

# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

1/2018

**Romanian Theatre – New Perspectives  
Celebrating the Centenary of Modern Romania  
(1918-2018)**



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UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**1/2018  
March**



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**Cover design by Constantin Daniel Rosenthal,  
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**YEAR**  
**MONTH**  
**ISSUE**

**Volume 63 (LXIII) 2018**  
**MARCH**  
**1**

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PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2018-03-30  
PUBLISHED PRINT: 2018-03-30  
ISSUE DOI:10.24193/subbdrama.2018.1

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### **Special Thematic Issue:**

*Romanian Theatre – New Perspectives  
Celebrating the Centenary of Modern Romania (1918-2018)*

**ISSUE EDITORS:** Anca Hațiegan, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu and Mihai Pedestru

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## *Foreword*

### *Anniversary of Romanian Theatre. Brief Retrospect.*

ANCA HAȚIEGAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The paper presents the history of Romanian theatre, beginning with the creation of the first Romanian itinerant theatre company, at the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the present. It is intended as a foreword and a chronological framework to this special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica*.

**Keywords:** history, Romanian, theatre, union, centenary

The year 2018 is the centenary of the union of Transylvania, Banat, as well as of Bessarabia and North Bukovina with the Kingdom of Romania. The "Great Union" at the end of the First World War, as known in Romanian historiography, crowned the Romanians' movements of national and cultural emancipation from the ward of the Habsburg Monarchy (followed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire), of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, movements initiated in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and intensified in the 19<sup>th</sup>. Given the celebration of the centenary of the Great Union, we intend to dedicate an issue of the journal *Studia Dramatica* to Romanian theatre, which we seek to revisit not only festively, but also critically.

The history of Romanian theatre is slightly longer than one century: the first Romanian itinerant theatre company was created by several Transylvanian students, from Blaj, at the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the century of the first attempts to create dramatic texts in Romanian. The first theatre shows in Romanian, in Moldavia and Wallachia, were performed in 1816, respectively

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1819. (We mean the first theatre shows in the modern sense of the word – and not the theatrical performances typical to traditional cultures or the medieval forms of entertainment, which continued to be present in the aforementioned period). In the fourth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, professional Romanian theatre was established, by the foundation of the first theatrical education institutions in Romanian, at Bucharest and Iasi – the capitals of the two principalities Wallachia and Moldavia, which, by the union of 1859 (“Small Union”), were the nucleus of the modern Romanian state. The first national Romanian theatres appeared in the same places; this phenomenon foreshadowed, to some extent, the proclamation of Romania’s independence (the name “Romania” was officially adopted by the United Principalities by the Constitution of 1866). The declaration of independence occurred in 1877, at the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war, during which the Romanians fought on Russia’s side, obtaining the release from Ottoman suzerainty. Romanian theatre had seen some significant developments since the beginning of the century, owing to playwrights Vasile Alecsandri and Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu and to some actors such as Costache Caragiali, Matei Millo, Teodor Teodorini, Mihail Pascaly, Eufrosina Popescu or Fanny Tardini. In Iasi, which hosted a strong Jewish community, in 1876, so around the war, Abraham Goldfaden founded the world’s first professional theatre in Yiddish. Immediately after the country’s independence was won, the reorganization of the Romanian theatrical system was approached, according to the model offered by French Comedy, a model that has remained roughly functional to the present day in the state-subsidized theatres (repertory theatres with an established company) and it continues to dominate the Romanian theatrical stage. Dramaturgy was strengthened in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of the great playwright (and prose writer) Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912), a tutelary personality of Romanian theatre, the author of a number of comedies and of a drama that became a standard in Romanian culture. Perhaps not accidentally, they premiered under the ruling of Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, in a period favourable for Romania, when the country was wholly ascending, an aspect marked by the proclamation of the Kingdom, in 1881.

The same period saw the appearance of the great Romanian actors (Aristizza Romanescu, Grigore Manolescu, then Constantin Nottara, Aglae Pruteanu, Agatha Bârsescu, etc.). With Paul Gusty, stage director at the Bucharest National Theatre, the theatrical staging entered a new visionary and creative stage and became an indispensable element of the performance. The Romanian theatre’s links with the Western European theatre (first and

foremost with the French one, but also with the Italian, German, Austrian or English ones) increased. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time with the European theatrical movement, the idea of free theatre also materialized in the Kingdom of Romania by the foundation, in 1909, of the Davila Company – the first private theatre company in modern Romania.

A significant aspect is that, in the debut of the inaugural performance, a programmatic play, written specifically for this event by Ion Luca Caragiale, was put on stage. The company manager, Alexandru Davila, a complete theatre professional (like Caragiale, in fact), i.e. actor, director and playwright, enforced such a discipline of the play and of the staging that his shows became and continued to be for a long time the supreme reference in the assessment of a new theatrical production. He launched and encouraged a number of new acting talents who would reach their full potential in the inter-war period (Marioara Voiculescu, Lucia Sturdza and Tony Bulandra, etc.). The coattail of the Davila Company encouraged, before the First World War, the appearance of two other private companies (led by the aforementioned ones, i.e. Marioara Voiculescu, respectively the Bulandra spouses, who also became associates at some point).

### **Between World War I and World War II**

During the First World War, when Romania fought on the side of the Triple Entente, the capital and a large part of the country territory were occupied by the German army. Most of those active in the sector of theatre took refuge in Moldavia, at Iasi, where the Royal Family has also withdrawn, together with the government, the army and almost the entire country administration. When the fortunes of war changed, the Romanians took back their positions and once again began the attack at the west, for the release of Transylvania and Banat – territories where the population was mostly Romanian – from under the domination of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1918, i.e. one hundred years ago, the Romanians there, as well as those from Bessarabia and North Bukovina, expressed their desire to unite with the “motherland”, which, at the end of the war, led to the creation of Greater Romania. On 15 October 1922, in the Transylvanian locality Alba-Iulia, chosen for the occurrence of this event owing to historical and symbolic considerations, the coronation of King Ferdinand and of Queen Mary as sovereigns of united Romania took place. Before that, the King and Queen had engaged in an official tour across Transylvania, during which, in Sibiu,

they woke up, in their sleeping room, with the two debut volumes of the young writer and philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895-1961), born not far from this town. Their author was already considered Transylvania's most precious "gift", after the Union, to the motherland. The Queen held the books and later awarded a prize to the writer. With Lucian Blaga, the Transylvanian culture took an unexpected qualitative leap after the Great Union. The creator of the "most original and ample philosophical system in Romanian culture"<sup>2</sup>, poet and prose writer, Blaga was also a bright playwright, perhaps the most daring and inventive one in the inter-war period – a period not at all deprived of valuable plays written by authors such as Camil Petrescu (Blaga's most important "competitor", himself a philosopher and excellent prose writer and theatre theorist), George Ciprian (dramatic author successfully put on stage also in Berlin, Prague, Bern, and Paris), Mihail Sebastian, G.M. Zamfirescu, Victor Ion Popa, Al. Kirițescu, Tudor Mușatescu, Adrian Maniu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, and so on and so forth. In the same period, in Cluj, Cernăuți and Chișinău, meaning the most important urban hubs of the provinces that had recently joined the Kingdom of Romania, new national theatres were founded. (Unfortunately, two of them, i.e. in Cernăuți and Chișinău, and the National Theatre of Craiova, were closed down in 1935, perhaps also because of the great world economic crisis, which had also had an impact on Romania).

In the inter-war, in Cluj, an Academy of Music and Dramatic Art was also founded. Under the Habsburg rule and later under the Austro-Hungarian one, the Transylvanian and Banat Romanians had been prohibited from founding a professional local theatrical movement or to erect a national theatre. In the aforementioned provinces, until the Great Union, there had been only Romanian theatre companies made from amateurs. Starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, professional actors from the neighboring Romania took a chance, however, and engaged in a number of tours in the said territories, facing the authorities' complaints. Such an actor was Zaharia Bârsan, born in Transylvania, but trained at the Bucharest Music and Declamation Conservatory, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was appointed in the management of the Cluj National Theatre

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2. Marta Petreu, *Filosofii paralele [Parallel Philosophies]*, second edition, revised (Iasi: Editura Polirom, 2013), 28. See also Marta Petreu, Ioan Muntean, Mircea Flonta, *Romania, philosophy in*, in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2004): <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/romania-philosophy-in/v-1> (accessed on February 20, 2018).



in 1919, for his special efforts in promoting Romanian theatre in Transylvania before the war. Apart from the national theatres, in the inter-war, in Romania and especially in the capital, at Bucharest, numerous private theatres appeared, some short-lived, others with a longer life. Many of them were led by actresses (Marioara Voiculescu, Maria Ventura, Lucia Sturdza Bulandra, Maria Filotti, Dida Solomon, Tantz Cutava-Barozzi, and so on and so forth), a sign of accelerated emancipation of women in that time. The repertory program of these theatres was quite eclectic, and the staging did not have a style too different from the one of the state subsidized theatres. The great actors and directors of the age were positively active both in one and in the other. Actor Constantin Tănase founded, in 1919, the Cărbuș Company, the first specialized revue theatre in Romania. In the same period, in 1929, the National Radiophonic Theatre was created and it has been extremely active until now.

There were also avant-garde movements, but, despite the fact that Romania was the country of birth and debut of Tristan Tzara and Marcel Iancu, two of the founders of Dadaism, the theatrical avant-garde here was rather "soft". There were attempts to found people's theatres or theatres for workers (this purpose was approached in particular by the directors and playwrights Victor Ion Popa and G.M. Zamfirescu), but their activity did not have a significant echo. (The existence of proletarian theatre, Agit-prop, in inter-war Romania, had not been well-documented.) The connections of Romanian theatre with Western European theatre intensified significantly in this stage. Actors and companies from abroad would visit Romania frequently, which had a strong echo among the professionals of theatre, but also among the regular domestic audience. On the other hand, the Romanians organize considerably fewer tours, of which we note, however, the one of the Teatrul Mic of Bucharest, which, in 1923, presented in Paris M. Sorbul's *Patima roșie* [*Red Passion*], with Elvira Popescu and Alexandru Mihailescu in the leading roles, actors who were later adopted by the French stage.

Undoubtedly, the most important phenomenon characterizing the inter-war Romanian theatre was the theatricalisation movement, promoted by a number of gifted directors, such as Aurel Ion Maican, Ion Sava (the former's disciple and the most audacious "theatricalizer" of the inter-war), Soare Z. Soare (follower of Max Reinhardt), Haig Acterian (friend with Edward Gordon Craig, who prefaced a book for him, and the author of a micro-monograph dedicated to Craig), Victor Ion Popa, George Mihail Zamfirescu, Sandu Eliad, Vasile Enescu, Ion Șahighian and so on, as well as a

number of equally gifted scenographers, such as Traian Cornescu, Victor Feodorov, George Löwendal, Theodor Kiriacoﬀ, M.H. Maxy, etc. The theatricalization of theatre meant the waiving of realism and stage naturalism in favor of suggestion, abstraction, and stylization. The focus shifted from the text to the performance. Stage director Ion Sava was the most decided supporter of the idea that theatre is not literature, it does not serve to the dramatic text, but it is a self-reliant art (an idea also backed up by playwright I.L. Caragiale in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Inter-war "theatrical" theatre was first and foremost a theatre of image, the setting, the stage design, the choreography of the actors' bodies, corporeal plasticity becoming increasingly more important elements of the play. The directors who promoted theatricalization would often build stage metaphors which would involve an intellectual labor from the audience – they had to decipher the meaning of the related metaphors, the stage symbols. Cinematographic-like staging was also a practice, which led to the acceleration of the pace of the dramatic action, of the setting changes, of the acting. (The same Ion Sava, who admired the Italian theatre and film director Anton Giulio Bragaglia, a pioneer of photography and of futuristic filmmaking, was the main supporter of the techniques borrowed from filmmaking to theatre.) The "inter-text", the cultural citation would also be practiced, the stage images being able to refer to known or lesser known works of the plastic arts. Inter-war directors were also frequently theatre theorists. Owing to them and to other critical writings from Camil Petrescu, Lucian Blaga, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Mihail Sebastian, the aestheticians Tudor Vianu and Alice Voinescu, and others, in the inter-war, Romanian theatrical studies saw an unprecedented development.

After the effervescence of the first decades after the Great Union, Romanian theatre entered a stage of decline, of marked commercialization, toward the end of the 1930s, because of the increasingly more charged political atmosphere. Like in other European countries, the right nationalist movement was more and more visible and aggressive in Romanian politics, but also among a (rather significant) part of the intellectuals. The latter were inclined toward the nationalist right rather than toward the socialist left because of their mistrust in the neighboring Russia, fueled by an unfortunate historical experience and because they did not agree with communist internationalism, nor did they agree with the project of the country's dismemberment and its organization in soviets, considering the efforts and the delay taken for the creation of the unified Romanian state. The liberal-democratic and bourgeois notions began to wear away. The totalitarian and

the collectivistic temptations were increasingly stronger. In 1938, King Carol II repealed the democratic constitution that had been adopted in 1923 and installed the dictatorship. Octavian Goga's nationalist government, installed at the end of 1937, issued the first discriminating, anti-Jewish laws, of a series that also continued under other succeeding governments.

During 1940, after the beginning of the Second World War, Romania suffered a number of significant territorial losses (Bessarabia, reattached to the USSR, North Bukovina and the Hertza Region, also occupied by the USSR, north-eastern Transylvania, assigned to Hungary by the Vienna Award, and Southern Dobruja, lost in favor of Bulgaria), which led to the abdication of King Carol II who assigned his prerogatives to his young son, Michael. However, the real leader of the country was General Ion Antonescu, appointed head of government in the same year. For a while, he allied with the Iron Guard (a fascist paramilitary organization), and, on 13 September 1940, Romania was proclaimed "national legionary state". After a number of disorders caused by them in the countries, assassinations and a pogrom committed by the legionaries in Bucharest, Antonescu suppressed their rise during their attempt to take over the rule from his hands ("the legionary rebellion"), an attempt crushed on 22 and 23 January 1941, which marked the end of the legionary state, but not of the anti-Semite persecutions and violence. Thus, because of the racist legislation enacted during Antonescu's government, which prevented Jews from playing in Romanian theatres, they founded the theatre called Barașeum, which operated in 1941-1945. The institution's entire personnel was Jewish, but the performances (in prose and musical) took place, by the authorities' decision, only in Romanian. We need to note that, however, this was the only Jewish theatre in Europe which survived in the period of the Second World War. In fact, the whole theatrical activity was turned upside down. For example, the staff of the Cluj theatre was moved, during the war, in Timisoara, since the Cluj was on the territory occupied by Hungary. On 22 June 1941, Romania entered the war by siding with the Axis powers, beginning the (counter)attack against the USSR, together with the German troops. The Romanians recovered the territories that had been taken by the Russians, but continued to advance, with their German allies, to Stalingrad and in the Caucasus. As known, the Russians were victors in these battles and, in exchange, began to flow to the West and South-west. They had already entered Northern Moldavia when King Michael I, who had grown sufficiently on account of the difficult circumstances, removed and arrested marshal Antonescu, proclaiming, on 23 August 1944,

Romania's shift of side with the Allies. In consequence, the Germans bombarded Bucharest, one of the affected objectives being the National Theatre, the building of which had been inaugurated in 1852 (initially called Teatrul cel Mare). Nowadays, on Calea Victoriei, one can see only its front, reconstructed and incorporated in a building meant to be a hotel...

### **During the Communist regime**

After signing the armistice with the governments of the United Nations (12 September 1944), Romania began to lose, piece by piece, its independence. The important decisions were made in Moscow. Moscow enforced, for Bucharest, in 1945, a transition government led by Petru Groza, an allied of the communists. In November 1946, elections were organized, their results being heavily falsified; in the end, the Romanian Workers' Party (resulting from the union of all the left wing Romanian parties with the Romanian Communist Party) was declared winner. The historical, democratic Romanian parties were under siege. Their leaders, as well as numerous party members, would lose their lives in the communist prisons. Terror had merely begun to show its teeth. By the Peace Treaties of Paris (1947), Romania received back Northern Transylvania, but lost Bessarabia, North Bukovina and the Hertza region in favor of the Soviet Union, as well as South Dobruja, assigned to Bulgaria. On 30 December 1947, King Michael I, who had tried to reinstall the democratic regime and who had taken every humanly possible effort to oppose the Soviet occupation and the transformation of Romania in a leftist dictatorship, was forced by the communist authorities to abdicate. Romania was proclaimed a People's Republic. In April 1948, a new constitution was promulgated, moulded on the Soviet Constitution. In the same year, the campaign of forced collectivisation of agriculture began; it would last until 1962. The main means of production, all the large enterprises of the country were nationalised, including private theatres and film theatres or film processing laboratories. The removal of the undesirable intellectuals from the higher education (including the theatrical one) system and from the Romanian Academy began. Practically, 1948 was the year when the extremely brutal mass repression of those labelled enemies of the new regime was unleashed; not even the ill, the elderly, the pregnant women, the children were spared. Many people were investigated and judged in show trials or simply thrown in prisons, without having been trialled; they were incarcerated in extreme conditions which most of them

could not survive. Many of them were tortured or even ideologically “re-educated” (especially in the ominously famous prison of Pitești), deported (across the country or in the USSR), exploited in labour camps, or killed.

Despite the retreat of the Soviet troops from Romania in 1958, the age of terror continued until 1964, with a brief “*intermezzo*”, after Stalin’s death (1953), cut short by the anti-communist revolt of Hungary, in 1956. After the nationalisation and in the middle of the collectivisation campaign, in 1951, the accelerated industrialisation of the country was approached; it led to an important migration of the population from the rural environment to the urban one. In 1952, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, secretary general of the Communist Party ever since 1945, won the fight for power within the Romanian Workers’ Party. Following Petru Groza, he occupied the position of President of the Council of Ministers (in other words, of the government). But, more importantly, Gheorghiu-Dej continued to lead the Romanian Workers’ Party, in the position of secretary general, until 1965, with a very short break, between April 1954 and October 1955. In 1965, he was replaced by Nicolae Ceausescu, who, thus, became the main decision-maker in the country’s management and held dictatorial powers. In the same year, under a new constitution, the name of the People’s Republic of Romania was changed to the Socialist Republic of Romania, and the Romanian Workers’ Party was renamed the Romanian Communist Party.

Theatrically speaking, the Gheorghiu-Dej age brought a number of processes that upset completely the system inherited from the inter-war: the introduction of the drastic censorship of dramatic texts and of stage plays; starting from 1948, the disappearance of private theatres; the establishment of new state theatres (including theatres of the Hungarian, German and Jewish minorities) and of a new national theatre (in Timisoara); the enforcement of the presence of Soviet plays in the repertoires – usually, these were written by minor authors; the enforcement of domestic plays of political propaganda favouring the new regime; the political control of the program of theatres. At the same time, the single method of creation approved by the communist party was socialist realism, imported from the USSR; it had the following characteristics: *ideinost’* (art is supposed to reflect the communist party’s ideology), *partiinnost’* (party-mindedness), *narodnost’* (it should reflect the life of the simple man, of the commoner *recte* of the proletariat), *klassovost’* (be class-oriented, reflect the class fight between the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, i.e. the classes deemed “retrograde”, on the one hand, and the proletariat, seen as the society’s forward-moving class, the force

of good, on the other hand). The character (preferably from the industrial or agricultural environment) was not to be individualised, the vision was expected to be optimistic-triumphalist, adding to the construction of the “new world”, reflecting the communists’ struggle for emancipation, etc.

Starting with 1955, Stanislavski’s system was introduced in the Romanian theatrical education, as a mandatory method of actor’s training; however, this Stanislavski was sifted through the theses of socialist realism; his writings (their translation in Romanian began in 1950) reached the readers in an incomplete, censored version. As a reaction to the unprecedentedly aggressive intrusion of the political in the Romanian theatre’s organisational and creative problems, a group of young directors started, toward the end of the seventh decade, the process of its re-theatricalisation, taking advantage of the brief cultural-ideological thaw following the disruption triggered by the report through which Khrushchev condemned, in 1956, the crimes of Stalinism. The polemics approached in the press by the young insurgents with the defenders of dogmatism in art ended with the Report of the V. I. Popa Circle of Young Directors, presented at the Counsel of the Theatre Professionals, of January 1957. The manifesto-articles signed by the directors Liviu Ciulei and Radu Stanca, which were published in *Revista Teatrul* in June and September 1956, should also be noted: *Teatralizarea picturii de teatru* [*The Theatricalisation of Painting in Theatre*], respectively “*Reteatralizarea*” teatrului [*The “Retheatricalisation” of Theatre*]. The proponents of re-theatricalisation restored the connection with the inter-war stage approach and practice, but, most of all, they sought to refute socialist realism, by using aesthetic arguments, while promoting, in exchange, the aesthetics of suggestion and stylisation. The greatest Romanian theatre productions of the communist era (signed by directors such as Liviu Ciulei, Vlad Mugur, Radu Penciulescu, Lucian Giurchescu, Crin Teodorescu, Aureliu Manea, Lucian Pintilie, David Esrig, György Harag, Andrei Șerban, Cătălina Buzoianu, etc.) were, one way or another, under the sign of the re-theatricalisation of theatre, owing a lot to this second wave of the movement that had started in the inter-war and which had extensions until the end of Ceausescu’s dictatorship (and even afterwards). The tutelary presence of “theatrical” theatre, which dominated the domestic stage until 1989, was, indisputably, that of the director who – given the lack of the freedom of speech and, thus, the absence of a viable dramaturgy of the present – often had the trying task of bringing to the present-day plays included in the classic repertory or where the action is placed in other ages and in other geographical contexts. Thus, a style of the

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“oblique”, allusive, Aesopian, subversive stage discourse was developed; this style characterised also a part of the post-war Romanian dramaturgy that remained politically non-aligned (owing to playwrights such as Iosif Naghiu, Ion Băieșu, Dumitru Solomon, Teodor Mazilu, Marin Sorescu, etc.) The theatrical education, limited to the related universities (called “institutes”) of Bucharest and Târgu-Mureș, saw, starting from the 1960s, additional to Stanislavski’s method, which was the foundation of the training of actors, the arrival, in more or less covert ways, of the working method of Jerzy Grotowski, Lee Strasberg, Michael Chekhov, and Viola Spolin. The connections with the Western theatre (and with the Occident in general), which had been ruthlessly amputated after 1947, started to be resumed from the middle of the 1950s, but under the careful eye of the authorities and lacking the effervescence of the inter-war. Romanian tours abroad were the authorities’ opportunity to offer to the West a pretend image of the country’s reality. The beginning was with the Bucharest National Theatre, in 1956, and its triumphal tour at the Nations’ Theatre in Paris, with *O scrisoare pierdută* [*A Lost Letter*] by I.L. Caragiale, directed by Sică Alexandrescu, and *Ultima oră* [*Last Hour*] by Mihail Sebastian, directed by Moni Ghelerter. Other tours abroad followed, with plays directed by Lucian Giurchescu, Liviu Ciulei, David Esrig, Cătălina Buzoianu, etc. Surprisingly, Romania was visited by a fairly significant number of companies from abroad during communism. Some of the most valuable Russian companies, of course, came here, such as the company of the Bolshoi Theatre, of the Maly Theatre, of the Vahtangov Theatre or of the Maxim Gorky Theatre, led by Tovstonogov. From France, those that toured were: Marcel Marceau (1953, 1967), Théâtre Atelier (1956), Vieux Colombier (1959, 1966), Théâtre National Populaire, led by Jean Vilar (1961), Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne (1963, 1971), Comédie-Française (1964, 1975), Théâtre Odéon, with Jean Louis Barrault (1965), and so on and so forth. From East Germany: Berliner Ensemble, with *The Mother* by Berthold Brecht, based on Maxim Gorky’s novel (with Helene Weigel herself in the leading part) and with *Life of Galileo* (1959, 1976), Deutches Theatre (1967), Municipal Theatre of Karl Marx Stadt (1978), National Theatre of Weimar (1969, 1973, 1976), and from West Germany: Kammerspiele of Munich (1971), Stadttheatre of Köln, theatre of Bochum (1980), Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer (1980), etc. From Austria: the Vienna Burgtheatre (1969). From Italy: Piccolo Teatro of Milano (1960), with *Harlequin Servant of two Masters*, based on Goldoni, directed by Giorgio Strehler, Teatro Stabile of Genoa (1965, 1970), Teatro Stabile of Catania (1968), etc. From England:



Royal Shakespeare Company, with *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Peter Brook and *The Comedy of Errors*, put on stage of Clifford Williams (1964, 1972), English Stage Company of the Royal Court Theatre (1968), Royal Exchange Company of Manchester (1979), London Actors Partnership (1986) and the actor Ian McKellen, with an excellent recital (1982). Furthermore, a number of Polish, Hungarian, Czech, etc. theatre toured here. This means that Romania was not fully isolated in communism, from a theatrical point of view. The information on the evolutions of Occidental dramatic art also circulated on various ways, but its more daring and radical aspects could not always be applied. Romanian theatre studies no longer experienced the spectacular development they had in the inter-war. But theatrical historiography was enriched with Ioan Massoff's *Teatrul românesc* [*Romanian Theatre*], a massive, eight-volume work published by the author in 1961-1981 and covering the history of Romanian theatre from the beginning to 1950. Although censorship and self-censorship did leave their mark on the work, it continues to be the most important and fullest synthesis in the sector for the mentioned period.

