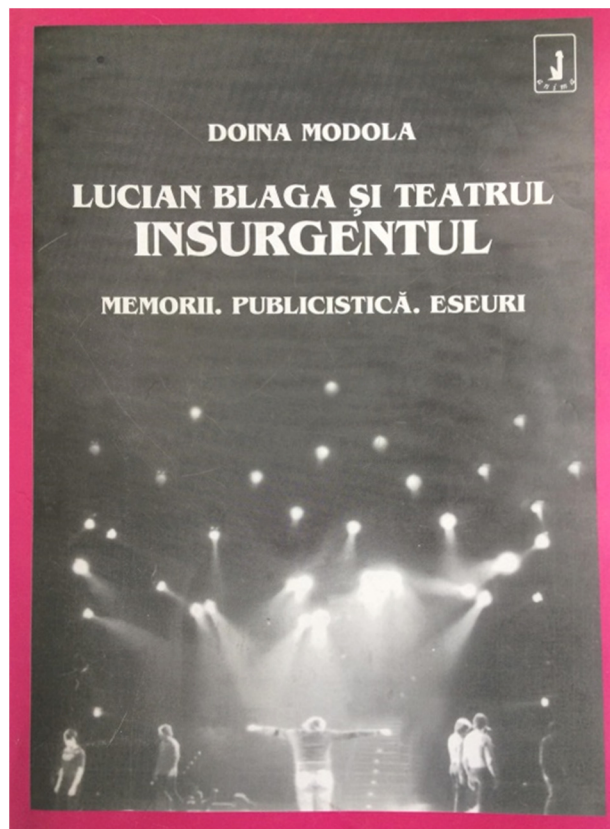


Lucian Blaga as Visionary but Unfortunate Playwright

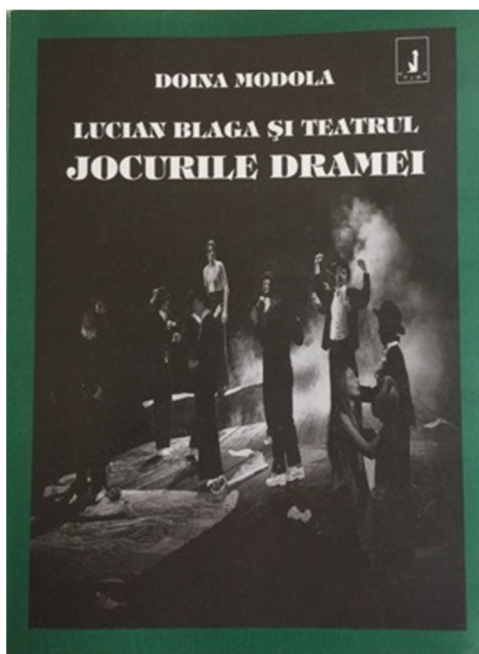
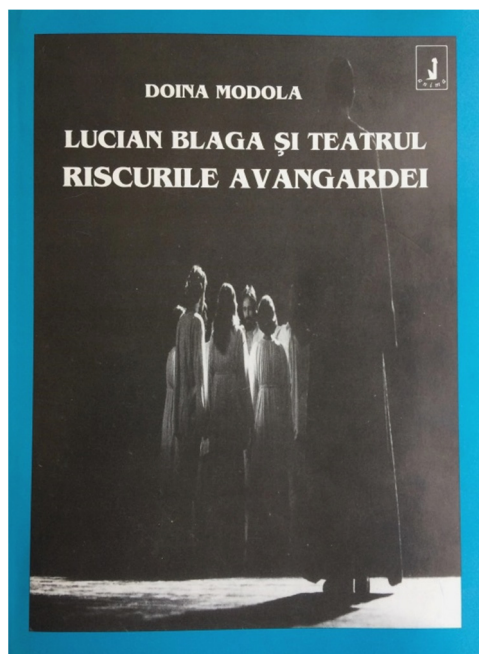
Book review: Doina Modola, *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Jocurile dramei. Tulburarea apelor, Fapta, Daria, Înviere* [Lucian Blaga and the Theatre. Drama Games. Whirling Waters, The Deed, Daria, Resurrection], Bucharest: Editura Anima, 2017; *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Riscurile avangardei* [Lucian Blaga and the Theatre. The Risks of the Avant-garde], Bucharest: Editura Anima, 2003; *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Insurgentul. Memorii. Publicistică. Eseuri* [Lucian Blaga and the Theatre. The Insurgent. Memoirs. Journalism. Essays], Bucharest: Editura Anima, 1999



