the bosom of our poor domain, / Upon it, if you can, count the tracks of our enemies, / Through castles, and through huts, down in the plains, high in the mountains! / Open through the ages, its wounds are ruthless still; / Fire and sword, from the valleys to the hills, fire and sword! / Many bloody years of terror... of content, none at all! / Eternal is the fight for law, eternal, the struggle for one’s fame / The young men die before the elders, before their mothers too! / The red of fire in the skies, the red of blood on fields, / Whether dead by iron or by fire they do not know, but dead they are; / And dying, they kiss the bosom of the motherland, for they are pained / By her ancient tears on yet another dying son! [...] / This is our anguish, and with it, our longings, dreams / Are all written in blood across the ancient land! / Behold my anguish, the grief of a Romanian lord.”

An enigmatic, but transparently symbolic presence, Român Grue, represented the unwavering support of lordship, which is always sacrificed and which embodies the ancestral ties between the crown and the people. Through this hero, a persuasive triumph of discretion, riddled with meaningful silence, Al. Davila attempted to enhance through “muteness” the suggestive possibilities of an otherwise discursive theatre. This came as a conversion from rhetoric to its absolute negation – the purely gestural expression assimilated to the system of allegorical signs characteristic of drama.

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