In his first years of leadership, Nicolae Ceausescu was seen as a reformist, and this opinion was strengthened by the denunciation of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, a move that attracted the Occident's goodwill and rekindled hope across the country. In fact, Ceausescu had focused constantly on the increase of his powers, by cumulating various positions and responsibilities and by encouraging the cult of his personality. In 1974, he was proclaimed the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, a position occupied by him until the fall of the communist regime after the people's revolt of 1989. Unlike his predecessor, who was a Stalinist, Ceausescu revived nationalism, to megalomaniac extents, thus distancing himself from Moscow. During Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorship, the repression was somewhat gentler than in the Gheorghiu-Dej age, but it did not cease. It took some of the most insidious forms: those who caused disruptions were no longer incarcerated for political offences, but for (imaginary or staged) civil or criminal transgressions, or they were forcedly admitted in psychiatric hospitals. Deaths were "accidental". In the more "fortunate" situations, problematic individuals were "merely" intimidated and placed under constant surveillance. Sometimes, they were put under house arrest. Censorship grew equally insidious; it was applied by a larger number of authorities and at a larger number of levels, which meant that responsibility was distributed among more establishments. In the case of

stage plays, censorship operated at the level of the theatrical institution, but also of party and state bodies, which delegated the members of the play viewing commissions (before and after the premiere).

In July 1971, after a visit to North Korea, deeply impressed by what he had seen there, Ceausescu gave a speech in Mangalia, on the shore of the Black Sea, a speech called "Measures proposed for the improvement of the political-ideological activity of Marxist-Leninist education of the party members, of all the workers". The seventeen "theses" of this speech dictated an even deeper subjection of art to the requirements of party directives. The effects were soon visible. In 1972, after only three performances (23, 26, and 28 September), N.V. Gogol's *Government Inspector*, directed by Lucian Pintilie, put on stage at the Bucharest Bulandra Theatre, was suspended. It was not the first play prohibited by the communist regime and it would not be the last one to be subject to this treatment, but, exceptionally, the decision was announced by a release from the Council of Culture and Socialist Education (the ministry of culture), which was broadcast on radio and on television, and then published in the *Scântea* newspaper, the official platform of the Romanian Communist Party (issue of 30 September 1972). Following this scandal, the whole management of the theatre, including director Liviu Ciulei, was removed, and Lucian Pintilie was forbidden to put plays on stage in Romania. After the halting of the *Government Inspector*, theatre professionals could no longer kid themselves with regard to the condition of art and of the artist under Ceausescu's regime. A real exodus of the great Romanian theatre creators started: one by one, some directors (Lucian Pintilie, Vlad Mugur, Andrei Şerban, Lucian Giurchescu, Radu Penciulescu, Liviu Ciulei) went into exile and settled in the West. This was an authentic catastrophe for the Romanian theatre – the second of this extent, after the early disappearance, for various reasons, of several valuable inter-war directors during or around World War II and the installation of communism. Exiled directors would return in the country after 1989; some of them managed to stir things again with their productions (Andrei Şerban and Vlad Mugur, first of all), but the wrong that had been done could no longer be undone. On 20 December 1973, the new building of the Bucharest National Theatre was inaugurated, an event also attended by the Ceausescu spouses. This was the first and last time that the dictator visited this building, an aspect symptomatic of his relationship with theatre.

### **After the fall of the communist regime**

Following the events of 1989 and the fall of communism, Romanian theatre, like the whole society, began a lengthy and strenuous stage of restoration. In 1991, the new democratic Constitution of the country, still in force nowadays, was adopted. In theatre, the recently acquired freedom of expression prompted the massive return of the things that had been repressed in the collective subconscious: nudity, sexuality, violence, strong and vulgar language, all prohibited during communism, squeezed their quick way on the stage, stirring the audience's or the critics' intense reactions of approval or disapproval. In the absence of dramatic texts drawing directly upon the Romanian experience of totalitarianism, the denunciation and exorcising of the traumas caused by it were possible, however, immediately after the end of the communist dictatorship, by the directors' use of the texts written by the classics of world dramaturgy (based on the pattern offered by the years prior to 1989) or of texts drawing on the experience of the right-wing totalitarian regimes.

Small private theatre companies, independent initiatives re-emerged with great efforts. Some theatre productions began being hosted in unconventional spaces because of the precarious resources rather than owing to the theatre professionals' need to experiment. The higher education theatre schools of Cluj and Iasi were re-established and some new ones appeared. The actor's training methods were diversified. The connections with the Western theatre were resumed by the organisation of great tours of the national theatres abroad (at the beginning of the 1990s), by the founding of mixed theatre companies (which, however, did not have a long life), by the individual efforts of artists who were awarded creative residences or workshops abroad and by the participation to the international theatre festivals or the organisation of such festivals in the country (in Sibiu, Craiova, Cluj, Bucharest). After the beginning of the new millennium, a new generation of playwrights and directors, much readier to collaborate and interested in the present and in Romanian reality, began its self-assertion. Another increasingly clearer tendency in the last years is the one that challenges the director's supremacy. Young theatre professionals engage more and more often in collective creation. Stage scripts and plays are a team effort. Of course, there are also negative aspects: the chronic underfunding of the theatrical system, especially of its independent component, the audience's preference for casual entertainment, the competition of television

and internet, the diminishing of the space dedicated to dramatic reviews in generalist publications, the extremely precarious condition of the Bucharest and Iasi museums of Romanian theatre, etc. The reasons of pessimism are as many as those of optimism. In *Studia Dramatica*, we sought to avoid the extremes and to approach soundly both the assessment of the past and the assessment of the present. The reader will weigh the success of our attempt.

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## **STUDIES AND ARTICLES**





## Un jeu théâtral traditionnel roumain au carrefour des cultures (est-) européennes: *IROZII – les HÉRODES*

ȘTEFANA POP-CURȘEU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract: A Traditional Romanian Theatrical Performance at the Crossroads of (East-) European Cultures: *Irozii - The Herods Play*.** The kind of theatrical performance upon which we focus our attention in the present study brings together sacred and profane masks, characters coming from the Christian tradition (present in the canonical texts of the Bible as well as in the apocryphal ones), characters who represent an image of a certain social order on the one hand (the priest, the shepherds, the sacred family) and of a possible disorder on the other hand (the lunatic of the village, the devils, the personification of Death). Taking into consideration the fact that the orthodox communities had difficulties in accepting religious theatre and that there are interesting similarities between these performances and the catholic medieval mysteries, a few questions will guide us through the matter: Where are these performances, mixing the archaic and the modern, coming from? Which are the links we can retrace back to the medieval religious theatre? And how did the neighbouring communities, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Germans, Serbs influence the evolution of the Romanian *Herods* plays?

**Keywords:** The *Herods*, Romanian popular theatre, religious theatre, folkloric Romanian masks, Nativity popular theatre

En cette année qui marque le centenaire de la Grande Union des provinces roumaines, et de la Roumanie en tant que nation moderne indivisible au sein du continent européen, la meilleure manière de célébrer le théâtre de ce pays fascinant, situé aux carrefours des cultures de l'Ouest et de l'Est, du monde latin et slave, de la chrétienté catholique et orthodoxe, me

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semble être celle de me tourner vers le folklore, vers les coutumes théâtrales populaires contemporaines, qui relient le moderne à l'ancien, en ouvrant un couloir temporel qui nous fait remonter dans le temps, à travers le Moyen Âge, jusqu'à l'Antiquité et aux civilisations préchrétiennes. Le théâtre populaire roumain est un des plus riches d'Europe. Encore vivant, bien que transformé par la modernité, par l'intrusion du plastique en tant que matériau qui participe à la confection de certains masques, ou par l'ajout de certains objets qui renvoient à l'usage quotidien de notre monde contemporain, ce « théâtre populaire » est en fait un appellatif générique de manifestations paysannes des plus diverses, à caractère rituel combiné au divertissement, qui revêtent des spécificités en fonction de chaque région ou communauté qui les pratique, mais qui se caractérisent toutes par un puissant caractère théâtral, souvent para-dramatique très archaïque<sup>2</sup>, et par la présence de masques et costumes des plus élaborés qui relient la vie du XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle aux rites et croyances des ancêtres.

Bien que pour l'homme citadin – qui a oublié les lois de la cohabitation avec la nature, la proximité familière de la mort, les joies de l'initiation, les rites de passage à l'âge adulte et à la fondation d'une nouvelle famille –, les jeux masqués ne soient plus que des curiosités touristiques et des vestiges de la tradition rurale, le monde paysan a gardé la plupart de ses repères culturels et continue d'assurer leur survivance en dépit des adversités historiques ou socio-économiques. Pour le chercheur et l'historien du théâtre, ces traditions qui incluent jeux dramatiques, danses, pantomimes, parades et processions, ne sont ni plus ni moins qu'une mine d'or. Et cela, non pas seulement du point de vue de l'histoire du théâtre roumain, mais aussi de celle du théâtre européen car dans la plupart des cultures des différents pays de notre continent nous retrouvons des coutumes similaires et des croisements de certains types de masques et de costumes qui nous renvoient ainsi à un bagage culturel indoeuropéen commun, transmis et modelé par la culture latine, germanique ou slave. Romulus Vulcănescu, un des plus importants ethnologues roumains qui a mené à bien la première grande étude de synthèse sur les masques paysans de Roumanie dans les années 1970, dessine la carte de ces masques d'Europe Centrale et de l'Est<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Nous utilisons ici le terme de Jelle Koopmans, *Le théâtre des exclus au Moyen-Âge, hérétiques sorcières et marginaux* (Paris : Éditions Imago, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Romulus Vulcănescu, *Măștile populare*, Bucarest, Ed. Științifică, 1970.

UN JEU THÉÂTRAL TRADITIONNEL ROUMAIN AU CARREFOUR DES CULTURES (EST-) EUROPEENNES: IROZII – LES HÉRODES



Fig. 1: Carte de la répartition des masques phytomorphes, anthropomorphes et zoomorphes en Europe Centrale et de l'Est, d'après Romulus Vulcănescu

Masques zoomorphes (d'ours, cerf, chèvre et mouton, taureau et bœuf, cheval, oiseaux), anthropomorphes (vieux et vieilles, danseurs, fous, démons, etc.) et phytomorphes (à feuilles et branchages, paille, roseaux, etc.), masques profanes ou sacrées peuplent les fêtes et coutumes des paysans roumains et des communautés des montagnes d'Europe.

Le jeu théâtral sur lequel nous concentrerons notre attention dans la présente étude, *Les Hérodes*, rassemble des masques sacrés et profanes, des personnages issus de la tradition de l'Église chrétienne (présents dans les Évangiles canoniques et dans les textes apocryphes), des personnages trahissant un certain ordre ou désordre social (le prêtre, les bergers, le fou du village), aussi bien que des êtres fantastiques comme les diables ou la personnification de la mort. Étant données, d'un côté, les fortes ressemblances avec certaines formes de théâtre religieux médiéval occidental catholique et, d'un autre côté, l'appartenance aux traditions des communautés roumaines orthodoxes qui n'ont pas officiellement connu des formes de théâtre religieux, mais qui ont accepté la pratique d'anciens rituels païens christianisés, plusieurs questions nous guideront dans notre démarche: 1. D'où viennent ces jeux qui mélangent l'archaïque et le moderne? (structure, personnages, costumes, mise en espace, rôle social) ; 2. Quels sont les liens qui les unissent aux drames semi-liturgiques du Moyen-âge occidental catholique? ; 3. Quels sont les apports des peuples voisins et/ou présents sur le territoire de la Roumanie historique, comme les Saxons, les Hongrois et les Sicules, les Ukrainiens, au développement de ce jeu traditionnel roumain?



**Fig. 2:** Masque zoomorphe d'ours, dans la danse des ours du Nouvel An, en Moldavie



Fig. 3 : Carte des régions historiques de la Roumanie

### 1. Origine des *Hérodes* : variantes, contenu, personnages

On appelle *Les Hérodes* un nombre de Jeux théâtraux religieux traditionnels<sup>4</sup> que l'on trouve en Transylvanie centrale, au Maramures, en Moldavie et Bucovine, puis en Munténie, joués entre Noël et le Nouvel An, plus précisément entre le 25 décembre (Fête de la Nativité) et le 28 décembre (Jour des Saints Innocents) :

Par le *Bethléem (Vicleimul)* en Munténie ou les *Hérodes (Irozii)* dans les autres provinces roumaines, il faut comprendre la coutume des jeunes de représenter à Noël *La Nativité de Jésus Christ, les Mages suivant l'étoile*, leur accueil par *Hérode*, la ruse de ce dernier pour trouver l'enfant par l'intermédiaire des trois rois, et, souvent, la confrontation de la mécréance, personnifiée par un *enfant* ou par un *berger*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Traditionnel étant ce qui est propre à une culture qui reconnaît et assume son identité, tout en étant validé par une certaine continuité, ritualisation, rythme vital cyclique à l'intérieur de la communauté en question (de la « société civile culturelle ».)

<sup>5</sup> Tudor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la Români, Crăciunul, Studiu etnografic* [Les Fêtes chez les Roumains, Noël, Étude ethnographique] (Bucarest : Libr. Socec & Comp. & C. Sfetea, 1914) p. 155.

Plusieurs historiens parlent de l'apparition de ce théâtre populaire religieux vers la fin du XVIIIe siècle<sup>6</sup>, d'autres de ses racines antiques datant de la christianisation du territoire roumain<sup>7</sup>, mais nous n'avons affaire qu'à des hypothèses et il se peut que le phénomène soit un peu plus ancien, vu les rapports directs et indirects avec des formes théâtrales typiques du Moyen Âge européen.

Dans certaines régions (au Maramureș, par exemple), les acteurs des *Hérodos* portent avec eux une arche d'alliance, une sorte d'église en miniature portable, qui peut laisser voir à l'intérieur différentes scènes des environs de Bethléem, comme le palais du roi, des jardins, la crèche, très probablement inspirée par la caisse à poupées des marionnettistes slaves, influence sur laquelle nous aurons l'occasion de revenir. Cette petite église-crèche peut aussi avoir un compartiment où est glissé l'argent reçu pour les spectacles, jouant donc le rôle de tirelire.

Il n'y a pas beaucoup de textes de ces pièces, mais après l'inventaire de toutes les variantes, il n'y a aucun doute que le texte fondamental qui a servi de canevas aux dramatisations ultérieures est le passage biblique de l'Évangile selon St. Matthieu, 2:16-17 :

Alors Hérode, voyant qu'il avait été joué par les mages, fut pris d'une violente fureur et envoya tuer, dans Bethléem et tout son territoire, tous les enfants de moins de deux ans, d'après la date qu'il s'était fait préciser par les mages. 17.° Alors s'accomplit l'oracle du prophète Jérémie : *Dans Rama s'est fait entendre une voix qui sanglote et moult se lamente : c'est Rachel pleurant ses enfants et ne veut pas qu'on la console car ils ne sont plus.*

Dans les plus anciennes variantes écrites attestées, datant du début du XIXe siècle, l'action se concentre sur la nativité, l'hommage rendu par les rois mages et le massacre des innocents ne figure pas, étant juste annoncé. Cet épisode, qui est pourtant l'un des plus dramatiques, se limite le plus souvent

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<sup>6</sup> Voir Ioan Chindriș, « Blaj and the Beginnings of the *Vifileim* Custom among the Romanians », in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie « George Bariț »* (2005) 531-544 ; Letiția Gitza et Mihai Florea, « Manifestări de dramă populară în câteva regiuni ale țării » [« Manifestations de drame populaire dans quelques régions du pays »], in *Studii și cercetări e istoria artei*, n° 1, (1958) : 275-280 ; G. Vrabie, « Teatrul popular », in *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei*, n° 3-4, (1957) : 485-562.

<sup>7</sup> Mihail Vulpescu, *Irozii, Păpușile, Teatrul țărănesc al Vicleimului, Scaloianul și Paparudele*, (Bucarest: Tipografia Ziarul universul 1941).

à une discussion parsemée de chants entre Hérode et les trois Mages. D'autres textes signalent la présence de personnages plus nombreux, deux anges, un officier, un berger, l'enfant et les bouffons qui ne manquent jamais<sup>8</sup>. La première publication d'un texte roumain des Hérodes a été faite a par Ion Thomici à Buda, en 1827, et il s'agit d'un court dialogue en prose entre Hérode et les Mages<sup>9</sup>. En 1848, une variante très courte a été publiée par Aton Pann (Munténie)<sup>10</sup>, en 1860 est publiée la variante de Moldavie<sup>11</sup>, et en 1875 la variante de Transylvanie<sup>12</sup>. Mais beaucoup d'autres textes ont circulé, ou par voie orale, ou dans des manuscrits perdus.

Un manuscrit intéressant en ce sens est celui de Picu Pătruț qui rassemble trois variantes de Transylvanie, écrites entre 1836 et 1838. Le premier texte qu'on y trouve présente, d'après Elisabeta Nanu<sup>13</sup>, des similarités et des parentés dans le style des répliques avec des textes latins de drames liturgiques médiévaux allemands<sup>14</sup>. Il reste quand même difficile à vérifier si le diacre Transylvain Picu Pătruț avait pu connaître ce genre de textes en version latine ou allemande. Une version allemande des Hérodes, provenant de Transylvanie, publiée en 1859 à Sibiu<sup>15</sup>, ne présente pourtant aucune ressemblance avec la pièce jouée par Picu Pătruț, car elle est du genre liturgique chanté, alors que la variante roumaine est, quant à elle, effectivement jouée.

Les deux premiers textes, plus simples, ne font entrer en scène qu'un ange, Hérode et les rois mages qui lui annoncent la naissance de Jésus et

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<sup>8</sup> Tudor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la Români, Crăciunul...*, 158.

<sup>9</sup> Ion Thomici, *Scurte învățături pentru creșterea și buna purtare a tinerimii române* [Courts enseignements pour l'éducation et la bonne conduite de la jeunesse roumaine] (Buda, 1827).

<sup>10</sup> Voir N. Cartoian, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească* [Les livres populaires dans la littérature roumaine], vol II, (Bucarest : Ed. Enciclopedică Română, 1974), 187. Une autre variante de Munténie, plus ample mais ressemblant à celle d'Anton Pann, a été publiée en 1884, voir G. Dem. Teodorescu, *Poesii populare române* (Poésies populaires roumaines), Bucarest, 1885, 102-109.

<sup>11</sup> T. Burada, *Istoria teatrului român în Moldova* (Histoire du théâtre roumain en Moldavie), I, Iași, 1915, pp. 7-26.

<sup>12</sup> P. Băncilă, *Colindele Crăciunului și ale Pasciloru* (Les « colinde » de Noël et de Pâques), Sibiu, 1875, pp. 46-56.

<sup>13</sup> « Un manuscrit cu Irozi al lui Picu Pătruț » [« Un manuscrit de Picu Pătruț contenant les Hérodes »], in *Anuarul Arhivei de Folclor*, VI, (s.l., 1942).

<sup>14</sup> Voir Karl Weinhold, *Weihnachtsspiele und Lieder aus Süddeutschland und Schlesien* (Wien, 1875), 56-61.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Johann Schuller, *Herodes. Ein deutsches Weihnachtsspiel aus Siebenbürgen...* (Hermannstadt, 1859).



leur mission. Hérode réagit et menace de tuer tous les enfants<sup>16</sup>, puis la pièce finit avec un chant de Noël. Dans la troisième variante, de 1838, plus développée, sont ajoutées les personnages de Marie, Joseph, 3 bergers, et le messager du roi Hérode. L'arrêt de mort prononcé par Hérode est suivi par une atroce malédiction lancée par Balthazar avant qu'il ne parte pour la crèche, malédiction que l'on retrouvera dans la grande majorité des scénarios ultérieurs, en Transylvanie comme en Moldavie :

*Irod zice mânios și cătrănit :*

[...] Poruncivoi la ostași  
pre moarte să faci pași  
Vino, vino oaște tare  
săți dau o poruncă mare  
De o dată multe o grămadă  
la mine de săbii adă  
Casăfac o vitejie  
sătaiu prunci preste omie

Ca și Isus săsă tae  
Întru acea rea bătae.