A qualified literary critic and theatrologist, rewarded in 2007 with the award of the Romanian Theatrical Union for career achievements, Doina Modola has a multi-volume publishing history: *Dramaturgia românească între 1900-1918* [Romanian Dramaturgy between 1900 and 1918] (1983); *Actori pe scena lumii* [Actors on the World Stage] (1990); *Chipurile Traviatei. Reprezentația lirică* [The Guises of La traviata. The Lyrical Representation] (2002); *Seducătorul și umbrele: Gib I. Mihăescu. Dramaturgia prozatorilor* [The Charmer and the Shadows: Gib I. Mihăescu. the Dramaturgy of Prose Writers] (2003). The certain thing, however, is that her capital work, currently unfinished, is dedicated to the theatre of Lucian Blaga (1895-1961), one of the most important Romanian writers and philosophers, a creator whose presence has marked, inspired and guided the author ever since her childhood, as revealed by the “dedications” that open two of the three volumes. The most recent of them, *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Jocurile dramei. Tulburarea apelor, Fapta, Daria, Înviere* [Lucian Blaga and the Theatre. Drama Games. Whirling Waters, The Deed, Daria, Resurrection] (Bucharest: Editura Anima, 2017) is the third volume of an expected cycle on the theatrical concept of Blaga, Blaga’s dramaturgy and its reception from the beginning to the contemporary age, as well as on the theatrical productions that this dramaturgy has generated. The volume was preceded by *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Insurgentul. Memorii. Publicistică. Eseuri* [Lucian Blaga and the Theatre. The Insurgent. Memoirs. Journalism. Essays] and by *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Riscurile avangardei* [Lucian Blaga and the Theatre. The Risks of the Avant-garde] (Bucharest: Editura Anima, 1999 and 2003).

The plays *Tulburarea apelor*, *Fapta* and *Înviere*, which, together with *Daria*, are the subject matter of the book published by Doina Modola the last year, were hidden away on her mother’s shelf of “forbidden items”. What were these “forbidden items”? These were the books by Romanian (and foreign) authors banned in communism, in the 1950s-1960s; owning them was very dangerous during that age (this could have even led to the incarceration of the “transgressive” reader). On the aforementioned shelf, Blaga’s works had the good company of Mircea Eliade’s novels written in his youth. In fact, the plays *Tulburarea apelor*, *Fapta* and *Înviere* are also the works of a young man who foreshadowed, by some aspects of his rebel, “insurgent” spirit, as described by the author, the emergence of the radical generation '27 of writers and philosophers asserted in inter-war Romania (Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu – later to become Eugène

Ionesco -, Mihail Sebastian, Constantin Noica, Bucur Țincu, Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Belu Zilber, etc.). Doina Modola's triptych focuses on this young, active, restless and very daring man rather than on the canonized and "embalmed" writer who had been buried alive in all sorts of preconceptions and clichés. "An «avant la lettre» Artaudian", as described by the author in the first volume, owing to the propensity for the elemental, the orgiastic, the metaphysical, the archetypal, to the accent on the theatrical image, Lucian Blaga is also, in terms of humor, irony and grotesque, the link that connects the universe of the prose writer and playwright Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912) and the one of Eugène Ionesco, she claims, following behind critic Nicolae Steinhardt, in her most recent volume. (In fact, the two directions converge, Caragiale and Ionesco themselves having affinities with Artaud, as shown, in the case of the former, by another Romanian critic, Ion Vartic.) Both descriptions are a challenge launched by Doina Modola in relation to a specific (limited, still) tradition of interpretation of Blaga's dramatic texts. While, as shown above, her exegetic work is not completed, a circle closes, however, with *Jocurile dramei*, because this marks the end of the extremely thorough analysis of Blaga's youth plays written by the writer in the time interval 1921-1925, which – notes the author – overlaps the period during which "the Romanian theatrical avant-garde had a meteoric enactment", represented by groups such as *Teatrul Nou* (1920), *Studio* (1921), *Insula* (1921), *Poesis* (1922), *Teatru sintetic* (1925), and so on and so forth. This led Doina Modola to an unequivocal – and very accurate – diagnosis (in the first volume of the series): "Organically linked with this theatrical avant-garde and found in its most advanced line, without Lucian Blaga being actually included in a group, the five plays (*Zamolxe*, 1921, *Tulburarea apelor*, 1923, and especially those written in 1925: *Fapta*, *Înviere* and *Daria*) stood for its innovating tendencies in the Romanian space, at its most symptomatic state, while also being its most significant dramaturgic successes" (1999, 14). Therefore, the three books signed by Doina Modola cover Blaga's years of training, of theatrical apprenticeship and of crystallization of his own "theatrical mission", but also the stage of the first creative results in the dramaturgic sphere.