*Hérode dit courroucé et énérvé :*

Je vais ordonner aux gardes  
de faire des pas vers la mort  
Viens, viens forte armée  
que je te donne un ordre important  
que tu apportes d'un seul coup  
un énorme tas d'épées  
pour que j'accomplisse un exploit  
en tranchant plus de mille  
nourrissons  
pour que Jésus aussi soit tranché  
Pendant cette lutte terrible.

*I lea craiu Valtazar zice cătră dânsul:*

Ho, ho că nu merge așa  
după socoteala ta  
Ce vrei tu tirane căne  
calicule vai detine  
Pre Is.vreai să-l omori  
mai bine tu acum sămori  
Crapă nori și zipoteaște  
ceriule iutel trăznește

*Et le Ier roi mage, Balthazar lui dit:*

Halte là, arrête, ça ne va pas aller  
Comme tu le souhaites  
Ce que tu veux, toi, tyran, chien  
pauvre miséreux que l'on  
prend en pitié  
c'est de tuer Jésus.  
Or c'est à toi de mourir  
maintenant  
Ciel, fend les nuages et verse la  
pluie  
Foudroie-le vite

<sup>16</sup> « *Irod cu mânie zice: tăiare eu îți poruncesc / căla tot ținutul vestesc / nici o glumă nu le pae / cicu deadinsul să-l tae / au voi și ași sălnici / prunci de 2 și mai mici / lăsând și jalea și mila / doară îl voi tăia și prea acela.* », in Elisabeta Nanu, « Un manuscris cu Irozi al lui Picu Pătruț », 312.

UN JEU THÉÂTRAL TRADITIONNEL ROUMAIN AU CARREFOUR DES CULTURES (EST-)  
EUROPÉENNES: *IROZII – LES HÉRODES*

Că a acestui armadie  
iasă astăzi la părădie

La părădie cumplit  
varsă sânge negătît  
Foc și piatră pucioasă

din ceriu preste a tale oasă să iasă.

car l'armée de celui-là  
sort faire une parade  
aujourd'hui.

À la parade terriblement  
Elle verse du sang non préparé  
Que du feu et de la pierre de  
soufre

Sorte du ciel et tombe sur tes  
os.<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 4 :** Les rois mages du jeu des *Hérodes*, dans l'espace scénique de la cour d'un habitant du village, les spectateurs autour, dans le Maramureș

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 326 ; notre traduction. On retrouve exactement le même texte avec très peu de modifications dans la commune Geoagiu de Sus, district d'Alba, un siècle plus tard, en 1938. Texte fourni par Ioan Bocănici, in Vasile Albu, Vasile Repede, Ovidiu Repede, *Geoagiu de Sus, județul Alba, Străveche icoană a biruinței legii românești la porțile munților Apuseni*, (sl. : Coordonate monografice, s.d., 2004).

Dans une variante moldave, jouée en 2004 à Sucevița (texte qui nous a été donné par un des acteurs, Florin Antoniac), l'introduction est faite toujours par l'ange qui vient donner la bonne nouvelle de la naissance de Jésus au public et aux personnages. Un général se présente devant Hérode pour lui annoncer que trois rois ont été arrêtés dans les rues qui mènent au palais et qu'ils cherchent le Messie. Hérode les fait entrer et il s'en suit une confrontation verbale où les explications sur leur origine, leur mission, sur les prophéties sur Nativité et sur la vie du Christ, sont données en chansons. L'affirmation que Jésus est un roi plus grand qu'Hérode déclenche la rage de ce dernier et il se vante d'avoir tué quatorze mille enfants parmi lesquels se trouvait sûrement le petit Jésus. Par la suite, le roi est maudit par le Prêtre pour sa mécréance, il appelle ses officiers pour tuer les rois mages, mais un Turc intervient et fait la paix (élément dramaturgique plutôt étrange, vu que les Turcs ont joué le rôle des bourreaux dans l'histoire de la Moldavie et que leur présence est connotée le plus souvent négativement<sup>18</sup>). L'ange revient pour demander le repentir du roi et sa christianisation et le prêtre l'obtient, Hérode promettant d'aller se prosterner aussi devant le nouveau-né.

D'autres sources confirment la récurrence de ces personnages typiques, costumés en uniformes (pour les généraux), avec de coiffes colorées sur la tête pour les rois mages, costume à turban pour le Turc, longue tunique noire pour le prêtre et robe blanche pour l'ange, et le fait que ces petites pièces se jouaient et se jouent encore dans les cours des gens ou dans les maisons, avec des processions à travers le village<sup>19</sup>. À part l'église – qui est le lieu de départ obligatoire – et, plus récemment, depuis le début de la période de régime politique communiste, la salle de la maison culturelle du village – où l'on organise les festivités de la communauté –, l'on décide à l'avance qui seront les villageois qui accueillent le spectacle et il s'agit des personnes les plus importantes du village et des familles des « acteurs » impliqués qui vont aussi gratifier les acteurs de nourriture, boissons et argent. Et même si le jeu proprement-dit se limite à une sorte de drame semi-liturgique du genre *Ordo Stellae*, comme nous le verrons plus loin, dans le cadre des déplacements d'un espace de jeu à un autre, se joignent à la compagnie des masques de

<sup>18</sup> Dans toutes les représentations du Jugement dernier, sur les peintures murales post-byzantines des Monastères de Moldavie, les turcs sont figurés en Enfer.

<sup>19</sup> Voir Jean Cuisenier, *Memoria Carpaților. România milenară : o privire interioară* (Cluj : Echinox, 2002), 444-457, et aussi, du même auteur, « Rois Mages dans les Carpathes », in *Simposio Rito y Misterio*, (La Coruña : Coleccion « Cursos, congresos y simposios », 1991), 27-38.

toutes sortes, des couples de vieux, des fous, des diables et autres figures carnavalesques qui font rire les passants et disent leur quatre vérités à ceux qui n'ont pas eu un comportement correcte pendant l'année qui approche de la fin. Le rôle des badins, fous et plaisantins est très important dans les petites communautés, car grâce au masque ils se permettent de parler sans barrières de choses qui leur attireraient des ennuis autrement, et ainsi s'opère une purification rituelle nécessaire de la communauté en question.

Intéressant est le fait que, dans le cas des *Hérodes* joués dans la région du Maramures, le personnage du fou est souvent inclus dans le jeu lui-même. Nous prendrons comme exemple le jeu des *Hérodes* du village de Botiza, auquel nous avons eu l'occasion d'assister le premier jour de l'An 2004, toujours représenté de nos jours et qui est beaucoup plus complexe que les autres variantes mentionnées. Il semble que cette variante soit inspirée par le texte dramatique le plus développé de Transylvanie, écrite dans le cahier de 33 pages du maître d'école Petru Bilț du village de Ieud (Maramureș) à la fin du XIX siècle<sup>20</sup>.

Voici les principaux moments de l'action: 1. installation du Viflaim (le Bethléem : la crèche décorée) sur une chaise placée au centre de l'espace de jeu, par de jeunes garçons habillés en femmes ; 2. les bergers arrivent et chantent des louanges à la gloire du Nouveau-né ; 3. deux bergers parlent avec le vieux berger Miron, corrompu par le diable, en essayant de le convaincre du miracle ; 4. arrivée des rois Mages au palais d'Hérode et dispute ; 5. Hérode communique à ses généraux qu'il vient d'être trompé par les Mages et il leur donne l'ordre d'aller tuer tous les enfants de son royaume ; 6. les généraux reviennent et rapportent que l'ordre a été accompli, que sept mille nourrissons ont été tués par chacun des deux groupes de soldats, mais qu'ils sont horrifiés par ce qu'ils ont vu, par le sang et par les pleurs des mères affolées ; 7. Hérode les félicite et leur promet une récompense en monnaies d'or ; 8. le chœur des personnages entonne un chant de condamnation d'Hérode et une sorte de chanson funèbre qui pleure la mort des petits innocents, tout en louant leur sainteté et en invoquant les anges ; 9. Hérode est harcelé par les diables et par la mort, puis emporté par ces derniers ; 10. Hymne, remerciements et vœux finaux pour la Nouvelle Année.

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<sup>20</sup> Voir N. Cartoian, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească...*, 243

Plusieurs choses sont à remarquer :

-**L'espace** : le lieu scénique traditionnel est la cour de l'église mais surtout la cour des maisons villageoises, un espace assez large qui permet aux spectateurs de se regrouper autour, en cercle, au niveau des acteurs ou sur les terrasses et balcons des maisons qui les accueillent.

-**Le temps** : on joue le spectacle plusieurs fois par jour, on fonction de la demande, en général de jour.

-**L'action** : tout est centré autour de la crèche à laquelle tous les personnages se rapportent mais de deux manières différentes : en se rapprochant pour lui rendre hommage par un signe de croix (pour les personnages positifs) ou bien en prenant de la distance et en lui tournant le dos (pour les personnages négatifs). Il s'agit d'une alternance de dialogue parlé partiellement versifié, et de chansons et hymnes de louanges et chants religieux paysans. Le fou intervient de manière régulière dans l'action pour empêcher les méchants d'agir et pour contrebalancer le dramatique et le sérieux du sujet par des plaisanteries et des farces.

À la différence des autres variantes des *Hérodes*, le massacre des innocents constitue une partie importante de la pièce et il est bien rendu présent, par la réaction des militaires et ce qu'ils racontent, sans qu'il soit pour autant véritablement montré scéniquement aux villageois spectateurs. La douleur des Mères qui ont perdu leur enfants est racontée par les généraux-messagers d'Hérode et rendue vivante par les lamentations du chœur (composé des Bergers, des « Femmes »<sup>21</sup>, des Mages, menés par le Prêtre) qui accomplissent ici le rôle des pleureuses, mais aussi de tribunal, à la façon des chœurs antiques, porte-parole de la communauté rurale qui assiste au spectacle.

-**Les personnages et leur image** : Le rôle important attribué aux officiers du roi Hérode peut expliquer en partie le pluriel du nom sous lequel est connu ce jeu. Car ces personnages masculins sans masque, font partie de la catégorie plus large, communément connue dans les traditions roumaines sous le nom de « Beaux », en opposition aux « Laidés » masqués, qui comprennent vieillards, diables, fous, etc. « Beau » ne veut pas forcément dire « bon », mais il est vrai que souvent la beauté est associée aussi aux vertus morales. Nous avons ainsi les costumes et masques suivants :

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<sup>21</sup> Les trois femmes sont des garçons déguisés, qui portent la petite arche colorée et ornée, fréquente dans le Maramureș.



**Fig. 5 :** Quelques acteurs du groupe des *Hérodes* de Botiza : à gauche debout le personnage de la Mort, dont on ne voit pas le visage, un mage debout en rouge, deux bergers accroupis de part et d'autre du mécréant berger Badea Miron, et à leurs côtés le fou à lunettes, derrière et devant on aperçoit deux diables à crinière, cornes et pompons rouges (photo personnelle 2004).

***Les Beaux :***

-*Rois mages et Hérode*: uniformes de cadres supérieurs de l'armée et képi, transformées par des décorations, qui fictionnalisent partiellement l'uniforme : colliers, perles, pendentifs à petites croix, paillettes, éclats de miroirs, bandelettes de tissus colorés. À Botiza, les rois mages sont vêtus d'uniformes rouges.

-*Généraux du roi* : uniformes militaires, moins décorés que ceux des précédents

-Femmes qui portent la crèche : jeunes hommes travestis, portant des costumes traditionnels de femme de la région, foulard sur la tête.

-*Bergers* : costumes traditionnels de la région, pantalons en laine, chemise blanche, gilet en laine noire, bâton de berger à la main.

-*Le prêtre* : costume typique d'un prêtre orthodoxe, croix etc.

### *Les Laid* :

-*Le fou/ bouffon* : masque partiel, costume coloré, sur sa veste sont cousus des jouets en peluche et toutes sortes d'objets et petites clochettes, lunettes de soleil aux yeux, fausse barbe, tête couverte.

-*Le vieux berger mécréant Badea Miron* : costume composé d'éléments « diaboliques », fait en peaux de moutons à poil long, visage et tête couverts, portant beaucoup d'anneaux sur ses doigts (signe de corruption), massue.

-*Diables* : costumes et masques archaïques, très grands et lourds, avec de longues cornes de bélier auxquelles on a attaché des grands pompons à franges rouges pour éloigner le mauvais œil. Personnages attribués en général à des jeunes hommes forts et hauts de taille, habillés de peaux d'animaux, ceints de ceintures multiples à cloches de diverses les dimensions qui font un bruit épouvantable à tout mouvement, surtout lors des déplacements et des danses. (fig. 13 et 17)

-*La Mort* : costume archaïque composite, en peaux d'animaux noirs ou bruns foncé, renvoyant aux êtres sauvages, sans visage

Ces derniers masques ont quelques chose de très sauvage, les costumes étant de la même facture que ceux des *wild men* médiévaux que l'on trouve en Angleterre et dans le pays germaniques, mais les masques qui couvrent entièrement la tête et les épaules sont plus complexes. Dans son chapitre « Fools and other Entertainers », du livre consacré à la scène médiévale anglaise, Davidson parle de certains personnages étranges très présents dans les fêtes et jeux dramatiques du Moyen Âge : les hommes sauvages (*wild man* and *wild woman*) qui faisaient de la place pour que les acteurs puissent passer à travers la foule, avec des artifices ou torches flamboyantes. Ils sont décrits comme étant laids, ayant une barbe noire et de longs cheveux noirs, habillés de vert ou d'une sorte de mousse, bien que les images qui les figurent très poilus, nous montrent plutôt une peau de bête sauvage, ou de mouton qui les habille. Ils avaient un caractère belliqueux et grivois<sup>22</sup>, qui correspond tout à fait au caractère des diables et des masques de la famille des Laid des manifestations théâtrales folkloriques roumaines.

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<sup>22</sup> Clifford Davidson, *Illustrations of the Stage and Acting in England to 1580*, Early Drama, Art and Music Monograph Series, 16 (Michigan: Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1991).





**Fig. 6 :** Miniature des sauvages dans *De Nobilitatibus, Sapientiis et Prudentiis Regum*, de Walter de Milemete, Oxford, Christ Church College, MS.92, fol. 64v, Davidson, 103



**Fig. 7 :** Wild man abducting a lady, *Taymouth Hours*, B. Library, MS. Yates Thompson 13, fol.62., Davidson, 102

**-Le jeu :** ce n'est pas un théâtre professionnel, mais sont admis dans le groupe d'acteurs les garçons de plus de 14 ans, d'habitude qui n'ont pas encore fait leur service militaire, mais qui, en tout cas, ne doivent pas être mariés. Les masques se transmettent aussi de père en fils et les costumes sont cousus et préparés par les femmes et filles de la famille du jeune en question.

## 2 Les *Hérodes* roumains et les drames semi-liturgiques médiévaux

Etant donné le schéma dramaturgique suivi par toutes les variantes des *Hérodes*, les types de personnages impliqués et les conventions quant à l'espace et au temps de jeu, il est impossible de ne pas penser aux drames liturgiques et semi-liturgiques du Moyen Âge occidental. Ainsi, un court parallèle pourrait-il en éclaircir certains aspects.

Le moment de l'année consacré à ces jeux religieux est bien le même, le temps des fêtes de Noël et du Nouvel An. La dénomination même de ce jeu, rattaché aux coutumes des *colinde*<sup>23</sup> qui supposent, même de nos jours, la visite de toutes les maisons du village par des groupes de jeunes qui chantent la Naissance du Christ, montre la lignée de facture religieuse culte de ce jeu théâtral que l'on promène d'un lieu « scénique » à un autre. D'ailleurs on dit rarement que l'on joue les *Hérodes*, mais on va de maison en maison avec les *Hérodes*, ou on porte l'étoile ou on porte le Bethléem.

<sup>23</sup> Terme venant des *Calendes* romaines, que nous retrouvons aussi dans la tradition de *Chalande* en Suisse romande.



En Occident, nous avons aussi un grand nombre de textes de drames liturgiques et semi-liturgiques de L'*Officium pastorum* qui devient *Officium stellae* (L'Office de l'étoile), *Ordo ad representandum Herodem*, ou bien *Officium regnum trium*. Auxquelles s'ajoutent plus tard les drames semi-liturgiques du massacre des innocents: *Ordo Rachelis*, *Lamentatio Rachelis*, *Ad interfectionem puerorum*, qui complètent l'action criminelle du roi Hérode et en montrent les résultats. Car le drame liturgique de Noël se charge à partir du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, d'un nombre de plus en plus important de séquences dramatiques : l'arrivée des rois mages, les rois mages devant Hérode, le départ des rois, l'annonce du danger et la fuite en Egypte, le massacre des innocents. De même, parmi les variantes du *Jeu des Hérodes*, comme nous l'avons déjà vu, il y en a de plus ou moins développées, avec un nombre plus grand ou plus réduit de personnages.

Dans la tradition médiévale, l'église reste l'espace privilégié de la mise en scène de ces épisodes des Évangiles, puis la place devant l'église et les processions théâtrales dans les rues. En Roumanie on ne joue les *Hérodes* dans l'église même que de manière exceptionnelle et cela dans le Marmures (région où le gréco-catholicisme est très présent) et en Moldavie, région qui a subi une forte influence catholique ponctuelle au XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles. Dans le village de Groși, par exemple, près de Baia Mare, on jouait le Viflaim dans l'église une seule fois, après la messe du Nouvel An, alors que le spectacle était joué dès le premier jour de Noël, chez les habitants du village<sup>24</sup>. Par contre, on joue devant l'église dans toutes les trois régions et surtout dans les cours des gens, espaces ouverts intermédiaires entre la maison individuelle et la rue, avec les spectateurs qui forment un grand cercle autour de l'espace scénique délimité *ad hoc*. La rue reste un espace traditionnel de passage, lieu de rencontres, de charivaris et de farces jouées aux passants.

En ce qui concerne les personnages nous avons quelques éléments intéressants à remarquer: à peu d'exceptions près, on retrouve les mêmes présences de l'Évangile selon Matthieu : Les rois Mages (*Magi*), Hérode (*Rex*), l'écuyer du roi (*Armiger*), les bergers (*pastorum*), L'ange (*Angelus*), les sage-femmes (*mulieres, obstetrices*), le messager (*Intenuntius*), Marie, Joseph et le petit Jésus. Peuvent encore apparaître ceux qui gardent la crèche (*Custodes*), les grands prêtres (*episcopi*) et les scribes de la cour du roi.

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<sup>24</sup> Ioan et Floarea Herteg racontent que dans l'église, Hérode était placé sur une chaise, le dos à l'autel, alors que les mages restaient debout, lui faisant face. L'ange et les bergers se mettaient à la gauche d'Hérode, et les soldats à sa droite. *Memoria ethnologica*, no. 11-13, (juillet-décembre 2004), 1371-1372.

Dans la variante du Maramures, il y a des garçons déguisés en femmes qui portent la crèche, au nombre de 3. C'est là un possible renvoi aux sages-femmes qui, d'après les *Évangiles apocryphes*<sup>25</sup>, ont été appelées par Joseph pour laver le nouveau-né comme le montre iconographiquement la tradition byzantine dès le Xe siècle, mais aussi aux trois Maries au tombeau et surtout aux mères des innocents massacrés par Hérode.



Fig. 8 : Peinture murale de grandes dimensions située à la base de la coupole du naos du Monastère de Probotă, Moldavie XVIe s.

Les deux *obstetrices* jouent un rôle actif dès les premiers drames liturgiques de l'Occident médiéval qui prennent forme le jour de la fête de Noël, car ce sont elles qui posent la fameuse question aux bergers : « *Quem quaeritis in presepe, pastores, dicite ?* » Puis, en entendant que c'est le Sauveur qu'ils cherchent conformément aux dits de l'ange (« *Salvatorem Christum Dominum infantem pannis involutum, secundum sermonem angelicum* »), elles répondent : « *Adest hic parvulus cum Maria matre sua, de quo vaticinando*

<sup>25</sup> Voir l'Évangile du Pseudo-Matthieu, in Cristian Bădiliță *Evangelii apocrife [Évangiles apocryphes]* (Iași: Polirom, 2002) 141.

*Ysayas dixerat propheta : Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium ; et nunc euntes dicite quia natus est* », en découvrant la crèche située devant ou sur l'autel (« discoperiando anconam ») et en se prosternant devant elle « flexis genibus »<sup>26</sup>. Dans les *Hérodes* de Botiza, dans la région du Maramures, le Bethléem (la crèche) est porté par deux de ces « femmes » qui se prosternent devant l'icône des saint personnages placée dans cette maisonnette-église en miniature et tous les personnages « positifs » en font de même.

L'art médiéval occidental, comme l'art byzantin et post-byzantin ont su exploiter de la même manière, l'épisode apocryphe des deux sages-femmes Salomé et Zélémi (ou Zebel dans la *Légende dorée*)<sup>27</sup>, mais intéressant est le fait que le rôle de Joseph est resté, quant à lui, secondaire, un rôle de figurant, d'accompagnateur de la Vierge, debout à côté de la crèche dans les images peintes ou sculptées, absent ou muet le plus souvent, dans les images scéniques de la Nativité, dans les drames liturgiques et semi-liturgiques<sup>28</sup>. Ce n'est qu'un peu plus tard, au XIVe-XVe siècles, dans le cadre des mystères, qu'il acquiert un véritable rôle dans l'économie dramaturgique de l'histoire de la Nativité<sup>29</sup>.

Nous remarquons aussi dans le cas des *Hérodes* roumains, que, pareillement, Joseph est rarement présent. Il apparaît pourtant dans certaines variantes transylvaines plus complexes, qui font précéder la rencontre des rois mages avec Hérode de quelques scènes comprenant l'Annonciation, le

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<sup>26</sup> Dans les tropes dramatiques du XIe siècle en France et en Italie, comme dans l'*Officium Pastorum* de Padoue, où l'appellation *obstetrices* apparaît clairement à la place des *duo cantores* qui se tiennent à côté de l'autel, cf. Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vol. (London : Oxford University Press, 1951), vol II, 7-12.

<sup>27</sup> Pour l'importance des apocryphes dans les images médiévales de la Nativité et de l'enfance du Christ voir E. Mâle, *L'art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France, Étude sur l'iconographie du Moyen Âge et sur ses sources d'inspiration* (Paris : Armand Collin, 1968), t. II, 143-158. Voir aussi l'épisode des sages-femmes dans la *Passione di Revello*, in Anna Cornagliotti éd., *La passione di Revello, Sacra rappresentazione quattrocentesca di ignoto piemontese*, (Torino : Centro di Studi Piemontesi, 1976), 40-41.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph se voit attribuer une réplique dans un seul des *Ordo Stellae* répertorié par Young, celui de la cathédrale de Laon, du XIIIe siècle, alors qu'il est absent de tous les autres *Officium Pastorum* et *Officium Stellae.*, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* II, 103-107.

<sup>29</sup> Dans la *Passion de Valenciennes*, par exemple (pendant la 4<sup>ème</sup> journée), c'est lui qui va chercher le nécessaire pour l'accouchement, c'est lui qui accueille les bergers et les mages, et c'est toujours lui qui demande la circoncision et va chercher les personnes en droit de le faire de Jérusalem. Voir E. Konigson, *La Représentation d'un Mystère de la Passion à Valenciennes en 1547* (Paris : CNRS, 1969), 79-80.

mariage de Joseph et Marie, les doutes de Joseph inspirées par le diable, et le départ à Bethléem suite au décret de César<sup>30</sup>, et il semble évident que ces insertions soient d'origine catholique occidentale, plus tardives que les drames semi-liturgiques et mystères médiévaux, très probablement à relier au théâtre catéchétique jésuite des XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles. Un élément venant soutenir cette affirmation est le côté très explicatif, moralisateur de la présence de Joseph qui est là pour éclaircir comment la sainte conception, événement exceptionnel, mais en dehors de normes sociale et pouvant être donc condamné par cette société, a été acceptée par la communauté. Joseph en est la clef, et un passage de *L'Hymne de la Nativité*, de Romanos le Mélode, a très probablement contribué à l'acceptation de ce rôle dans l'église orthodoxe. Ainsi, dans les strophes 11 et 12, la Vierge explique-t-elle aux rois mages le rôle de Joseph dans l'économie de la situation : « Je vais vous rappeler pourquoi, dit Marie aux mages, je garde Joseph dans ma maison : c'est pour confondre tous les médisants, car il dira ce qu'il a entendu sur mon enfant [...]. En songe il a vu un ange saint [...], il raconte aux bergers [...], de vous, mages il dit qu'une étoile radieuse [...] »<sup>31</sup>. En d'autres mots, Joseph est le témoin, c'est celui qui, bien que n'étant pas directement impliqué dans le mystère de l'Incarnation, y participe, pourra en parler et le transmettre plus loin. En général, dans le jeu des *Hérodes*, Joseph n'intervient pas dans le dialogue, et dans certaines variantes du Maramures les autres personnages parlent de lui, mais il fait partie du mystère qui reste caché dans la crèche et n'est dévoilé – sous la forme d'icône – qu'aux bons croyants.

L'ange est un personnage qui apparaît beaucoup plus souvent pour guider les bergers, dans les drames semi-liturgiques du XIIe siècle., puis réapparaît après le massacre des innocents pour les conduire au Paradis. Il est surtout présent dans les variantes des *Hérodes* de Transylvanie centrale, mais aussi, plus récemment, dans le nord du Maramures (Vișeu de Sus) et en Moldavie, vêtu de blanc, ailé et interprété par un jeune garçon, qui chante avec les autres personnages.

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<sup>30</sup> N. Cartoian, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, 243-244.

<sup>31</sup> Il s'agit de l'hymne le plus connu de Romanos le Mélode, ayant vingt-quatre strophes, chanté à Constantinople et de nos jours encore dans les églises orthodoxes pendant l'office du jour de Noël, *Hymnes*, trad. J. Grosdidier de Matons, vol. II (Paris : Cerf, S. C., 1965), 63.



**Fig. 9 :** Scène du Ménologe de Moldovița, correspondant au 25 décembre, XVIe s. On peut y voir la crèche, les rois mages, l'ange parlant aux bergers, les sages-femmes lavant Jésus et Joseph parlant au berger mécréant.



**Fig. 10 :** Détail du cycle sculpté par Jehan Ravy de 1318 à 1351, bas-relief en bois peint Notre-Dame de Paris

Les bergers par contre sont toujours présents, dans les drames liturgique et semi-liturgique catholiques comme dans les *Hérodes* orthodoxes. Ils ont un rôle essentiel, ce sont les premières personnes qui découvrent l'enfant Jésus et qui portent la bonne nouvelle. Mais à part ce rôle, leur présence en grand nombre dans le théâtre populaire paysan de Roumanie s'explique aussi par le fait que ces personnages sont très importants dans la culture traditionnelle roumaine, vu le métier emblématique de l'élevage des moutons pour une société éminemment rurale avant le XXe siècle. Bien qu'ayant un rôle très actif aux débuts du théâtre religieux médiéval, les bergers finissent par se contenter d'être de simples témoins et perdent du terrain devant l'importance croissante au cours des siècles des rois mages et du roi Hérode.

Une sorte d'intrus dans le groupe des bergers est le vieux berger corrompu par le diable ou le diable déguisé en berger. C'est un personnage typique de l'iconographie post-byzantine, légué par la tradition des écrits apocryphes qui ont circulé dans le monde orthodoxe (voir fig. 5 et 11). Il apparaît dans le jeu du Maramures déjà cité de Botiza, sous le nom de Badea

Miron De manière étrange, c'est une sorte de personnification de la mécréance et ne parle pas à Joseph (comme le montrent les peintures) mais aux deux autres bergers qui ont appris le miracle, Coridon et Acteon, et qui veulent le convaincre de venir rendre hommage au Fils de Dieu. Tâche difficile car non seulement refuse-t-il toute prosternation, mais il joue la bêtise, il fait semblant de ne pas comprendre ce qu'on lui explique et ce qu'on lui demande de faire, il est ou fait semblant d'être ivre, ce qui rend la communication encore plus difficile et plus drôle, il tombe à terre et refuse de se lever, têtue comme un âne, et accepte difficilement à apprendre comment faire le signe de croix devant la crèche et à reconnaître ainsi le Naissance de Jésus. Ce personnage est beaucoup plus archaïque que les autres, c'est l'homme non encore civilisé, non encore christianisé, mi-sauvage, mi-humain, qui aime boire et manger (il peut porter une énorme cuiller à la main), mais ne se soucie point des choses saintes. Querelleur comme il est, il ressemble à un personnage du folklore médiéval flamand, Ourson, qu'on retrouve dans la *Querelle d'Ourson et de Valentin*, jeu carnavalesque, où Valentin (l'homme civilisé) rencontre Ourson, le sauvage monstrueux barbu à la massue, devant le jugement du roi en robe longue et jaune-dorée, qui tient l'épée à la main, un roi qui ressemble d'ailleurs beaucoup à Hérode<sup>32</sup>.

Le berger mécréant a, comme nous l'avons déjà vu, un statut similaire à celui du fou. Le fou/ bouffon (Augustul) a quelque chose du mime antique latin et des sots médiévaux, des badins présents dans les farces populaires. Il intervient en permanence dans l'action des autres personnages, les empêche de s'exprimer, détourne le sens des mots, joue des tours, mise sur un humour grossier, fait du tapage avec les diables.

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<sup>32</sup> Voir « Le combat de Carnaval et Carême » de Bruegel l'Ancien et la reprise de la scène d'Ourson et Valentin par un anonyme en 1566, sous le nom de « La mascarade d'Ourson et de Valentin », d'après Bruegel l'Ancien, gravure sur bois. Ici, les costumes sont aussi plus détaillés, on voit bien Ourson avec sa massue, sa couronne de feuilles et son costume entier d'écailles, puis Valentin qui tient une arbalète à la main, le roi ou le juge avec sa boule à croix et la couronne sur la tête et finalement les deux personnages qui font la quête. Cf. Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, *Pour une théâtralité picturale. Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs*, (Cluj-Napoca : Casa Cărții de Știință, coll. Teatru-Eseuri 2012), 21-22.





Fig. 11 : Badea Miron et le fou, personnages des *Hérodes* dans le village de Vișeu de Sus, Maramureș

Les rois mages, personnages centraux de l'office de l'étoile, ont donné le nom pluriel de Hérodes (Irozi), peut-être à cause de leur condition royale qui les unit tout en les opposant à Hérode. Ils sont les représentants du bien et du beau. Leur discours est en vers, souvent moralisateur et prophétique. Ils s'associent au prêtre « orthodoxe » pour condamner les mauvaises actions du roi Hérode.

Les diables constituent un groupe de personnages fascinants du Jeu et du cortège des *Hérodes*. Dans sa très récente étude sur *Le théâtre religieux roumain*, Ion Cristescu en parle pourtant très peu, bien que *Les Hérodes* y occupent une place centrale. Or, il nous semble que si l'on veut chercher des éléments archaïques dans ce jeu, non empruntés à la littérature catéchétique culte, c'est du côté des diables et de leurs costumes qu'il faut se tourner. Car la présence des diables et des diableries a été interdite en Occident avec les mystères, au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Or, nous voyons que dans la

peinture murale religieuse post-byzantine (dans la figuration des miracles de Saints importants, dans l'Hymne Acathiste, et surtout dans les Jugements derniers), les diables sont très présents. L'imaginaire rural religieux roumain est peuplé de ces figures monstrueuses qui font peur aux enfants pendant les longues nuits d'hiver.



**Fig. 12 :** Détail du cycle sculpté par Jehan Ravy de 1318 à 1351,  
bas-relief en bois peint de l'église Notre-Dame de Paris

On ne pourrait affirmer avec certitude que les personnages des diables soient entrés dans les jeux de *Hérodes* par voie occidentale. Étant donné qu'ils n'existent pas dans toutes les variantes, qu'ils ont en général peu de texte (ayant plutôt une présence menaçante) et qu'ils s'associent au groupe des laids avec des masques qui font partie d'autres rites et processions, il ne serait pas erroné de penser que sur un fond théâtral para-dramatique existant, sont venus se greffer des rôles dramatiques puisés dans les textes des mystères médiévaux occidentaux.





Fig. 13 : Jeunes masqués en diables, avec le personnage de la Mort au centre, Village de Botiza Maramureș, 2009

Prenons par exemple le moment du châtement du roi Hérode, après le massacre des Innocents, dans les grands mystères de la Passion (où les diables poussent Hérode à agir tel qu'il le fait, rôdent et commentent les faits, en attendant d'acquérir l'âme du criminel) et dans une variante plus complexe des *Hérodés* roumains. Dans le *Mystère de la Passion* d'Arnoul Gréban, par exemple, Hérode, poussé par Sathan, se suicide, ne pouvant endurer sa douleur physique en disant « a tous les diables me commans » (v. 7943) et alors Sathan et Astaroth emportent joyeusement l'âme du tyran en Enfer :

UN JEU THÉÂTRAL TRADITIONNEL ROUMAIN AU CARREFOUR DES CULTURES (EST-)  
EUROPÉENNES: IROZII – LES HÉRODES

SATHAN

Sus, troussons,  
nous deulx saquemens,  
Ce faulx murtrier desesperé !

ASTAROTH

Son logis est ja tout paré ;  
Portons l'en enfer droicte voye.

SATAN

Lucifer, esgarde quel proye  
Nous admenons cy au chapitre !

ASTAROTH

C'est Hérode, vostre menistre,  
qui vient pour querir son loyer.

LUCIFER

Si le fault ung pou faistoier ;  
Il vient de loing, et pour salu,  
estrenez lë en plomb bollu,  
confit de metal tout ardent.  
Noz loys a esté bien gardant :  
C'est raison qu'il ait ses sauldees.

*Icy font les dyables tempeste.*  
(v. 7944-7957)

Et voici l'échange de répliques d'un texte des *Hérodos / Le Bethléem* de Slatina, correspondant au même moment de la fin, quand la mort et les diables se disputent l'âme et le corps d'Hérode, en soulignant la morale : « Iar tiranul, acest rău, / Ce-i dușman lui Dumnezeu, / De viu îl va aduce dracu. / Ca să se-ngrozească altu! » (Et le tyran, ce méchant, / qui est l'ennemi de Dieu, / vivant il sera emporté par le diable, / pour que ses semblables en soient terrifiés) »<sup>33</sup>.

INSPECTORUL

Cât mor pruncii mititei  
Noi nu avem folos de ei  
Căci tu mulți prunci ai tăiat  
Și pe noi ne-ai înșelat  
Pentru aceasta a ta faptă  
Te va duce-n iad la plată  
Că tu n-ai acum iertare  
Că ești om blăstamat tare,  
Nu ești un om cuvios  
Nici dracilor faci folos!

L'INSPECTEUR DES DIABLES

Lorsque les poupons meurent  
trop petits  
On ne peut pas s'en servir,  
Et comme tu en as massacré  
beaucoup,  
Tu nous as aussi trahis.  
C'est pour cela que ton méfait  
Te portera en enfer pour ta paye  
Car tu n'as plus de pardon  
Car tu es un homme méchant  
Tu n'es ni un bon croyant  
Ni aux diables tu ne sers !

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<sup>33</sup> Vasile Ona Jotu « Viflaiemul din Slatina », *Memoria Ethnologica*, 8-9 (Juillet-Décembre 2003): 921-937, notre traduction.

MOARTEA

Voi, draci afurisiți,  
Voi de viu îl chinuiți!  
Lăsați-mă eu să-l spovedesc  
Datorința s-o-implinesc!

LA MORT

Eh, vous, diables maudits,  
Vous le torturez vivant!  
Laissez-moi le confesser,  
Et accomplir mon devoir!

ISPRAVNICUL

Mai așteaptă, domnișoară  
Căci noi nu voim să moară  
Că și noi îl știm juca  
Mai altfel ca dumneata.  
Că ar fi pagubă de tine  
Să-ți ungi dinții cu așe un câne!  
Ț-îs destui acești copii,  
Vo patrusprezece mii,  
Care ți i-ai luat ieri  
Prin crâncenele tăieri!  
Cu aceasta pasăre vie  
Ne-om face și noi veselie  
Căci ca el de blăstămat  
Nu avem pe altu-un iad!  
[...]

LE PRÉFET DES DIABLES

Un peu de patience, demoiselle,  
Car on ne veut pas qu'il meure  
encore.  
On sait aussi comment le faire  
danser,  
Un peu différemment de ce que toi  
tu sais.  
Et ce serait dommage pour toi  
De graisser tes dents avec un chien  
pareil  
Que tous ces enfants te suffisent,  
Ces quatorze mille poupons,  
Que tu as pris hier,  
Grâce aux terribles massacres !  
Avec cet oiseau vivant,  
Nous nous amuserons aussi un peu,  
Car aussi maudit que lui  
On n'en a pas de pareil en enfer!  
[...]

IROD

Ce folos de-a me domnie  
Că-s cu dracii de-o soție:  
Ostașii nu mă pot scoate,  
Nici a mele averi toate,  
Unde ești, iubită moarte?  
MOARTEA  
Aici! Aici!  
[...]

HÉRODE

Quel bénéfice m'a apporté mon  
règne  
Si je suis des diables le conjoint  
Mes soldats ne peuvent plus rien  
pour moi  
Et tous mes trésors non plus.  
Où es-tu, ma chère Mort ?  
LA MORT  
Ici! Ici!  
[...]<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, notre traduction.



**Fig. 14 :** Miniature de la cinquième journée du mystère de la Passion de Valenciennes, par H. Cailleau, manuscrit de Rothschild I-7-3 de la Bibliothèque Nationale (reprod. Elie Konigson, pl. III).

Il faut remarquer la conception dramatique similaire des deux moments, qui correspondent, comme le montre aussi la fameuse miniature de Cailleau, à la prise en main du roi, corps et âme, par les diables, auxquels se joint chez les Roumains la Mort, personnage allégorique faisant penser plutôt aux moralités médiévales, mais très présent aussi dans l'iconographie religieuse des églises en bois du Maramures, des XVIIIe-XIXe siècles. De même, la didascalie *Icy font les dyables tempeste*, se retrouve dans la réalité scénique de ces jeux, car le bruit produit par les diables, qui sautent en agitant leurs multitudes de cloches fendues attachés à leur costume, est effectivement infernal.

D'ailleurs, la musique religieuse et le bruit infernal se trouvent côte à côte<sup>35</sup>, puisque l'échange de répliques est constamment interrompu et complété par des chansons de Noël, sacrées ou profanes, plus ou moins archaïques (en

<sup>35</sup> Pour une étude plus poussée, voir Mihaela Nubert Chețan, *Muzica în teatrul popular românesc [La musique dans le théâtre populaire roumain]*, (Baia Mare : Editura Ethnologica, 2005)

fonction de la région et de la zone urbaine ou rurale, de montagne ou de plaine, où les jeux ont lieu). En ce sens, la miniature du Psautier de St. Remigius, du XIIIe siècle (fig. 15), pourrait être considérée représentative pour les deux réalités scéniques, occidentale et roumaine.



**Fig. 16 :** Miniature du Psautier de St. Remigius, *Beatus Vir-Musique sacrée et musique profane*, Reims, vers 1125, Cambridge, Saint John's, College, ms. B 180, fol.1r (photo in Thomas E. A. Dale, "Monsters, corporeal Deformities and Phantasm in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa" in *The Art Bulletin*, vol.83, n°3, sept. 2001, pl. 10, p. 114)



Fig. 17 : Costume du groupe de diables (l'Intendant) à cloches suspendues, Vișeu de Sus, Maramureș

### 3. Possibles croisements et Conclusion

D'où est venue l'idée du Vicleim chez nous ? Il n'est pas facile de répondre. Les Grecs [...] ne l'ont pas – et les Bulgares non plus ne le connaissent que dans les régions avoisinées à la Serbie. L'église orthodoxe, qui a été réfractaire à l'introduction de la sculpture dans les églises a considéré impie la mise en scène du drame évangélique. Le mystère religieux est ainsi chez nous d'origine occidentale et il est lié au mystère des trois rois mages du Moyen Âge. Parmi les peuples voisins, ce sont les Ruthènes qui l'ont, l'ayant reçu des Polonais, et les peuples qui ont vécu dans la même sphère culturelle, au sein de l'ancienne monarchie des Habsbourg : les Saxons qui l'ont pris des Allemands ; les Italiens qui l'ont hérité du Moyen Âge, les Hongrois qui, d'après les études menées par leurs folkloristes et ethnographes l'ont reçu des Italiens, et , enfin, les Serbes des régions adriatique et du Banat [...] ont reçu au début du XVIIIème siècle des influences russes dans le jeu du Vicleim.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cartoian, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol II, 246.

En effet, il n'est pas aisé de retracer l'histoire de ce type de jeu théâtral, car la grande majorité de sources, étant orales, se sont perdues dans une histoire toujours mouvante, en perpétuel changement. Les documents qui nous restent, textes écrits, récits et descriptions nous paraissent très peu nombreux si nous les regardons en miroir aux jeux contemporains proprement-dits qui varient d'une communauté à une autre et, qui, tout en gardant certains schéma traditionnels, évoluent, changent d'une génération à une autre. Il s'agit d'un théâtre vivant, qui a su au cours du temps assimiler des éléments dramatiques et para-dramatiques provenant des coutumes des pays voisins et des communautés minoritaires (hongroises, saxonnes) qui vivaient dans les principautés roumaines et qui avaient en commun la même religion chrétienne, en dépit des différences de culte ou de langue.

Pour synthétiser, nous dirions qu'il y a donc un très probable croisement entre la manière de jouer effectivement ce jeu théâtral folklorique dans le nord de la Transylvanie et le contenu typiquement semi-liturgique et catéchétique catholique allemand et autrichien. Les influences hongroises sont pratiquement à exclure, car les quelques formes qui existent en Hongrie sont de provenance germanique-catholique et non réformée. D'un autre côté, le peu de variantes des Hongrois de Transylvanie présentent beaucoup de similitudes avec les textes roumains, tout en étant moins complexes et nous pensons qu'ici le rôle important a été joué par les frères jésuites très actifs au XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles dans le Banat, en Transylvanie, dans le Maramureș et en Moldavie<sup>37</sup>.

Pour ce qui est des influences du monde orthodoxe et gréco-catholique slave, que nous avons moins eu l'occasion de discuter dans la présente étude, il est important de signaler que c'est surtout sous sa forme de théâtre de marionnettes que les *Hérodes* slaves ont pénétré dans l'espace culturel roumain. Tudor Pamfile parle ainsi dans une de ses études ethnographiques d'une coutume très intéressante en Ukraine (dans la région de Kiev), qu'il décrit ainsi :

Considéré comme une sorte de mystère, comme la Bénédiction et la Nativité de Jésus, le Bethléem [*Vicleimul* ou *Viflaimul* ] est représenté avant Noël, le Nouvel An et l'Épiphanie et il montre « Le massacre des innocents ». La

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<sup>37</sup> Pour les variantes existant chez les Hongrois de Transylvanie, voir Ioan Cristescu, *Dramaturgia religioasă românească. De la misterele medievale europene la realizări românești*, [La dramaturgie religieuse roumaine. Des mystères médiévaux européens aux réalisations roumaines] (Bucarest : Editura Muzeul Literaturii române, 2013) 45-46.

caisse, longue et haute d'un mètre et demi, contient des poupées manipulées par une personne. « Les innocents, mis à mort par ordre d'Hérode, ne sont pas faits en bois comme les autres acteurs, mais en cire, et les soldats d'Hérode, habillés en Polonais, les empalent avec leurs lances. À la fin de la pièce, Hérode est puni et deux serpents viennent le dévorer. Ces mystères sont accompagnés de pièces satiriques où l'on donne la plus grande liberté aux acteurs en bois. »<sup>38</sup>

Effectivement, l'Ukraine, plus proche de la Pologne catholique, était entrée en contact avec le théâtre religieux de type occidental beaucoup plus vite que d'autres pays orthodoxes comme la Russie, par exemple, qui ne tolérait que difficilement le théâtre de marionnettes, occupation des *skomorokhi* ou jongleurs autochtones.