Blaga saw the first stage play when he was 7 years old, in 1909. The “passion for reading” was triggered in him when he was 13 and he read a fragment from the beginning of the dramatic poem *Faust* (which he would translate many years later), Goethe remaining a major reference and model for his entire literary and philosophical works, “his guardian spirit”, as noted by Doina Modola in the first volume of the series. Therefore, she says, “one of the first pivotal experiences in the development of Lucian Blaga” occurred “symbolically, predictively, under the sign of theatre” (1999, 16). In 1916, Blaga took the first trip to Vienna, where he would settle, soon thereafter, for his studies. There, he got in contact with expressionism and with the avant-garde artistic orientations, which prompted him to abandon classical and realistic poetry and to adopt, systematically and knowingly (in the opinion of Doina Modola), while seeking to synchronize the Romanian theatre with the Western one, the “latest” tendencies “of modern art”, which he would apply, by experimenting, to the dramaturgic plane: *anti-mimesis*, revisiting “the non-Aristotelian mystery formulae” (the ancient mystery in *Zamolxe*, the Renaissance mystery in *Tulburarea apelor*, the medieval mystery pantomime

in *Înviere*), the aesthetics of stylization, distancing, the grotesque, the irony, the tragicomedy, and so on and so forth (1999, 24-25). Back home at the end of the First World War, Blaga assisted the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia, on 1 December 1918, which voted the union of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, Sătmar and Maramureș with the Kingdom of Romania. On his debut of 1919, with *Poemele luminii* [*Poems of Light*], followed shortly thereafter by the volume of aphorisms *Pietre pentru templul meu* [*Stones for My Temple*], which had flaming success, Blaga (born in Lancrăm, near Sebeș and Sibiu) was considered the most precious gift that Transylvania offered, artistically speaking, to “the motherland”, after the long-awaited Union. However, soon thereafter, the playwright started to be misunderstood by his contemporaries. The strong influence of Freudian and, especially, of Jungian psychoanalysis on the writer (and philosopher), which meant a new field, at that age, for the Romanian sphere, generated great difficulties for the author, notes Doina Modola, damaging “in particular the reception of Blaga’s plays, prompting violent reactions of rejection from the established critics, hindering the texts’ staging not only at the time of their writing, but also a long time later, because of the inculcation of persistent preconceptions” (2017, 154). In the opinion of both the experienced (with several exceptions) and the unexperienced audience, Blaga’s dramatic work had come to be obscured by his poetic and philosophic work, an anomaly that continues to be perpetuated even nowadays: “his trouble was not an ignorance of the laws of the dramatic genre or the inadequacy of the styles used in drafting the plays, but a theatrical-dramatic competence by which he exceeded clearly his age and his commentators”, writes, to this end, Doina Modola in *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Insurgentul...* (1999, 27). And the author’s current three volumes on the subject matter prove it heavily. Certainly, a very important input to the preservation and strengthening of the aforementioned anomaly was also provided by communist censorship, by the intrusion of the political in culture, to which the writer and his work fell victims after 1945. This is how we can explain (at least partially) that, of the Blaga’s four youth plays discussed by the author *in extenso* in *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Jocurile dramei...* only one – i.e. the psychoanalytical drama *Daria* – was put on stage during the playwright’s life, a short time after its publication. The other were staged only after the fall of communism, in the 1990s.

In her books, Doina Modola engages in a very careful and detailed close-reading of Blaga's plays, while also including various openings that relate to the field of comparative studies (she establishes sources, filiations, potential influences, etc.) or of genetic criticism (she monitors the changes that occur from one version to the other of the commented works). She provides very many pieces of information with regard to the Romanian and European, Western theatrical context of the publication of Blaga's plays, as well as to the dramatic forms revised by him, according to his extremely ambitious plan (which, in fact, he did achieve!) to create "forma matching those present in Western Europe" and to also create "a theatrical-dramatic epic of wide scope, including key-moments of Romanian history and culture" (2017, 12). Directing or play suggestions are not missing; they were brought about by the staging or acting errors noted by the author. This already rich picture is completed by a (commented) panorama of the critical reception both of Blaga's plays (so of the texts) and of the staging of the same, radio drama included. In the second volume of the triptych, *Lucian Blaga și teatrul. Riscurile avangardei*, which focuses on the dramatic poem *Zamolxe*, the section dedicated to reception occupies nearly half of the book. For pragmatic reasons, the author limited the space dedicated to reception in the third volume, without abandoning it completely. (The gathered material may, perhaps, compose another stand-alone volume). Given the prolificacy of Lucian Blaga's playwright activity – he also wrote the "founding tragedy" *Meșterul Manole* [*Manole the Craftsman*] (1927), "the symbolist play" *Cruciada copiilor* [*The Children's Crusade*] (1930), the "historical fresco" *Avram Iancu* (1934), "the biblical parable" *Arca lui Noe* [*Noah's Ark*] (1944) and the "play upon masks" *Anton Pann* (1945) – Doina Modola's ongoing project, by the weight of the three volumes she has already published, turns out to be straightforwardly titanic, but extremely necessary for the Romanian culture. Its continuation is absolutely mandatory, like the retrieval of Blaga's play writing in the theatrical field and its integration in the live circuit of the Romanian stages. (At the time of the writing of this review, the National Theatre of Cluj is staging *Meșterul Manole*, but this continues to be too little for this world-class creator and thinker.)

Anca HAȚIEGAN

*Assistant Professor in the Theatre Department,
Faculty of Theatre and Television,
Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj.*