En Russie, ce genre de petites pièces à sujets évangéliques et bibliques n'apparaissent qu'au milieu du XVIIe siècle, dans un élan de contre-attaque à l'encontre des avancées de l'église catholique qui faisait sentir son influence dans les régions côtoyant les frontières de la Pologne. Le théâtre religieux jésuite (apparu en réponse à la Réforme et au fait que Luther utilisait le théâtre comme moyen d'éducation et d'évangélisation protestante) était en vogue à la fin du XVIe siècle, et l'église orthodoxe avait dû à son tour adopter les moyens scéniques et dramatiques pour attirer les masses et les catéchiser<sup>39</sup>. Le premier drame de la Nativité, dont le prologue annonce aussi la participation capitale du roi Hérode et la monstration du massacre des innocents, date de la fin du XVIIe siècle et l'auteur, le moine Dimitry de Rostov (1651-1709), fut canonisé par l'Église russe en 1751. Cette pièce fait apparaître un grand nombre de personnages allégoriques (la Paix, l'Espoir, la Joie, l'Envie, etc.), mais le passage consacré au massacre est réduit à l'ordre donné par Hérode et à la punition immédiate du roi par la désintégration de sa chair. Toute sa cour l'abandonne, horrifiée, et on le retrouve en Enfer où il est sermonné par l'Innocence et par la Vengeance<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Tudor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la Români...*, 159 ; il cite ici la *Revue de Traditions populaires*, I, 1886, 84-85. La traduction du roumain nous appartient.

<sup>39</sup> À propos de la création de l'Académie dramatique Mohyla (du nom d'un descendant de la famille moldave des fondateurs du monastère de Sucevița, Petru-Pierre Movilă – Mohyla en transcription russe –, qui fut métropolite de Kiev au XVIIe siècle et grand théoricien de l'orthodoxie) et de la propagation du drame religieux scolaire, voir Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1985), 7-11.

<sup>40</sup> Voir *ibidem*, 17-19, qui qualifie ce drame de typiquement jésuite.



Pour revenir sur le territoire roumain, dans la région du Banat *Le Bethléem* apparaît aussi sous cette forme de caisse à marionnettes, et nous avons ce témoignage du XIX e siècle, qui utilise le nom slave du spectacle : le *Vertep*.

Un groupe est composé de trois Mages, Hérode et le porteur de l'Étoile. Un autre groupe formé de trois bergers et l'Ange. Quand ils vont avec le Bethléem, ils se mettent ensemble [...]. Je sais que c'est la coutume de faire dans le *Vîrtepu* [*le Bethléem*] le jeu de marionnettes aussi qui représentent plusieurs scènes de légendes et le joueur [le marionnettiste] qui joue souvent la comédie et ne produit que de la dérision et du rire.<sup>41</sup>

Il semble que ce genre de spectacle était courant au XIX e siècle dans toute la Transylvanie (ce qui n'est plus du tout le cas) avec les mêmes scénarios et textes que le théâtre joué par des acteurs en chair et en os et qu'il s'agissait d'une forme de spectacle mixte, « un étrange mélange entre le drame liturgique et le théâtre de marionnettes ; quelquefois s'y joignaient aussi les chanteurs des *colinde* portant l'Étoile – des groupes de musiciens avec un répertoire composé de chansons qui racontent la naissance de Jésus et l'Adoration des Mages »<sup>42</sup>. Dans son livre *Le Théâtre populaire roumain*, Horia Barbu Opreșan, décrit justement le moment final du massacre des innocents, d'un tel spectacle mixte :

*Le spectacle continue dans cette double manière jusqu'au moment final où HÉRODE, furieux, dit :*

Où sont tous ces mages et philosophes qui m'ont trompé? J'enverrai l'armée pour tuer tous les enfants de moins de deux ans, pour qu'ensemble avec eux je puisse tuer aussi le roi nouveau-né.

TOUT LE MONDE (*en chantant*):

Rafilo [Rachel], ne te lamente pas, ne pleure pas,  
En voyant tous tes enfants ensanglantés,  
Car ils ne périront pas

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<sup>41</sup> Atanasie M. Marienescu, *Steaua Magilor sau Cântece a Nașterea Domnului Isus Christos* (Biserica Albă : Tipografia J. Wunder 1875) 41,42.

<sup>42</sup> Carmen Stanciu, « Metamorfozele teatrului de păpuși în România », *Yorick*, mai 2012. Ion Cristescu parle aussi d'une seule variante de *Hérodes* joué par des marionnettes attestée dans l'espace culturel hongrois, ayant une composante religieuse et une laïque, cf. *Dramaturgia religioasă românească...*, 57

Mais fleuriront de plus belle.

*Pendant cette chanson le marionnettiste sort la poupée Rachel avec son enfant dans les bras; Hérode apparaît l'épée à la main, enlève l'enfant de Rachel et le tue. Apparaissent alors le Prêtre avec son livre sous le bras et le diacre. Le prêtre accomplit la messe, alors que le diacre tire les cloches. Rachel pleure. Le soldat pique l'enfant avec sa lance et l'emporte pour l'enterrer. Après l'enterrement, [...] le soldat tape avec sa lance dans la boîte pour que les spectateurs donnent de l'argent. A la fin ils chantent tous la Chanson des trois mages [Trei Crai de la Răsărit].<sup>43</sup>*

Les peintures murales des monastères moldaves qui figurent le moment du massacre des innocents constituent à leur tour un témoignage digne d'être pris en considération. Dans le Pronaos de l'église de l'Annonciation du monastère de Moldovița, comme dans celui de l'église St. Nicolas du monastère de Probotă, datant de la première moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les soldats d'Hérode, habillés d'armures ou juste portant des tuniques empalent les nourrissons avec leurs lances. Est-ce possible que les peintres des deux églises se soient inspirés de représentations contemporaines de ce « mystère » joué en Moldavie roumaine ou en Ukraine voisine pour figurer le meurtre collectif des enfants, qui apparaissent avec leurs auréoles de saints dans la fresque de Probotă ? Ce qui prouverait que ces jeux théâtraux existaient déjà à la fin du Moyen Âge sur le territoire roumain. Ou bien est-ce l'inverse, et ce sont les marionnettistes et les acteurs qui se sont inspirés des images religieuses contemplées sur les murs des églises ? La réponse saura attendre des études à venir.

Que dire de plus ? Ce jeu traditionnel roumain nous renvoie à une multitude de cultures différentes qui viennent se greffer sur les coutumes roumaines ou qui sont assimilées en tant que spécifiquement roumaines. Il y a une « impureté » extrêmement riche dans le folklore de tout pays, et le théâtre paysan des *Hérodes* en témoigne à merveille. Il dépend de nous de sauvegarder et de comprendre ce patrimoine immatériel en voie de disparition.

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<sup>43</sup> H.B. Opreșan, *Teatrul popular românesc*, București: Editura Meridiane 1987, 111-112, notre traduction.



Fig. 18 : Fresque du massacre des innocents, pronaos de l'église St. Nicolas du monastère de Probota, 1532.



Fig. 19 : Pronaos de l'église de l'Annonciation du monastère de Moldovița, 1537.

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## *The Theatrical Christening of Romania*

ANCA HAȚIEGAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The present paper focuses on the first theatrical representation of Romania by the actor and playwright Costache Caragiali (1815-1877), examining the portrayal of the female protagonist of the prologue written by the said author on the occasion of the grand opening of Teatrul cel Mare (the future National Theatre) from Bucharest, in 1852. The paper also traces the history of the allegorical representation of the nation in the Romanian theatre from the beginning to the end of World War I, by such authors like Gheorghe Asachi (one of Caragiali's precursors), actor Mihail Pascaly, Frédéric Damé (a writer and journalist of French origin), Ion Luca Caragiale (Costache Caragiali's nephew and one of Romania's greatest writers of all times) and actor and playwright Zaharia Bârsan.

**Keywords:** Romania, theatre, 19th century, Caragiali, allegory, nation, Marianne

### **The Name of the Country: A Bit of History**

The current name of the Romanian state, i.e. "Romania", was adopted first by the 1866 Constitution published in the "Official Gazette – Journal of Romania", no. 142, of 1/13 June 1866, and promulgated by the Ruling Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen on 30 June of the same year. Article 1 of this Constitution stipulated the following: "The Romanian United Principalities represent an indivisible State called Romania." The Romanian United Principalities referred to by the document were, at that time, Wallachia<sup>2</sup> and Moldavia<sup>3</sup>, territories that had a majority Romanian

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<sup>2</sup> Țara Românească, called "Wallachia" by foreigners, included at that time the historical regions of Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia) and Muntenia (Greater Wallachia) (Dobruja joined them later, after the War of Independence of 1877-1878).

population, under Ottoman sovereignty and the collective protection of the greater European powers (England, France, Sardinia, Prussia, the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire), incorporated in 1859 with the – required – name of “United Principalities Moldavia and Wallachia<sup>4</sup>”, an action made possible owing to the Convention of Paris, of 7/19 August 1858, which ended the Crimean War. The representatives of the Romanians in the two Danubian Principalities – another of their names abroad – had requested in Paris that they make a single state, called “Romania”, but the Great Powers dismissed this request; they had accepted, however, their formal union (according to this vision, the Principalities would continue to have different governments and capitals, but also common institutions). “Romania” was the name selected by the members of the Ad hoc Meetings convened in October 1857 both in Moldavia, at Iasi, and in Wallachia, at Bucharest, as provided by a decision made during the Paris Peace Conference (18/30 March 1856), for extraordinary consultations regarding the future form of organization of the Principalities. This was an unprecedented democratic exercise in the history of the two state formations, attended, directly, by the great boyars and the clergy, and, indirectly, by delegates, low-ranked nobles, freelancers and peasants. The double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza<sup>5</sup>, at the beginning of 1859, as ruler of Moldavia and Wallachia, by the legislative assemblies of both Principalities, accelerated the complete fusion of the two states. In 1861, in the wake of the Constantinople Conference, the sultan issued a Firman (a decree) whereby he recognized officially the union of the Principalities, but solely for the duration of Cuza’s rule. In reality, “the Small Union”<sup>6</sup>, its later name, became thereafter an irreversible act. The announcement was made across the country, by the ruler, through a proclamation to the nation in which – and this is extremely significant – there was no mention of

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<sup>3</sup>. Moldavia as part of the United Principalities included its Occidental or Central-Western part (without Bucovina) and a small section of Bessarabia, north of the Danube Mouth. After the War of Independence, a part of Budjak (historical Bessarabia), which had been re-included in Moldavia in 1856, was attached, for the second time, to the Russian Empire (which had occupied it in 1812).

<sup>4</sup>. See note 2.

<sup>5</sup>. Alexandru Ioan Cuza (b. 20 March 1820, Bârlad - d. 15 May 1873, Heidelberg, Germany), politician and ruler of the United Principalities between 1859 and 1866.

<sup>6</sup>. By opposition to the “Great Union” of 1918, by which Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania also became parts of the Kingdom of Romania. (The Kingdom had been proclaimed in 1881, four years after the independence from the Ottoman Empire had been won.)

the Principalities, but there was the unambiguous reference to the “Romanian nationality” and to a “single Romania”, the message ending with “Long live Romania!”.<sup>7</sup>

According to the historian A. D. Xenopol, in the 20 March 1862 meeting, the Legislative Assembly (the joint assembly of the legislating bodies of the two Principalities, in other words, their first single parliament) rejected Mihail Kogălniceanu<sup>8</sup>'s suggestion, “that, among other measures meant to strengthen the union – such as the unification of the colours and of the flag, the fusion of the gazettes, the removal of the borders – the title of United Principalities should also be replaced with *Romania*”<sup>9</sup>. The proposal was too daring for that moment. Nevertheless, in the opening of the first meeting of the assembly of the United Principalities, of 24 January 1862 (anniversary the reminded the double election of Cuza three years before), the ruler Alexandru Ioan I had begun his speech with the words: “A new life now opens for *Romania*”. Xenopol did not miss this and, in a note to *Domnia lui Cuza-Vodă*, he mentions: “This name (*Romania, our note*) had been given a number of times before to the United Principalities, even in the internal official acts. Foreigners used it equally. As an interesting fact, we quote an 1862 letter of Victor Hugo to one of his acquaintances in Bucharest, which, at the address, includes the name *Roumanie*. See *La Voix de la Roumanie*, 3 January 1862.”<sup>10</sup> We can provide another example: the alternating use of the names “United Principalities” and “Romania” in *Statutul dezvoltător al Convenției din 7/19 August 1858 [The Expanding Charter of the Convention of 7/19 August 1858]*, promulgated by Alexandru Ioan I in May 1864 and published in the “Official Gazette – Journal of the Romanian United Principalities” (no. 146 of 3/15 July 1864), by which the ruler amended substantially the *Convenția pentru organizarea definitivă a Principatelor Dunărene ale Moldovei și Valahiei din 7/19 august 1858 (Convention for the final organization of the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia of 7/19 August 1858)* (the fundamental legal and political act of the country between 1858 and 1866). For this purpose, the opening

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7. The proclamation was published in the “Official Gazette of Wallachia”, on 11, respectively 12 December 1861, being also printed on leaflet at the Printing Office of Adolf Berman of Iasi (dated 1 December 1861). The text, translated in French, also appeared in the magazine *Archives Diplomatiques. Recueil de diplomatie et d'histoire*, VI, tome II, April, May, June (1866): 209.

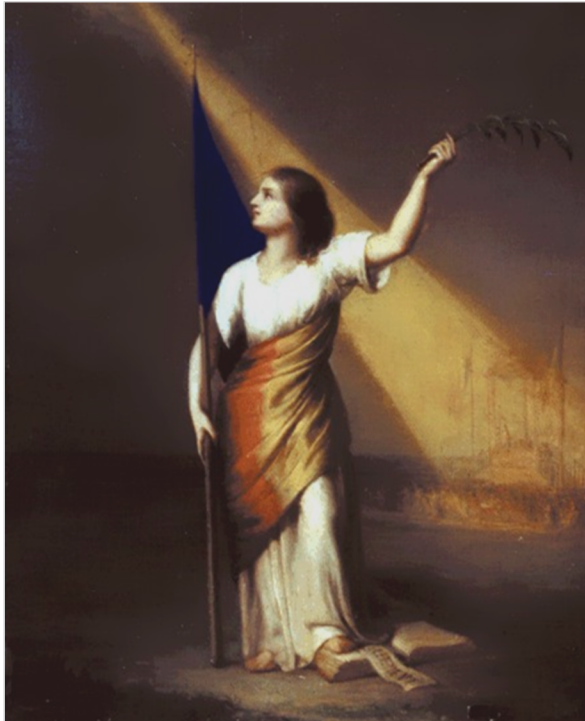
8. Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817-1891), Romanian politician, historian, writer.

9. A.D. Xenopol, *Domnia lui Cuza-Vodă [Cuza Voda's Rule]*, vol. I (Iasi: Publishing Printing Office “Dacia” P. Iliescu & D. Grossu, 1903), 235.

10. *Ibid.*, 236 (see also footnote no. 44).



sentence is memorable: "The Convention made in Paris, on 7/19 August 1858, between the Sovereign Charter and between the Power warranting the autonomy of the United Principalities, is and remains the fundamental law of Romania." The invocation of "Romania" in a sentence meant to put to sleep the Great Powers' suspicions regarding the legislator's true intentions was, in fact, a first and important departure from the spirit and letter of the aforementioned Convention, in a series of other departures. The founders of modern Romania did not leave untested any loophole in the international relations of the Principalities, nor did they ignore any resource, in their keen desire of independence and union.



**Fig. 1:** "Romania Breaking off Her Chains on the Field of Liberty" (1848)  
by Constantin Daniel Rosenthal

Unofficially, the name "Romania", with regard to both of the Romanian countries, Moldavia and Wallachia, and even to Habsburg Transylvania, had circulated in the Principalities (and not only there) since the first half of the

19<sup>th</sup> century, and then, starting from the 5 and 6 decades, it was used more and more frequently. Before that, the word would sometimes be used with regard to/ instead of Țara Românească (the oldest sources attesting this meaning are those of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>11</sup>). In fact, as shown by historian Ioan Aurel Pop, “the name of Țara Românească (Romanian Country) is absolutely identical with the one of Romania. Just as for anyone the name of *Germany* is synonymous with *Deutschland* (which, translated literally in Romanian, means ‘the German Country’ or ‘the Country of the Germans’), so the name of Țara Rumânească/ *Românească* can only be a synonymous of the name *Rumânia/ Romania*. If *England* (translated literally as ‘the Country of the Angles’) is a perfect synonymous of the name of England, if *Scotland* is the ‘Land of the Scots’ and *Magyarország* (‘Hungarian Country’) is the official name of Hungary, we cannot see why and how we could claim that there is any essential difference between the name ‘Țara Românească’ and the one of Romania”<sup>12</sup> and also according to him: “Obviously, *Romania* is a modernized form of the name Țara Rumânească, which appears in non-Romanian sources as *Wallachia*. (...) Owing to this synonymy, in the age of national emancipation, when every nation was supposed to have a national state to unify and protect all of its members, Romanians had had for a long time a name readied for their country. They did not choose the name *Dacia* (although it had been proposed), because this name (...), albeit very old, had long disappeared from the public consciousness, but they preferred the name *Rumânia* or *România*. This was not invented by Dimitrie Philipide<sup>13</sup>, nor by the Forty-Eighters<sup>14</sup>, nor

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<sup>11</sup>. See Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, “Despre numele României” [“About the Name of Romania”], in *România literară*, XLI, no. 41, October 16 (2009): 13; as well as the reception speech of historian Ioan-Aurel Pop at the Romanian Academy, of 29 May 2013, titled *Istoria și semnificația numelor de român/valah și România/Valahia* [History and Significance of the Names of Romanian/Wallachian and Romania/Wallachia], accessed February 18, 2018: [http://www.acad.ro/com2013/pag\\_com13\\_0529.htm](http://www.acad.ro/com2013/pag_com13_0529.htm). (Ioan Aurel-Pop also names an even older source, of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, i.e. “the letter of Auxentius of Durostorum, probably dated back to 383, kept in the annotations of Maximinus on the Council of Aquileia (of 381)”, which mentions the phrase “*in solo Romaniae*”, used with regard to the Danubian space, but the historian believes it is “an isolated testimony, because later almost all the sources named Wallachia these lands inhabited by Romanians, while the name given by Romanians to their country remained in the dark”, 13.)

<sup>12</sup>. Ioan Aurel Pop, *Istoria și semnificația...*, 21.

<sup>13</sup>. Daniil Dimitrie Philippide (1750/1755? – 1832), Greek monk, man of letters and historian, author of a *History of the Romanians* and of a *Geography of Romania*, both published in 1816 in Leipzig.

by the first ruler of the United Principalities, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, nor by his minister of foreign affairs<sup>15</sup>, Mihail Kogălniceanu. This name was kept in the collective memory, emerged from a distant past, a name that, at a point in time, all the political organizations of the Romanians had borne. This was also the name that 'Țara Românească' had had since 1300, i.e. the oldest and most prestigious Romanian medieval state, around which the political unification of the people that gave its name occurred."<sup>16</sup>

### **The First Allegorical Representations of Romania in the Realm of the Visual Arts**

We were saying above that, in the 5 and 6 decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. around and after the (failed) Revolution of 1848, the name of "Romania", in its modern meaning, started to be used more and more often. Gazettes were published with this name, such as "Romania" (Bucharest, 1848), a magazine with commented domestic and foreign news and educational materials, the *motto* of which was the French Revolution's "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité"; "România viitoare" (single issue), magazine published in Paris, in November 1850, by historian Nicolae Bălcescu and by an editorial board made from exiled Romanian revolutionaries; "România literară" (Iasi, 1855), led by writer Vasile Alecsandri (a first issue of the magazine had been published in 1852, but censorship required immediately the closing of the periodical); "România" (Bucharest, 1857), political and literary biweekly, which was no longer published after 48 issues because of censorship and of financial problems; or "România", political and literary periodical edited in Iasi by writer, historian and philologist B.P. Hașdeu between 18 November 1858 and 26 January 1859.<sup>17</sup> (These were not the first magazines named as such; between 20 December 1837 and 31 December 1838, the existence of the first Romanian newspaper, which had also been the first press element with

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<sup>14</sup>. Participants at the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian countries.

<sup>15</sup>. In fact, Mihail Kogălniceanu was not the minister of foreign affairs during Cuza's rule, but later, under Carol I, in 1869-1878. During Cuza's rule, Kogălniceanu was: president of the Council of Ministers of Iasi; minister of the interior; minister of the interior, agriculture and public works; and prime-minister.

<sup>16</sup> Ioan Aurel Pop, *Istoria și semnificația...*, 21-22.

<sup>17</sup>. See *Dicționarul literaturii române de la origini până la 1900 [Dictionary of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to 1900]* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1979), 741-746.

this name – spelled “Pomania”, in the transition alphabet<sup>18</sup> - had expired. Published in Bucharest, by the Editing and Printing House Frederic Walbaum, the magazine had as editors in chief professors Florian Aaron and Georg Hill.)<sup>19</sup>

Around 1850, the first iconographic representations of Romania appeared, from painters Constantin Daniel Rosenthal (1820-1851) and Gheorghe Tattarescu (1820-1894), both of them participants, one directly, the other indirectly, to the Revolution of 1848. We are talking about the allegorical paintings “România rupându-și cătușele pe Câmpia Libertății” [“Romania Unshackled on the Field of Liberty”] (1848) and “România revoluționară” [“Revolutionary Romania”] (1850), respectively “Renașterea României” [“The Rebirth of Romania”] (also known as “Deșteptarea României” [“The Awakening of Romania”], 1850), painted by their authors abroad (after the defeat of the Revolution in the Principalities, Rosenthal was in refuge in Paris, and, in the same period, Tattarescu was pursuing his studies in Rome). In the three paintings, Romania is depicted as a young woman, like the modern state that the Romanian revolutionaries of 1848 had tried to obtain and which would appear with the Small Union of 1859. Probably an important source of inspiration for the two artists was, in this sense (the representation of the country as a young woman), the famous Marianne of the French, symbol of their nation during the Revolution of 1789, to the principles of which the generation of the Romanian Forty-Eighters was deeply attached. Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, the author of a study called *Ipostaze feminine în cultura română a secolului al XIX-lea: “Marianne”-le românești*, finds that the authors of the three paintings tried to “fit in the Romanian setting (national costume, necklace, other details) the feminine allegories of the second French Republic, of 1848”<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The alphabet that allowed the transition from the Romanian Cyrillic alphabet (used in the writing of Romanian starting from the 14th and 15th centuries) to the Latin one. This was done between 1828 and 1862 by the gradual replacement of one Cyrillic letter at a time with its Latin alphabet equivalent.

<sup>19</sup> *Dicționarul...*, 741.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, “Ipostaze feminine în cultura română a secolului al XIX-lea: «Marianne»-le românești” [“Feminine Aspects in the Romanian Culture of the 19th Century: the Romanian ‘Mariannes’”], in *Études sur le texte dédiées à Halina Grzmil-Tylutki*, edited by Joanna Górniewicz, Barbara Marczuk, Iwona Piechnik (Kraków: Jagiellonian Library, 2016), 312-313.



**Fig. 2:** "Revolutionary Romania" (1850) by Constantin Daniel Rosenthal

The author also observes that Rosenthal's and Tattarescu's paintings were, "in the Romanian context of the age, exceptions"<sup>21</sup>, the feminine allegorical representations being "absolutely sporadic in the Romanian Principalities"<sup>22</sup> at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Like in the France of 1800-1830, notes the author, when, according to historian Maurice Agulhon, "'Marianne' left room to the virile, militarized patriotic representations, to the cult of Napoleon"<sup>23</sup>, "the revolutionary imaginary of

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<sup>21</sup>. Ibid., 312.

<sup>22</sup>. Ibid., 307.

<sup>23</sup>. Ibid., 312.

the Romanian Forty-Eighters was dominated by masculine, ruling tutelary personalities, with a privileged place occupied by Mihai Viteazul, Vlad Țepeș, Avram Iancu, and Tudor Vladimirescu<sup>24</sup>. In the opinion of Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, the explanation is the deeply patriarchal nature of the Romanian society of that Turkish-Oriental age, but also the delay of its development in relation to the West, especially with regard to the laicization of culture and of public life dominated by a “suffocating Orthodox ethicism”, as put by the literary critic Mihai Zamfir. Given the resistance of patriarchy to the wind of change (which blew mainly from France, first through Russian and Greek channels), by virtue of which, says the author, “the rulers’ and the fighters’ (or even the outlaws’) personalities would come to dominate the Romanian imaginary” in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the feminine ones would be assigned, both in the age and later, the marginal zone, of the ridicule and of parody”<sup>25</sup>.

### The First Theatrical Representation of Romania

Nevertheless, in the area of theatre, unexplored by Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, we can identify several very interesting feminine allegorical representations. One that deserved increased attention dates back to 1852 and belongs to the Wallachian actor and playwright Costache Caragiali (1815-1877), from the famous family that also gave Iorgu Caragiali (1826-1894; brother of the former, him too an actor and a playwright), Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912; nephew of the two mentioned before, considered a classic of the Romanian literature and the greatest Romanian playwright), Mateiu and Luchi Caragiale (Ion Luca’s sons, both of them writers) to the Romanian culture. This is the first allegorical-dramatic representation of Romania (which appeared only two years after its first iconographic representations), in a too little known *Prolog pentru inaugurarea noului teatru din București* [*Prologue for the Inauguration of the New Bucharest Theatre*], written by Costache Caragiali at the inauguration of Teatrul cel Mare [The Grand Theatre] of the Wallachian capital (which will be later called the National Theatre). Actually, this is not unprecedented: before him, the writer and cultural promoter Gheorghe Asachi (1788-1869) had turned Moldavia in a dramatic feminine character – “Zâna Moldovii [the Moldavian Fairy]” -, in

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<sup>24</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 313.

a *Prolog [Prologue]*<sup>26</sup> made for the debut performance of the students at the Iasi Philharmonic-Dramatic Conservatory (the first school of theatre in Moldavia), which occurred on 23 February 1837, on the stage of Teatrul de Varietăți [Variety Theatre]. Asachi's prologue "dramatized", in fact, an even older representation painted according to his own sketches on the curtain used on 27 February 1816, during the play with *Mirtil și Hloe [Myrtil et Chloé]*, after Gessner and Florian, which went down in history as the first representation of (semi)professional, "art" theatre (as opposed to folkloric, traditional performances or school drama), given by Romanians in their language.

Asachi, who would draw quite well and had studies in this field, first taken in Vienna and, then, between 1808 and 1812, in Italian towns – had also executed – additional to the translation of the text and its staging – the stage design of the play performed in the house of hetman Costache Ghica. The aforementioned curtain, which was an imitation of a model he had brought from Rome, showed god Apollo extending his hand to Moldavia. In the later prologue, with a marked pictorial tinge of "*tableau vivant*", Asachi introduced other characters, apart from the already described one: Genius<sup>27</sup>, as guide of the Moldavian Fairy to Mount Parnassus, and the "Muses", "with their traits"<sup>28</sup>, companions of the god of arts (together with whom they made a decorative plastic group placed on the summit of Parnassus "like in the famous icon of Raphael"<sup>29</sup>). The whole "action" of Asachi's *Prolog...*, which takes place, according to the stage directions, during a frightening night, with "lightning in the distance"<sup>30</sup>, is the travel of the Moldavian Fairy, led by Genius who holds a torch with the other hand, to the site of the divine protectors of the arts, which is shown only at the end of the sketch, like a sudden musical-bright vision (according to the stage directions, a "slow harmonious music" streams over to the audience<sup>31</sup>). At first, the Fairy, "used

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<sup>26</sup>. See Gheorghe Asachi, *Prolog rostit în Teatru Național din Iași la ocazia deschiderii și inaugurării sale în 23 Febr. 1837*, apud Teodor T. Burada, *Istoria teatrului în Moldova [History of Theatre in Moldavia]*, vol. I (Iasi: Institutul de Arte Grafice N. V. Ștefaniu & Comp., 1915), 170-172; as well as "Prolog compus de A. G. Asachi, și rostit pe Teatrul Varietăților din Iași în 23 februarie 1837. La acea întâi dramatică Reprezentație Moldovenească a Conservatorului Filarmonic", in *Albina românească (supliment)*, no. 18, March 4 (1837): 83-84 (in Cyrillic script).

<sup>27</sup>. "Ghenius" as transcribed by Teodor Burada.

<sup>28</sup>. The specification can be found only in the supplement to *Albina românească* of March 4 (1837): 84, in a *Însemnare [Note]* that Burada no longer reproduces in his *Istoria...*

<sup>29</sup>. See the previous note.

<sup>30</sup>. "Thunders", as transcribed by Teodor Burada.

<sup>31</sup>. See note 28.

to leisure”, as she admits it herself, expresses her fears with regard to the difficult road that Genius had convinced her to follow, while the latter, without hiding from her its challenges and dangers (including temptations), also finds words of encouragement, reminding her of her “twin sisters” (probably the Western people of the Latin race) who had known a long time before her the same trials and who had got to smooth waters. Called to choose “between dark and light”, the Moldavian Fairy chooses to go forward, against any risk, ready to sacrifice herself for what seems to be a noble purpose: “Eu aleg petroasa cale, care văd că s-au deschis, / De-oi peri, frumoasă-i moartea, pentr-un lucru evghenis” [“I choose the stony path that I see open, / Should I succumb, death for a noble thing is beautiful”]. The *Prolog...* (printed in the national colours on leaflets that “would rain” on the spectators at a certain point, as shown by an unsigned review of the age<sup>32</sup>) was staged in the opening of a play that included two other adaptations by Asachi, based on *La Pérouse* (*Lapeirus* in his Romanian translation) and *Văduva vicleană* (*The Cunning Widow*) by August von Kotzebue.

The Moldavian Fairy was played by madame Elisabeta Fabian, and Genius by Alecu Asachi, son of Gheorghe Asachi, both students of the Philharmonic Conservatory. Costache Caragiali may well have known this *Prolog...*, just as he must have known about Iancu Văcărescu’s *Prologul la deschiderea teatrului întâiași dată în București* [*Prologue for the Opening of the Theatre for the First Time in Bucharest*] created for the performance at Cișmeaua Roșie, of 1819, of the Romanian students of Sf. Sava, a text in which god Saturn was the protagonist. (Văcărescu’s prologue was published in *Curierul românesc* in 1830<sup>33</sup>, while Asachi’s was published in *Albina românească*, in 1837.) The certain thing is that the list of *dramatis personae* of Caragiali’s *Prolog...* includes both Apollo with the Muses (but, here, they were named and individualized) and Saturn, so it is very likely that the author knew the previous similar writing of Asachi and Văcărescu, and, even more, he may have wanted to evoke them, reverently, by intertextual reference, thus placing himself and his writing in the lineage of a “founding” tradition. Unlike the previous prologues, however, Costache Caragiali’s text had an extremely rough, totally undeserved fate: written, as said before, for

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<sup>32</sup>. See *Albina românească (supliment)*, no. 18, March 4 (1837): 82. (The review, bilingual, printed on two columns in the pages of *Albina*, in Romanian and French, is reproduced by Burada in his *Istoria...*, 169-170.)

<sup>33</sup>. See *Curierul românesc*, no. 83, Friday, January 17 (1830): 347-348.



the inauguration of Teatrul cel Mare of Bucharest, it could not be put on stage, apparently because of its too markedly patriotic nature which did not sit well with the authorities of the age. "The inauguration took place; but it did so quietly, reservedly, without prologues, without patriotic hymns, all of them being cancelled... any hint at a national celebration was suppressed"<sup>34</sup>, noted, later, Cezar Bolliac in the gazette *Trompeta Carpaților*.

For an understanding of this interdiction, things should be seen in their historical context: this was an age of restrictions, of "restoration": after the suppression of the Revolution of 1848, by the Convention of Balta-Liman (1849), the organic Regulations had become effective once again; they (re)confirmed the domination of the Ottoman and Russian Empires (the sovereign and protecting powers) over the Romanian Principalities. The national rulers, considered high servants of the Sublime Porte, were required to take into account the preferences of both the Turks and the Russians, who took a poor view of the Romanians' attempts of national emancipation. This state of things lasted until the start of the Crimean War (1853-1856), when the Principalities were occupied by Russian and Austrian armies. In fact, the Romanian company of actors, led by Caragiali, who had been appointed director-lessee of the new establishment with the composer and conductor Ioan Andrei Wachmann (1807-1863), had been at threat itself of being excluded from the theatre opening program, because its manager, the Italian Papanicola, and the architect of the new building, the Austrian Heft, wanted to inaugurate the construction with Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, the topic of which allowed the display of the modern German machineries that they had. A fortunate event hindered the readiness of the machines within the due time, so that a new program was quickly drafted for the opening. It did not match Costache Caragiali's plans (nor did it match the plans of the former director of the theatres in the capital, cup-bearer Ioan Samurçaș, who had been removed right before the grand event and replaced with the grand logothete Ioan Slătineanu), but, at least, it allowed the Romanian artists (and Caragiali himself) to appear in front of the eager audience, on this great festive occasion, together with the performers of the Italian opera company, hosted in the same place. The intensely disputed inauguration occurred, in the end, on the evening of 31 December 1852, in the presence of ruler Barbu

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<sup>34</sup>. Apud Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică [Romanian Theatre. A Historical Perspective]*, vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1961), 416. (Hereinafter: Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc I*).

Știrbei, of the foreign consuls and of a motley crowd of spectators, from all classes of the society. The program was eclectic, including the overture of Ioan Wachmann's operetta *Claca țărănească* [*Peasant Corvée*], opened by a *doina* on flute (the only nationally specific moment of the program), several scenes of Italian opera and a vaudeville-comedy (with Costache Caragiali and Niny Valéry in the leading roles), which the theatre historians could not identify with accuracy: *Zoe sau Un amor românesc* [*Zoe or a Romanian Love Affair*], according to Dimitrie Ollănescu<sup>35</sup>, *Zoe sau Un amor romanesc* [*Zoe or a Novelistic Love Affair*], as rectified in a recently published article by historian Georgeta Filitti<sup>36</sup>, or *Zoe sau Amantul împrumutat* [*Zoe or the Borrowed Lover*], according to the officious "Vestitorul românesc"<sup>37</sup>, a play translated, apparently, from *Zoe, ou L'amant prêté* by Scribe and Mélesville, in the opinion of Ioan Massoff<sup>38</sup>.

Costache Caragiali's prologue remained in manuscript until after the author's death and was only published in 1881, when Vasile Alecsandri handed it over to Iosif Vulcan, to publish it in the magazine *Familia*, followed by a letter of recommendation. Both texts were published in the opening of issue 14 of *Familia*, of 15/27 February 1881. Ioan Massoff republished fragments of them in the first volume of his grand work, *Teatrul românesc* [*Romanian Theatre*], with a brief appreciative comment: "Costache Caragiale's prologue is effective and its performance would have borrowed the national character to the inaugurating play", claims the theatre historian.<sup>39</sup> Caragiali's *Prolog...* was never put on stage. In *Scrisoarea adresată redactorului* [*Letter to the Editor*] of *Familia*, Vasile Alecsandri painted a commemorative portrait of Costache Caragiali, without forgetting to emphasize his own artistic merits while evoking Caragiali's success, as actor, in the leading role of the play *Cuconul Iorgu de la Sadagura*, one of the first dramatic creations of the man who penned the letter. (In fact, therein, Alecsandri launched an inaccurate piece of information when he said that the play was presented by Caragiali, in Bucharest, in front of ruler Gheorghe Bibescu, while, after

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35. Dimitrie C. Ollănescu, *Teatrul la români*, edition managed, preface, notes, and comments by Cristina Dumitrescu (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 403.

36. Georgeta Filitti, "Teatrul cel Mare", in *Ziarul Metropolis*, March 9 (2016), accessed on February 15, 2018: <https://www.ziarulmetropolis.ro/teatrul-cel-mare/>

37. See the notice for the opening of the new theatre in *Vestitorul românesc*, XVII, no. 103, Wednesday, December 31 (1852): 412.

38. Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc I*, 414.

39. *Ibid.*, 415 (selections from Alecsandri's letter) and 564-567 (in the notes: beginning of the prologue, to the entry on stage of Romania and her first lines).

the performance, the Romanian theatrical company obtained an annual subsidy of 300 slots. But in fact, the play staged in front of the Wallachian ruler in 1845 had been *O bună educațiune* [A Good Education] by Costache Bălăcescu, as shown by Costache Caragiali himself in *Teatru Național în Țeara Românească*, a strongly autobiographic work of 1855.)

The protagonists of Costache Caragiali's *Prolog...*<sup>40</sup> are Apollo, God of Muses; Melpomene, Muse of Tragedy; Thalia, Muse of Comedy; Terpsichore, Muse of Dance; Erato, Muse of Lyric Poetry; Calliope, Muse of Poetry; Polyhymnia, Muse of Hymn; Urania, Muse of Astronomy; Clio, Muse of History; Euterpe, Muse of Harmony; Saturn, God of Time; Romania; and Fama (Pheme), Goddess of Rumors. The background characters include the spirits of "a number of dramatic authors of the classic school", peasants – men and women. The site of action is no longer the road to Mount Parnassus (like at Asachi), but Mount Parnassus itself: stepping on its peak, Caragiali's Romania will accomplish the journey begun by the other, older writer's Moldavian Fairy... The apotheotic nature of the image, tributary, like Asachi's, to the plastic arts, is made evident from the beginning:

*La ridicarea cortinei se vede Apolon pe muntele Parnas, cu lira sa pe genunchi. În giurul său Muzele în costum antic Elenic. În stânga și în dreapta, de la planul al 3-le până la planul 1-iu stau atârinate cununii mari de flori, purtând în mijlocul lor litera începătoare a numelui fiecărui autor clasic. Zeița Fama vine prin aer, anunțând. Fiecare Muză ține în mână emblema artei ce proteje. Zeul Saturn e cam în mijlocul scenei, făcând o dreaptă linie din partea stângă a spectatorilor cu cununele spiritelor autorilor. Muzica ezeută un tremolo; apoi un acord de anunțare ce precedează sosirea Famei.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>. The quotes are reproduced after Costachi Caragiali, „Prolog pentru inaugurarea noului teatru din București” [“Prologue for the Inauguration of the New Bucharest Theatre”], in *Familia*, XVII, no. 14, Sunday, February 15/27 (1881): 81-84.

<sup>41</sup>. “When the curtain lifts, the audience can see Apollo on Mount Parnassus, his lyre on the knees. Around him, the Muses wearing ancient Hellenic costumes. On the left and right, from the third to the first plane, large wreaths of flowers, with the first letter of the name of each classic author at the center. Goddess Fama arrives by air, announcing. Every Muse holds the emblem of the art that they protect. God Saturn is at the middle of the stage, going in a straight line from the left side of the spectators, with the wreaths of the authors’ spirits. The music is in tremolo; then an announcing tune preceding the arrival of Fama”.

She descends on the stage in a cloud, in grand style. The God of Rumors announces the arrival of a girl whose traits she emphasizes are – and we note this – youth, beauty, and modesty: „Juneța-i, frumuseța-i,/ Plăcuta-i modestie,/ E scumpa cheazășie/ De ceea ce doriți” [“Her youth, her beauty,/ Her lovely modesty,/ Are an assurance/ Of what you desire”]. Romania appears in front of Apollo and she wears “splendid national costume”. When she reaches close to him, “she greets everyone majestically”, while the orchestra starts playing the prelude of a national area. The choir and god Apollo praise and sing the girl’s grace. Despite the much-mentioned shyness, Romania introduces herself to the group of divinities fairly disinhibited:

*România.*

Apolon, mă ascultă,  
Ascultă cu răbdare.  
Dorința mea e multă  
Și ruga-mi este mare.  
Sunt Țeara România!  
Din mica mea pruncie  
Mereu am suferit  
Resboaie de orice treaptă  
Și soarta mult nedreaptă  
Adesa m-au oprit  
De-a face-naintări.  
Sosita acuma vreme,  
Încât nu se mai teme  
Românu-n veatra sa.  
Protecția ce are  
I face lui carare  
Spre a înainta  
În lumea de-ncântări.

*Romania:*

Apollo, listen to me,  
Listen to me patiently.  
My desire is great  
And my prayer is deep.  
I am Romania the Country!  
From my infancy  
I have always suffered  
All kinds of wars  
And the unfair fate  
Have often stopped me  
From going forward.  
But now the time has come  
For the Romanian not to be afraid  
In his land  
The protection he enjoys  
Paves the way  
For the world of delight.]

The character’s speech is illustrative for the way in which the meaning of the denominative Romania would go, in that age, between the more restricted meaning of Wallachia to the more comprehensive one of all the territories inhabited by a majority Romanian population, a polysemy that was kept by the writers (and probably the speakers) of the age in order to disguise, to some extent, their union-wise ideas that were not seen exactly favourably by the authorities.



Fig. 3: "Rebirth of Romania" (1850) by Gheorghe Tattarescu

The playwright proves his diplomatic tact also when he invokes, through his character, the "protection" that the Romanian people would enjoy in their land (hinting at the protection of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, whose representatives would assist the inauguration of Teatrul cel Mare) and which would finally allow them, after a long and difficult wait, to advance on the

land of arts. “Diplomacy and skills are not necessary only in parliaments”<sup>42</sup>, would note Caragiali later, in *Teatru Național în Țeara Românească*, with regard to his attempt to defeat the misconceptions of the higher classes in reference to the very young Romanian theatre. Although the author was well endowed with both, diplomacy and skills did not work their magic this time and failed to save his *Prolog...* from censorship.

The next fragment – the answer of the God of the Muses to Romania – can be another argument in favor of a filiation between Caragiali’s and Asachi’s prologues, because, like Genius, who recommended that the Moldavian Fairy measure her step for an easier achievement of her goal, Apollo (in whom we can reasonably see an *alter-ego* of the Wallachian playwright) teaches Romania the lesson of measure, advising her to walk with “tact and measure” on the path she chose. To strengthen his message, Apollo proposes that Romania take as guide the God of Time, Saturn. Like a good and docile daughter, she vows to abide by his advice and to take time and patience as her allies in her progress. The choir sings triumphantly, proclaiming her saved, redeemed (even in the religious sense of the word) from under the power of evil and of ignorance. Apollo repeats his invitation for the young woman to share her requests. Making a confession out of her ignorance, Romania asks to partake, like others before her, of the sciences and *belles arts* hosted on Mount Parnassus. The god is again moved by the girl’s decency and spells a better fate for her:

*Apolon:*  
 Îmi place modestia-ți! Ea îți  
 făgăduiește  
 Progres!  
 Acel ce se cunoaște pe sine,  
 acela crește,  
 Acela se mărește,  
 Acela-naintează,  
 Acela prosperează,  
 Acela dobândește  
 Înaltul înțeleș!

*Apollo:*  
 I like your modesty! It promises  
 Progress!  
 The one who knows herself grows,  
 Expands,  
 Goes forward,  
 Prospers,  
 Finds  
 The higher meaning!

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<sup>42</sup>. C. Carageali, *Teatru Național în Țeara Românească. Dedicată publicului român (București, iulie 1855) [National Theatre in Wallachia. Dedicated to the Romanian Audience (Bucharest, July 1955)]* (Bucharest: Printing Office C.A. Rosetti, 1867), 18.

Apollo then encourages the Muses to share their gifts to the new proselyte, which they hurry to do, elatedly. In fact, in the guise of old Hellas, the Muses perform a rite with autochthonous origins, the whole scene being a reminder of the well-known motif of the Ursitoare (Fates) in the tales of the Romanians. The Muse of Tragedy, Melpomene, as coryphaeus, speaks to Romania in the beginning and at the end of the rite, on behalf of the other Muses' choir, treating her like a sister. (Although, as playwright, Caragiali wrote exclusively comedy, he did hold tragedy in higher regard – like most of his contemporaries -, given that he had been raised, mainly, in the school of the Greek classics, of neo-classicism, and of the Enlightenment). Then comes the turn of the spirits of the “dramatic authors of the classic school” to agree with helping Romania by their knowledge and advice, as masterfully suggested by god Apollo. For this purpose, the “sublime” Shakespeare, the “blissful” Molière, Aeschylus, Racine, Corneille, Aristophanes, and Voltaire are invoked. The wreath of flowers that represent them tilt for approval, while “a light fills the stage”, as shown in the stage directions. The choir rejoices again:

*Cor:*

Au primit! au primit!  
 Te bucură, fetiță.  
 Iubită copilă,  
 Acum s-a hotărât!  
 Junimea ńaripată  
 De-acum povățuită,  
 Va fi neobosită  
 La scrieri mai solide, la faptă  
 mai bărbată!  
 Te felicităm,  
 Te felicităm,  
 Și progres în toate cu drag îți  
 urăm!

*Choir:*

They agreed! they agreed!  
 Be happy, little girl.  
 Darling child.  
 Now it's decided!  
 The youth now inspired  
 And instructed  
 Will be determined  
 To more solid writings, to more  
 steadfast doings!  
 We applaud you,  
 We applaud you,  
 And far-reaching progress  
 we wish you!



DUMINECA (MAGAZIN) Va est' joi' si' duminic'a. ANUL XVII. Prețul pe un an 10 fl.  
 15 Febr. st. v. Redacțiunea în 1881. Pe 1/2, de an 5 fl.; pe 1/4,  
 Dumineca Măgă-atca nr. 395. Nr. 14. 27 Febr. st. n. de an 2 fl. 70 cr.  
Pentru Românii a 2 galbeni.

**Serisire adresata redactorului.**

Miracesi 2/14 febr. 1881.

Domnul meu!

Pintre hârtiile mele gasesc un manuscris ce nu lipseste de oarecure interes în privirea datei sale și a ocazii în care a fost compus. Este un prolog în versuri, destinat a fi pus în musica, și executat la inaugurarea teatrului celui mare din Bucuresci.

Autorel, dl Costachi Caragiali a fost unul din cei întâi timeri Români care adâmbrașit carier'a dramatica. Elev distins al repausatului Aristia, el a fost imororat de art'a teatrului și într'un șie de mulți ani a luptat cu dificultățile vieții care au fost și sânt încă astadi partea actorilor nostri. Dar nu s'a descurajat până când bețușetele l'au lipsit de puteri.

Pe la anul 1844 Caragiali se gâsă la Iasi, și a creat cu mare succes rolul cel mai principal din comedi'a „Jorga dela Sadagura”, apoi s'a dus de a format o trupa în Bucuresci, unde ca director, ajunsese aprupe de o ruina completa, atât ead de poșin sustinut pe atunci tot ce eră național.

Pe când luse eră gata să închida teatrul, i veni ide'a să pue în scena pe „Jorga dela Sadagura”, în care avusese atăta succes la Iasi, și acesta însprăție l'a scapat de naufragiu. Ca prim varg'a unei vrajitoare, sal'a teatrului se umpli de spectatori, recet'a se mari, și comedi'a fu așa de gustata de publicul Bucurescesc, încât ônsuși Voda Bibescu veni să asiste la una din reprezentații. În acea seră memorabila guvernul se gândi mai serios la nou'a instituție a teatrului național și o ajută cu o subvenție de 300 galbeni pe an.

Costachi Caragiali în avântul seu artistic, a fost și actor și director și autor. El a compus mai multe drame (preparate cu oarecari anachronisme de cari ônsuși ridea mai târziu) și între' alte scrieri, prologul alaturat. Ve comunic o copie de pe el, nu ca o piesa de tranația literatură, dar ca un testimoniu al activității spirituelor la anul 1862.

Dacă credeți, că e bine a se publică tot ce va pută servi în istoria teatrului în Români'a, binevoiti ai deschide colonele „Familiei”. La ens contrar pastrati prologul cu o curiositate literara.

Costachi Caragiali a murit nu demult, lasând un fiu care pare a calca pe urmele purintelui seu. El a mai lasat și un volum întreg de poezi nepublicate, dintre cari unele merita a fi date în lamina.

Acosta datoria privesc pe fiul repausatului, cât pentru mine, marturisesc că as fi bucuros să nu se pierda cu totul numele umnia din cei întâi pionieri pe calea spinosa a artei dramatice în Români'a.

Primiti etc.

V. Alecsandri.

**Prolog**

pentru inaugurarea noului teatru din Bucuresci.  
1852

de Costachi Caragiali.

Personagi:

Apolon . . . . .	Deul Muzelor.
Melpomena . . . . .	Muz'a Tragediei.
Talia . . . . .	Muz'a Comediei.
Terpsihora . . . . .	Muz'a Danțului.
Ereto . . . . .	Muz'a Grățului.
Calliopi . . . . .	Muz'a Poeziei.
Pollania . . . . .	Muz'a Imnelor.
Urania . . . . .	Muz'a Astronomiei.
Clio . . . . .	Muz'a Istoriei.
Etherpa . . . . .	Muz'a Armoniei.
Saturni . . . . .	Deul Timpului.
Români'a	
Fam'a	Dei'a Vestitorilor.

Spirite a mai multor autori dramatici din școl'a clasica. Terani. Terance.

Teatrul reprezinta muntele Parnas.

La ridicarea cortinei se vede Apolon pe muntele Parnas, cu lira sa pe genunchi. În giurul sech Muzele în costum antic Elicic. În stâng'a și în drept'a, dela planul al 3-le până în planul 1-in stau atârinate canuni mari de flozi, purtând în mijlocul lor liter'a începătoare a numelui fiecărui autor classic. Dei'a Fama vine prin aer, anunțând. Fie-care Muză ține în mâna emblema artei ce proteje. Deul Saturn e cum în mijlocul scenei, facend o drepta linie din partea stâng'a a spectatorilor cu emanele spiritelor autorilor. Musica asculta un tremolo; apoi un acord de anunțare ce precedeă sosirea Famei.

*Apolon, către Muză.*  
 Imi place-adesă să ve ved  
 În fugă-mi adunato,  
 Fiuște îndestrate  
 De grație divina.  
 Ca voi imi place să consult  
 De sôr'a omenirei.  
 Căci numai voi puteti a fi  
 Organul fericirei  
 La trist'a omenire.  
 Când de dureri, mahnire  
 Săpăsa și suspini!  
 Aș dar astadi v'am vestit  
 Să fii în pregătire.  
 Că de'n Fama mi-a promis  
 S'aduca o vestire  
 Și un noț prozeit...

Fig. 4: The beginning of Costache Caragiali's prologue in *Familia*



Romania thanks her “divine sisters”, reassuring them that: „Pe plaiul nostru românesc / Primate-ți fi cu bine!” [“On our Romanian land / You’ll be welcome”]. These are her last replies in the prologue. Thereafter, Apollo offers a number of directions to the Muses. The idea on the mission of the arts, suggested by his words, is the one that dominated the Romanian culture in the first three quarters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tributary to the previous, “meliorist” century of Reason and to the principles of neo-classicism. According to this idea, arts were tasked with fighting against the flaws (vices) and with correcting the society’s mores, with eliminating the ignorance of the masses and with offering them delight with beautiful visions or offering consolation. „Încoronați virtutea! Blamați neomenia. / Prin blânde maniere poporul îndreptați. / Și ca să prospereze în secolii România / O școală de năravuri frumoase întemeiați” [“Crown virtue! Blame inhumanity/ With gentle manners better the people. / And for Romania to thrive across centuries/ A school of good habits you should establish”], tells Apollo to the Muses. The phrase “school of good habits” means, of course, the theatre. This synonymy, passionately nurtured by the pioneers of Romanian theatre, was long-lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, up to it becoming a cliché. The same god voices the following belief, which, certainly, was also the playwright’s: „Teatrul e știința! Și școala de lumină! / El viața îndreptează, durerea ne alină / Prin raza cea divină” [“Theatre is lore! And school of enlightenment! / It betters our life, and soothes our pain/ By the divine light”]. One “detail” of which Caragiali, and, in fact, his whole generation, were too painfully aware was that a preliminary condition for the arts to achieve their forward work was that this progress should be desired and promoted by the state authorities – hence the request for the ruler’s support, masked by Apollo’s shout: „Ferice este țeara al căreia părinte / Cu inima fierbinte / O ndeamnă, o împinge să meargă înainte!” [“Happy the country whose parent / With a heart fervent / Encourages it, pushes it to go forward!”] – an exclamation that will then be reprised by the choir of the Muses. In the end, the god hurries the Muses to the inauguration of the new construction, which they should perform, by giving them one last order: „Cântați un imn de pace, de mândra reînviere, / Poporului ce are un nume drept avere, / Și tot pe cale bună voi mersu-i îndreptați!” [“Sing a hymn of peace, of proud resurrection, / To the people whose name is its treasure, / And keep showing it the good way!”]. The characters and the setting are put in motion, according to a choreography very well-orchestrated by the author:

*Pornesc cu toți în modul următor: Saturn ținând de mână pe România și Muzele fac un giur pe dinaintea spectatorilor. Ies în stânga, în vreme ce se coboară o cortină în dreapta muntelui Parnas. Pe cortină se văd zugrăvite armoriile țării. Culisele sunt unite prin semighirlande de flori cu culorile României. Orchestra ezeceutează arii naționale. Apoi intră de prin stânga toți personajii din acest prolog; și din dreapta toți actorii îmbrăcați în costume naționale bogate. Ei cântă imnul. Pe urmă șese mici fetițe și șese băieți costumați în silfi fac un semi-rond, și după ei vin alți doi, cari aduc două mari buchaturi; și le oferează, zicând: Ție, prea înălțate Doamne! Ție, înaltă nobleță și generosule public!”<sup>43</sup>.*

All the actors chant in the end a hymn in two stanzas, the last one proclaiming:

Vivat! trăiască Prințul! Vivat iubita țeară! / Vivat noul Teatru! în el chiar  
astă seară / Români s-au adunat / Și-n limba strămoșească / De trupa  
Românească / S-au inaugurat! / Vivat! Vivat! Vivat! / Trăiască Prințul,  
țeara și cei ce l-au fondat!<sup>44</sup>.

Of course, as noted by Alecsandri, Costache Caragiali’s prologue is not “a piece of great literature”, nor was it created to be one, but, for all intents and purposes, i.e. for a (dramatic) poem of occasion, it is very well articulated and cleverly constructed, designed thoroughly in relation to the history of European and national theatre, to the national aspirations and to the audience. Significantly more complex, as compared with the similar creations of his

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<sup>43</sup>. “They start moving as follows: Saturn hand in hand with Romania and the Muses move in rounds in front of the spectators. They exit through the left, while a curtain goes down near Mount Parnassus. The country’s coat of arms can be seen painted on the curtain. The wings are joined by semi-garlands of flowers, in Romania’s colours. The orchestra is playing national areas. Then, through the left, all the characters in the prologue enter; and from the right, all the actors dressed in splendid national costumes. They sing the anthem. Then six little girls and six boys dressed as sylphs make a half circle, followed by two more who bring two large bouquets and offer them, saying: To you, our grand Lord! To you, our noble and generous audience!”

<sup>44</sup>. “Vivat! Long live the Prince! Vivat beloved country! Vivat the new Theatre! In it this very evening/ Romanians have gathered/ And in our ancestors’ language/ The Romanian company/ Was inaugurated!/ Vivat! Vivat! Vivat! / Long live the prince, the country and those who founded it!”

predecessors, Gheorghe Asachi and Iancu Văcărescu, Caragiali's play tells of another, perhaps greater ambition: the playwright wanted to go down in history as the author of the – theatrical – baptismal act of Romania (see the sequence with the Muses-Fates), while also searching for the official recognition of the primacy of the Romanian theatre company (which he led) in front of the foreign companies (fairly numerous at the time in the capitals of the Principalities) with which they have to compete for the audience's favour and, especially, for the state-granted subsidy (always lower than the one granted to their rivals). Caragiali would have wanted his play to be the foundation stone of a real National Theatre, in the sense that it would only acquire around the War of Independence (1877-78), i.e. of fundamental state institution meant to encourage, through theatre, the national idea and identity, the national specificity. The stars were against it. Romania's theatrical-dramatic "christening" act has remained, undeservedly, an obscure document.

In *Visualizing the Nation. Gender, Representation and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, when examining the feminine visual representations of the French nation in the age of the first Republic, Joan B. Landes finds that nationalist ideology involves a convergence of the patriotic sentiment and of eroticism.<sup>45</sup> The nation and the homeland are entities that are too abstract to be able to stir the imagination of the masses in the absence of representations that approach the senses, she notes, treading in the steps of the aforementioned historian Maurice Agulhon. When the political community is exclusively masculine – as the French one became (again) starting from 1793, when the attempts of feminine emancipation, seen in the first stage of the Revolution, were suppressed -, the feminine representations of the nation may help to stimulate the sentiments of (erotic) desire and (filial or passionate, or even filial-passionate, oedipal) attachment of its members to the thus embodied idea (of nation). They are the vehicle of a close intimacy between the citizens and the nation (homeland or state). The privileged position occupied by the woman in the system of the representation during the first French republic should not deceive us as to her condition: as shown by Joan B. Landes, this can be seen as a form of compensation for the social and political inequality that described her position in the real order of things.<sup>46</sup> In fact, says the author, while quoting a number of studies, it has been proven that there is an

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<sup>45</sup>. Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation. Gender, Representation and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (New-York, London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 80.

<sup>46</sup>. *Ibid.*, 82.

affinity between nationalism and the societies defined, mainly, as masculine fraternities; in other words, nationalism goes hand in hand with the tendency of excluding women from the public life.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, nationalist ideology cannot do without the woman's reproductive body, which represents the promise of historical continuity on which the nation is established.<sup>48</sup> The possibility of social regeneration, of national rebirth depends on this body. Subsequently, the maternal role becomes the core of the nationalist project, with a both public and private relevance, circumscribed to the domestic sphere.<sup>49</sup> Joan B. Landes also observes that, as allegory of the nation, the female body may stir more than feelings of affection; it may also lead to jealous possession: the nation's feminine allegorical body – the object of patriotic love – is to be protected at all time against a potential assault of internal or external suitors or assailants, against the "rape" (by the representatives) of other states or nations.<sup>50</sup> Because the citizen's "honour as family man" (as the famous nephew of Caragiali would write) relates to it, it is preferable that this body has a seductive but chaste, "desexualized but not altogether desensualized" representation<sup>51</sup>.

We have mentioned above a study by Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, which noted that the feminine allegorical representations (in literature and in the plastic arts) belong rather to a field of exception in the Romanian culture at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century-the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. This does not mean that the women of the Romanian principalities had more rights, at that time, than their sisters in the France during the first republic. Quite the opposite. Neither women, nor culture had it better. (Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei does not seem to consider this latter aspect: the backward position of our visual arts in relation to the West, the delayed development, in our country, only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the illustrated press, for example, or the slow process of laicization of Romanian painting. For instance, Tattarescu began his career as church painter.) Despite their sporadic nature, feminine allegorical representations appeared, in the Romanian culture, in close connection with the emergence of national consciousness – or the "awakening of Romania", a leitmotif of the age – and with the attempts of national emancipation that would lead, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>. Ibid., 138.

<sup>48</sup>. Ibid., 173.

<sup>49</sup>. Ibid., 91.

<sup>50</sup>. Ibid., 165.

<sup>51</sup>. Ibid., 168.

century, to the formation of the modern Romanian state and, in the end, to the Great Union of 1918. This stands true also for the theatrical-dramatic feminine allegorical representations discussed above, coming from Gheorghe Asachi and Costache Caragiali. The symptomatic aspect is that none of them seems to threaten the patriarchal order that, in both prologues, remains firm: men continue to hold the tutelary position (Genius, Apollo, Saturn); the man is the tutor, the guide, the protector, the one who counsels the woman, who has paternal authority, and the one who takes her hands (literally) to show her the way. Therefore, he is the tutor and the guardian of a still innocent country/nation. The woman (the Moldavian Fairy, Romania) has all the traits of the ideal daughter: she is young, beautiful (there is nothing provocative or indecorous about her, there is no sign of depravity), robust, docile, and amenable, but not fearful, modest, and dignified. Romania, in particular, promises to be the perfect wife... (The Fairy seems to be rather... otherworldly, she is of a different class. From Asachi to Caragiali the representation of the country seems to become humanized, slightly more familiar, and more manageable. Perhaps the image of the woman had also changed: she had begun to be included in the same species as the man.)

### **Other Allegorical Depictions of Romania on Stage until the End of WW1**

Unfortunately, the text on which the performance that allowed the first on-stage live representation of Romania – i.e. the debut show of the dramatic character called Romania – was based has not survived. Titled *24 Ianuarie sau Unirea țărilor și a tuturor partitelor* [24 January or the Union of the Countries and of All the Parties], it was written by actor Mihail Pascaly (1830-1882), one of Caragiali's disciples and the most notable of the national Romantic stage art representatives; it was performed at the celebration of one year after the Small Union, on the evening of 24 January 1860, in the presence of Ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza. "The title of the play – notes historian Ioan Massoff, *our note* – was a suggestion of amnesty, which, in fact, would occur on 24 January/ 5 February 1860, when those involved in the 28 September 1859 manifestation of the 'Bossel' hall were released; through it, the liberal-radical group had tried to twist the ruler's hand."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>. Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică (1860-1880)* [The Romanian Theatre. A Historical Perspective], vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1966), 27 (footnote).

According to an on-site report for *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, the fragment “depicted the events of 23 and 24 January of the last year, at the proclamation of the union by the re-election of a single Ruler for both Principalities”<sup>53</sup>, and the spectators’ reaction was enthusiastic: “The audience could not stop repeat their joy and praises, thousands and thousands of long live Romania and its Ruler”<sup>54</sup>.

The part of Romania was played by the famous Eufrosina or “Frosa” (b. Vlasto) Popescu, former student and prima donna of the Philharmonic School (the first school of theatre in Wallachia, of which Caragiali had also been a student), recently returned permanently from the West, where she had delivered a good impression as lyrical artist with the name of E. Marcolini, singing on the stages of theatres such as Scala of Milano or La Fenice of Venice. No other Romanian-born woman artist could boast a career with such a scope; none until her had enjoyed such reputation. Immediately welcomed among the employees of Teatrul cel Mare, the “prodigal daughter” of Romanian theatre had reasserted herself strongly in the first part of the 1859-1860 season, by approaching in only several months the role of Fiammina in the same-title play of Mario Uchard and the one of Adrienne Lecouvreur in the same-title play by Scribe and Legouv . These were two difficult scores, in vogue in Paris, which approached the condition of being an actress, slurred in the former and defended, rehabilitated in the latter. When she played Romania, Eufrosina (born on 20 October 1821) was not yet 39. The former beauty continued to score success after success not only as an artist, but also as a woman. Apparently, in her not too distant past, one of her conquests had been Napoleon III himself, “a kind of a godfather to the making of Romania”<sup>55</sup>, as put by historian Neagu Djuvara, with whom, according to Ioan Massoff<sup>56</sup>, Eufrosina Popescu had corresponded a long time after her return in the country. We can, thus, imagine that Romania

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<sup>53</sup>. “Cronica str in ” [“The Foreign Review”], in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 5, February 2 (1860): 19.

<sup>54</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>. Neagu Djuvara, *O scurt  istorie a rom nilor povestit  celor tineri* [A Brief History of the Romanians for the Young], 12th edition, revised and expanded (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2010), 201.

<sup>56</sup>. See Ioan Massoff, *Istoria Teatrului Na ional din Bucureşti, 1877-1937* [The History of the Bucharest National Theatre, 1877-1937] (Bucharest: Editura Libr riei „Universala” Alcalay & Co, 1937), 60; and Ioan Massoff, *Actorul de la miezul nopţii. Oameni şi int mpl ri din lumea teatrului de alt dat * [The Midnight Actor. People and Events of Olden Theatre] (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Rom neasc , 1974), 263 and 265 (footnote).

played by “Popeasca” in the play staged by Pascaly looked like an attractive and vigorous woman. The character was supposed to sing national songs, so the performer must have been at home playing her. The music of the play was composed by Alexandru Flechtenmacher. That Eufrosina was the ideal choice for this role is proven by the fact that the actress would later be asked constantly to play “national mothers”, thus becoming a true specialist in national roles. Another peak of her career in the same type of “*emploi*” was the role of Dochia<sup>57</sup> in the dramatic poem (translated from French) *Visul Dochiei* [*Dochia's Dream*]<sup>58</sup> by Frédéric Damé<sup>59</sup>, which premiered on 9 October, in the opening of the 1877-1878 season, amid the Russian-Turkish war that also involved the Romanian led by the Ruling Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern, fighting for the Tsar's subjects, in the hope of obtaining their own independence. The younger Maria Vasilescu played Romania, here as daughter of Dochia.

A novel view on the character comes from Ion Luca Caragiale, who, in 1899, on the eve of the new century, at the invitation of the Bucharest National Theatre director, “arranged” for the stage a setting of lyrics, prose fragments and theatre play scenes signed by Romanian authors before or contemporary with him, which he titled *100 de ani. Revistă istorică națională a secolului XIX, în 10 ilustrațiuni* [*100 years. National Historical Revue of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in 10 Illustrations*]<sup>60</sup>. Caragiale's script (which premiered on 1 February 1899) did not have too many original lines, but the playwright envisaged then an “armed Romania”, a character against the established tradition of dramatic representation of the nation (launched by his uncle) and a lot closer to the Western representations of the same type (Germania, Britannia, Marianne, etc.). The character was played by Eugenia Ciucurescu,

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<sup>57</sup>. Personality of Romanian mythology, linked with the Dacians, the ancestors of the Romanians, as well as with the moment when a significant part of the territories they occupied was conquered by the Romans, in the 2nd century AD.

<sup>58</sup>. See Frédéric Damé, “*Visul Dochiei. Poemă dramatică*” [*“Dochia's Dream. Dramatic Poem”*], translation by D.Ollănescu and T. Șerbănescu, in *Familia*, III, no. 10, February 28 (1879): 150-152; no. 11, March 15 (1879): 161-162; and no. 12, March 31 (1879): 183-184.

<sup>59</sup>. Frédéric Damé (1849-1907) was a French-born journalist and writer (dramatist, theatre reviewer, translator amateur historian, etc.), who settled in Romania in 1872.

<sup>60</sup>. See I.L. Caragiale, *100 de ani. Revistă istorică națională a secolului XIX, în 10 ilustrațiuni*, in *Opere. Teatru. Scrieri despre teatru. Versuri*, vol. III, second edition, revised and expanded by Stancu Ilin, Nicolae Bârna, Constantin Hârlav, preface by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, 2015), 673-716.

a young actress at the beginning of her career. With *Poemul Unirei* [*The Union Poem*], which premiered at the Bucharest National Theatre on 24 January 1919 (i.e. at the end of the First World War and after the Great Union of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, of 1918), the actor and writer Zaharia Bârsan (1878-1948), from Transylvania, rechanneled the allegorical character of Romania. The play was staged under the title *24 Ianuarie* [*24 January*] (probably the initial title of the short dramatic work), together with Nicolae Iorga's *Învierea lui Ștefan cel Mare* [*The Resurrection of Stephen the Great*]. But the greatest echo would be seen some time later, during the symbolic tour performed by the Bucharest National Theatre, at the initiative of director Ioan Peretz, in the Transylvania that had just been released from under the Dual Monarchy and unified with Romania.

The tour began on 25 April 1919 and took place in 13 Transylvanian localities, the first destination being Brașov, where Bârsan had spent his childhood. Then there were stops in: Sighișoara, Mediaș, Sibiu, Blaj, Turda, Cluj, Dej, Bistrița, Alba Iulia, Orăștie, Deva, and Lugoj. Bârsan's allegorical sketch *Poemul Unirei* would open every performance. The peak moment of the tour was the troupe's arrival and performance in Cluj, at the National Theatre, a stage to which the Romanians' access had been denied constantly since 1906, when the building was inaugurated. (In fact, the location was taken over on the same day from the Hungarian company, led by the talented theatre and film expert Jenő Janovics). In the Austro-Hungarian Cluj, which was the cultural and administrative hub of the Transylvanian Hungarians, only once, in 1870, in exceptional circumstances, was a company of Romanian actors allowed to perform on the main stage of the town (in the former Hungarian theatre).

The company was from Bucharest and was led by the great actor Matei Millo. All this time - from 1867 (and even before, under the Habsburgs) until the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire - the Romanians had been also denied the right to build their own theatre. This is how the unparalleled emotion linked with the performance of 14 May 1919, given by the actors of the Bucharest National Theatre in Cluj, is explained. "Romanians were coming in frequent and quick waves, in the evening, at eight, towards the theatre, for the first Romanian performance in the former Hungarian theatre. Seldom had we seen a hall filled by people as happy as



they were"<sup>61</sup>, notes Ștefan Mărcuș in *Thalia română [Romanian Thalia]* (1945), an important history of Romanian-language theatre in Transylvania, from its beginning to 1919. The first Romanian season of the Cluj National Theatre, the management of which was entrusted to Zaharia Bârsan after the Union (owing to his special success in promoting Romanian-language theatre in pre-war Transylvania), opened several months after the great tour of the Bucharest National Theatre, on 1 December 1919, with two of the new director's plays: *Se face ziuă [Daybreak]* (drama in one act) and *Poemul Unirei*, with Olimpia Bârsan – then 37 years old – in the female leading roles (the poster of the play has an honored place in the hallway of the Cluj National Theatre). *Poemul Unirei* was first published only in 1921, in a volume, at the Printing Office W. Krafft of Sibiu, enclosed by the poems *Furtuna* and *Cu toții una!...*, written by Bârsan again on the occasion of the events of 1918.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ștefan Mărcuș, *Thalia română. Contribuții la istoricul teatrului românesc din Ardeal, Banat și părțile ungurene [Romanian Thalia. Contributions to the History of Romanian Theatre in Transylvania, Banat and the Hungarian Parts]* (Timișoara: Institutul de Arte Grafice "G. Matheiu", 1945), 474.

<sup>62</sup> See Zaharia Bârsan, *Furtuna. Cu toții una. Poemul Unirei [The Storm. All Are One. The Union Poem]* (Sibiu: Printing Office W. Krafft, 1921), 3-11.

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*Zaharia Bârsan  
and The Establishment of the National Theatre in Cluj*

JUSTIN CEUCA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The article tackles the circumstances in which the National Theatre in Cluj came into being and its relevance to the Romanian cultural scene. It was inaugurated on the 1st of December 1919 after the Unification of Transylvania and Romania on the 1st of December 1918. To have professional theatre performed in the mother tongue of the majority was the embodiment of an age-old yearning of the Romanians living in this region, and was supported by the entirety of the theatre movement. In this respect, the most important aspects are mentioned. Before the Unification, Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Romanians, despite forming the largest segment of the population, were completely stripped of rights. Therefore, the new-born National Theatre in Cluj was invested with a plurality of missions, the main one being to stand as an expression and a stimulus of Romanian creativity in all Transylvania, which was materialized through tours and series of performances in the region.

The paper also attempts to capture the complexity of Zaharia Bârsan's personality, a reputable theatrical animator, actor, director, teacher, dramatist, poet, prose writer, who was the first to be invested as director and founder of the institution. The difficulties he had to overcome, which revolved around founding a troupe of talented actors, finding a repertoire and bestowing the theatre with an aura of prestige are analysed. Initially, the repertoire included classical pieces, which were thought to carry a clearer, more accessible message, but he introduced modern and Romanian pieces as well. Zaharia Bârsan managed to produce extraordinary performances right from the first theatrical seasons: **Vlaicu Vodă** by Al. Davila, **Oedipus Rex** by Sophocles, Shakespeare's **Hamlet** and **Macbeth**.

**Keywords:** National Theatre in Cluj, 1919, Zaharia Bârsan, Transylvanian theatre

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Paper translated from Romanian Adriana Stan.

In Western Europe, most national theatres were founded in the age of the formation of nations, as a core of their spirituality and unity, anchored primarily in their language.

The establishment of the National Theatre in Cluj followed the formation of the Romanian national state, through the 1918 Great Union, which liberated Transylvania from the centuries-long Austro-Hungarian servitude. The act of establishment was signed by the Presidency of the Romanian Directory Council that temporarily governed upon Transylvania, until the full union with the Old Romanian Kingdom, through No. 3910 Decree from 18 September 1919. The same act certified the establishment of the Romanian Opera of Cluj and the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art. It was the age when great Romanian cultural institutions were being created in a city which, until then, appeared to be led by Hungarian elites. Head of the new national theatre was appointed Zaharia Bârsan, one of the leading figures of Transylvanian culture, also assigned with organizing the theatre. Therefore, Zaharia Bârsan stands as a founder, so the more as he drafted the structure of the institution.

The National Theatre in Cluj opened its gates on 1 December 1919, in a festival celebrating one year from the Great Union. The plays *Poemul Unirii* (*The Poem of the Union*) and *Se face ziuă* (*The Dawn is Here*), both written by Zaharia Bârsan, were performed on the occasion. The first theatre season started on 2 December 1919, with the premiere of *Ovidiu* by Vasile Alecsandri, where Zaharia Bârsan had the leading role. The first Romanian words uttered on the main stage in Cluj, by the great actress Olimpia Bârsan, Zaharia Bârsan's wife, were: „The storm hath ended!” (from *The Poem of the Union*). The statement had a symbolic value. It signified the hope for better times, but also the long and rough journey the Romanian people of Transylvania had to undertake in order to get a professional theatre in their own language. One might say the entire Romanian theatre movement in Transylvania shared this goal. It expressed and professed national conscience, the ethnic unity, the unity of origin and language for Romanian people everywhere.

It was not coincidental that long before the Union, the first Romanian performances took place in Transylvania. In 1755, the “Comedia ambulatória aulumnorum” of the students from the city of Blaj was established. On Christmas Day, they played a religious performance, accompanied by an orchestra, wearing Vienna-ordered costumes. They also went touring in neighbouring locations. Everywhere, they attracted a large crowd that watched admiringly „the miracle”. In the following decades, the love for theatre would also spread in other Romanian schools, like those from Arad, Braşov, Beiuş, Oradea, Năsăud, Oraviţa.



Fig. 1: The building of the new Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, postal card from 1915

Reprezentatia No. 1.

# Teatrul National

LUNI 1 DECEMBRIE 1919

## FESTIVAL

Un act de adunarea de la Alba Iulia.

Se va reprezenta:

### SE FACE ZIUA

Drama intr'un act de Zaharia Bârsan

DISTRIBUTIA

Popa Costea	D-nul N. Nemesiu-Orosi	Banatul	D-nul Radu Ciocera
Mina, sora lui	D-ni Otilia Bârsan	Calina	D-ra Sofia
Judele, fratele ei	D-nul A. Altanovschi	Mircea, tata ei	D-ra Dumbrava
Christa, sora lui	Zaharia Bârsan		

Actiunea se petrece la sfârșitul secolului XIX în satul „Jude Costea” din județul Alba.

### POEMUL UNIREI

de Zaharia Bârsan

DISTRIBUTIA

Romania	D-na Otilia Bârsan	Transilvania	D-ra H. Fatima
Bucuresti	D-ra M. Simion	Moldavia	M. Popa
Bucovina	Titia Hoda	Macedonia	M. Dumbrava
Dobrogea	D-nul A. Altanovschi		

Intreprindeti la ora 7 seara precise. Odata cu inceperea spectacolului toate salile se inchid pana la sfârșitul actului.

Prețurile locurilor pentru reprezentatie extraordinară: Loja avântoasa III Cor. 150; Loja rangul I Cor. 130; Loja rangul II Cor. 120; Orchestra Cor. 40; Focșani Cor. 30; Sălaj I Cor. 20; Sălaj II Cor. 10; Balcon rangul I Cor. 10; Balcon rangul 2-4 Cor. 12; Balcon rangul 5-7 Cor. 10; Galeri numerotate Cor. 10; Loc in picioare in parter Cor. 4; Loc in picioare la galerie Cor. 2

DOAMNELE CU PALARI NU SUNT ADMISE IN STALII

Actiunea se petrece la sfârșitul secolului XIX în satul „Jude Costea” din județul Alba.

Acti 2 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Judele”**; 3-4 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Zaharia Bârsan”**; 5 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Poemul Unirii”**; 6 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Judele”**; 7 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Poemul Unirii”**; 8 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Judele”**.

Reprezentatia No. 2.

# Teatrul National

MARTI 2 DECEMBRIE 1919

## deschiderea stagiunii

se va reprezenta:

### OVIDIU

Drama in 5 acte de V. Alexandru

DISTRIBUTIA

August Octavian Cezar	D-nul A. Bârsan	Octavian	D-nul Radu Ciocera
Calpurnia	D-ni Otilia Bârsan	Brutus	D-ra Sofia
Antonia	D-nul A. Altanovschi	Portia	D-ra Dumbrava
Clodius	D-ni Otilia Bârsan	Lucius	
Brutus	D-nul A. Altanovschi	Antonia	
Clodius	D-ni Otilia Bârsan	Lucius	
Brutus	D-nul A. Altanovschi	Antonia	
Clodius	D-ni Otilia Bârsan	Lucius	
Brutus	D-nul A. Altanovschi	Antonia	

Intreprindeti la ora 7 seara precise. Odata cu inceperea spectacolului toate salile se inchid pana la sfârșitul actului.

PREȚURILE LOCURILOR PENTRU PREMIERA: Loja avântoasa III Cor. 80; Loja rangul I Cor. 75; Loja rangul II Cor. 70; Orchestra Cor. 30; Focșani Cor. 20; Sălaj I Cor. 15; Sălaj II Cor. 10; Balcon rangul I Cor. 10; Balcon rangul 2-4 Cor. 12; Balcon rangul 5-7 Cor. 10; Galeri numerotate Cor. 10; Loc in picioare in parter Cor. 4; Loc in picioare la galerie Cor. 2

DOAMNELE CU PALARI NU SUNT ADMISE IN STALII

Actiunea se petrece la sfârșitul secolului XIX în satul „Jude Costea” din județul Alba.

Acti 4 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Ovidiu”**; 5 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Poemul Unirii”**; 6 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Judele”**; 7 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Poemul Unirii”**; 8 Decembrie, **Reprezentatia „Judele”**.

Fig. 2: Posters of the first two performances of the first Romanian theatrical season at the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, 1919

The first Romanian dramatic text was published in Transylvania as well, in 1780, under the title of *Occisio Gregorii în Moldavia Vodae tragedice expressa* (*The Killing of Gregory, the King of Moldavia, depicted in a tragic register*), by an anonymous author, a text that was apparently performed by the same students from Blaj. It depicts the fight of Romanian kingdoms for freedom and national independence. The play is structured as a modern tragicomedy, with aspects of parody, nonverbal parts of circus or pantomime, scenes inspired by the popular theatre from Romanian folklore. The interest and love for theatre nurtured by the Romanian people of Transylvania is also illustrated by the 1800 publication of the first translation of *Hamlet*, signed by Ion Barac, with the title *Amlet, Prințul de Dania*.



**Fig. 3:** Photograph of one of the encounters of The Society for Romanian Theatre Fund of Transylvania, in Săliște.

In 1870 was established, on Iosif Vulcan's initiative, "The Society for Romanian Theatre Fund of Transylvania." The programmatic article written by Vulcan, titled *Let's establish a national theatre*, asserted the very necessity to



create a professional stage for the Romanian people from this province. Hungarian authorities had approved the society regulations, with one single amendment: Romanian people had the right to collect money for a theatre of their own, but were not allowed to actually establish the theatre. Even so, *The Society's* activity was remarkable. It published the first theatre journal, with the exact same name, "The Theatre Journal". It edited "The Theatre Library", meant to encourage original Romanian dramaturgy, as well as translations, which resulted in 400 volumes. In 1886, a 300-florin award was established for every new Romanian play. A legitimate dramaturgy appeared, mainly consisting of historical-national-themed dramas and comedies, Iosif Vulcan being the most representative and prolific author.

The **Society** funded apprenticeships for young people of talent, to go and study theatre but also opera in the West, in an attempt to train specialists for the future professional artistic institutions. Zaharia Bârsan was one of the first to benefit from such stipends, studying in Vienna and Rome. In the field of canto, we should mention Lya Pop, also known as „Transylvania's nightingale". In order to collect funds, the **Society** organized yearly meetings, in different cities, which contributed to enhancing the national feeling. Performances or parades of popular costumes took place, accompanied by songs, and an exchange of opinions. People made donations, which amounted to a considerable sum until the beginning of the first World War.

Tours made by great actors from Bucharest to Transylvania were effective in keeping the ethnic bond between the Romanian people set apart by historical hardships; they revealed and galvanized the feeling of national unity, the sense of belonging to the same nation. Some of the most important tours were made, from 1863, by Fanny Tardini, whose company's prompter was Mihai Eminescu, then by Mihail Pascaly, in 1868, and 1871, by Matei Millo, in 1870, I. D. Ionescu, in 1873, and 1875. In addition to those, many other smaller yearly companies toured the entire province, triggering in all cities genuine celebrations of the Romanian nationality. The repertory consisted of historical-patriotic plays and comedies.

The only actor allowed to perform in Cluj, which, as pointed out before, was a dominantly Hungarian city, was Matei Millo. His performances from the hall of the Hungarian Theatre were attended by Hungarian and Romanian spectators likewise. In 1871, Matei Millo leaves the city. Two actors, husband and wife, George and Margareta Alexandrescu, exit his



company, opting to stay in Cluj. They join The Theatre Society which had been running in Cluj since 1868, founded by Ion Baciú, who came from the strong theatre tradition of Năsăud. Members of the society were Romanian students of the Catholic college. The society can be justly considered the direct predecessor of the National Theatre in Cluj. Wallachian actors took charge of the group, further encouraging its development.



**Fig. 4:** Mihail Pascaly (1830-1882), famous actor, company director, pedagogue



**Fig. 5:** Matei Millo (1814-1896), famous actor, stage director and playwright

Considering the requirements of the time and the public, the repertory was formed of historical plays and comedies written by great Romanian writers such as V. Alecsandri, B. P. Hașdeu, C. Negruzzi, but also by Al. Lapedatu (*Tribunul* (*The Tribune*), about Avram Iancu).

Performances were given „one almost every month”, in the building of the Greek-Catholic parish, where Ion Baciú had built „an estrade under a barn”. Many „high society” spectators used to come there. In 1875, the students graduate college, and the society disintegrates. Still, Ion Baciú doesn't abandon theatre, but once he gets back in his village of Őoimuș, county of Bistrița-Năsăud, he builds a theatre and starts editing a field-specific magazine.

In what concerns the mission or the strategy of the new National Theatre in Cluj, it resembled the general orientation of other European national theatres, with certain particularities, however. The first one reflected the need to express the Romanian spirituality, to encourage the artistic and cultural creativity of the nation. In the initial conception, this institution was supposed to belong not only to Cluj, but to all Transylvania, a goal meant to be reached through tours and micro-seasons in other locations. The theatre was aimed at achieving the so-called at the time „soul unity” of all the Romanian people who had been set apart arbitrarily in the course of time. The famous French historian Jules Michelet once wrote that the nation should resemble an individual, that it should similarly have a soul. Likewise, the Cluj stage was meant to provide the model of a clean, unitary Romanian language, purified of all the foreign influences brought by the known historical conditions.

The new director, Zaharia Bârsan, had to face numerous and pressing necessities in order to ensure the functioning of the National Theatre in Cluj. Enhanced by the vicissitudes that followed the end of First World War, the administrative union with Romania was pending. First of all, a company of actors and a repertory, the body and soul of any theatre, as Mihai Eminescu used to say, had to be set. Time was of the essence, meanwhile in the country theatre seasons had already begun, performers were rather scarce then. However, thanks to Zaharia Bârsan's prestige, and to his personal relations, several esteemed actors from the National Theatres of Iași, Craiova and Bucharest gave up their good contracts and positions, choosing instead to enliven the Cluj stage. Zaharia Bârsan would emphasize on every occasion the fact that what these generous artists had made should always be remembered. Here are some of the names from the core of the company in those years: I. Stănescu-Papa, Nicolae Neamțu-Ottonel, Dem. Mihăilescu Brăila, Aurel Athanasescu, Sonia Cluceru, Al. Ghibericon and, last but not least, Olimpia Bârsan, Zaharia Bârsan's wife, first-class associate at the National Theatre of Bucharest. They were joined, in the position of technical

director, by Sică Alexandrescu, the future renowned stage director, who made his debut in this quality here, in Cluj. Other actors would also settle in this Transylvanian city on the Someș River, in later seasons, shaping a typologically and expressively diverse company.



**Fig.6:** Zaharia Bârsan (1878-1948) in *King Lear*



Fig. 7: Zaharia Bârsan in *Hamlet*

Repertory-wise, Zaharia Bârsan favoured primarily the classical type, which he considered clearer and more approachable by the public. But a then-modern play was also presented from the very first years. Romanian dramaturgy provided a reliable source, especially through historical plays, whose patriotic message was understandably successful in the case of Transylvania. In general, the National Theatre in Cluj tried to present almost every valuable new product in the domain. The institution was able to balance drama, comedy, melodrama. The most often staged playwrights, in

the first seasons, but also afterwards, were W. Shakespeare and I. L. Caragiale. They were joined by Molière, with quite many texts, Carlo Goldoni (*Hangița* [*The Mistress of the Inn*]), V. Alecsandri, B. P. Hașdeu (*Răzvan și Vidra* [*Răzvan and Vidra*]), Al. Davila (*Vlaicu Vodă* [*King Vlaicu*]), later also by N. Gogol (*Revizorul* [*The Government Inspector*]), M. Gorky (*Azilul de noapte* [*The Night Asylum*]), A. P. Chekhov (*Pescărușul* [*The Seagull*], with the title *Pescărelul*, in national premiere), H. Ibsen (*Strigoii* [*Ghosts*]), V. I. Popa (*Ciuta* [*The Deer*]), M. Sorbul (*Patima roșie* [*The Red Passion*]). Contemporary Romanian dramaturgy was encouraged then, resulting in prestigious debuts and absolute premieres, like Lucian Blaga's *Avram Iancu*.



**Fig. 8:** Olimpia Bârsan (1885-1935), one of the most admired actresses at the beginning of the XXth century

One imperative goal of the National Theatre in Cluj was to build prestige and come into prominence in the cultural landscape of the country. This could be attained through great performances from the great repertory. Director Zaharia Bârsan is quick to introduce such texts from the very first season, but is only able to present them to the public, as distinct performances, in the second and the following seasons. These texts are *O scrisoare pierdută* (*The Lost Letter*) by I. L. Caragiale, from the very first year, *Vlaicu Vodă* by Al. Davila, *Hamlet* by W. Shakespeare, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, milestones of any theatre.

Another problem was the audience. The Romanian population of Cluj was not very large at the time, Hungarian people clearly prevailing. Therefore, the same spectators had to be encouraged to attend more often theatre performances. With this in view, several premieres had to be prepared. To Zaharia Bârsan's estimates, they needed one every two weeks. In the very first season, 13 premieres were staged, while in the second season their number increased to 18. This called for tremendous efforts made by the actors. On the other hand, spectators had to be educated, drawn towards theatre, their own taste taken into account. This explains the repertory option for melodramas and small comedies, more accessible and better fitted to the popular taste. Students supported the director's views, remaining to this day the most faithful spectators. They led the actors in triumph to their homes, they went on stage as extras whenever the case, like in the production of *Vlaicu Vodă*.

As for the tours, Zaharia Bârsan hoped that a first one would already be made in the inaugural season, but the ministry did not grant the necessary subvention. The first tour headed to Oradea, on 9 November 1921; further on, the National Theatre in Cluj continued to travel weekly to this city, which led to 12 performances, a micro-season in its own, consisting of historical plays and comedies, which was welcomed with „extreme enthusiasm”. Things happened likewise in towns such as Dej and Turda. Zaharia Bârsan aimed at forming an itinerant company dedicated to touring, called “The Western Theatre”, which was supposed to be backed by the National Theatre and the Astra Society. The head of the latter, Vasile Goldiș, agreed verbally, but would never provide any money for the project.

Zaharia Bârsan also introduced, from the first season, the so-called „popular performances”, meant to create a constant public, formed of military men and school students, and taking place on Sundays from 2.30 p.m., at half the normal price.

As pointed out before, Zaharia Bârsan was a true leading figure of Transylvanian culture, embodied in several creative avatars. He was theatre promoter, actor, stage director, professor, playwright, poet, prose writer. We already mentioned his contributions as the first director and founder of the National Theatre in Cluj. Bârsan's first directorate, between 15 Oct. 1919-31 July 1927, was followed by two other, between 1 Dec. 1931-31 June 1933 and between 16 Apr. 1934- 31 March 1936, respectively.

Prior to these, between 1903-1913, Zaharia Bârsan organized yearly tours in Transylvania's main localities, from south to north, from east to west. Like the entire theatre movement, these tours were meant to cultivate the national conscience of the Romanian people, their sense of ethnic and linguistic unity, but also to provide a pure Romanian language. Zaharia Bârsan only chose performances of great aesthetic quality, played by professional actors. Considering this objective and the times, the repertory included historical plays, written especially by V. Alecsandri, but also by C. Negruzzi, as well as readings from G. Coşbuc. In addition to these, Z. Bârsan introduced in the Transylvanian repertory I. L. Caragiale's *Năpasta* [*Injustice*], Carlo Goldoni's *Slugă la doi stăpâni* [*Servant of Two Masters*], A.P. Chekhov's *Cerere în căsătorie* [*Marriage Proposal*], Ursul [*The Bear*]. Comedies were also on the list. Part of the company were first-rate artists of the National Theatre of Bucharest: Marioara Voiculescu, Aristizza Romanescu, Petre Liciu, V. Toneanu, C. Calmuschi and, of course, his wife, Olimpia Bârsan, always beside him. The mishaps and sometimes difficult conditions in which performances took place, the obstacles imposed by Hungarian authorities were chronicled by Z. Bârsan in *Impresii de teatru din Ardeal* [*Impressions from Transylvanian Theatre*], the first memorial of theatre travel in Romanian literature. After 1913, the director was denied by the Hungarian government the permission to enter Transylvania.

Zaharia Bârsan came from the village of Sân-Petru, next to Braşov (he was born on 11/23 January 1878, and died on 13 December 1948, in Cluj). Once completing the sixth high-school grade, he fled to Bucharest. There, he attended the classes of the Conservatory of Dramatic Art, which he graduated at C. I. Nottara's class, with a maximum grade and the first prize in tragedy. He was then hired at the National Theatre of Bucharest, where he became a first-class associate.

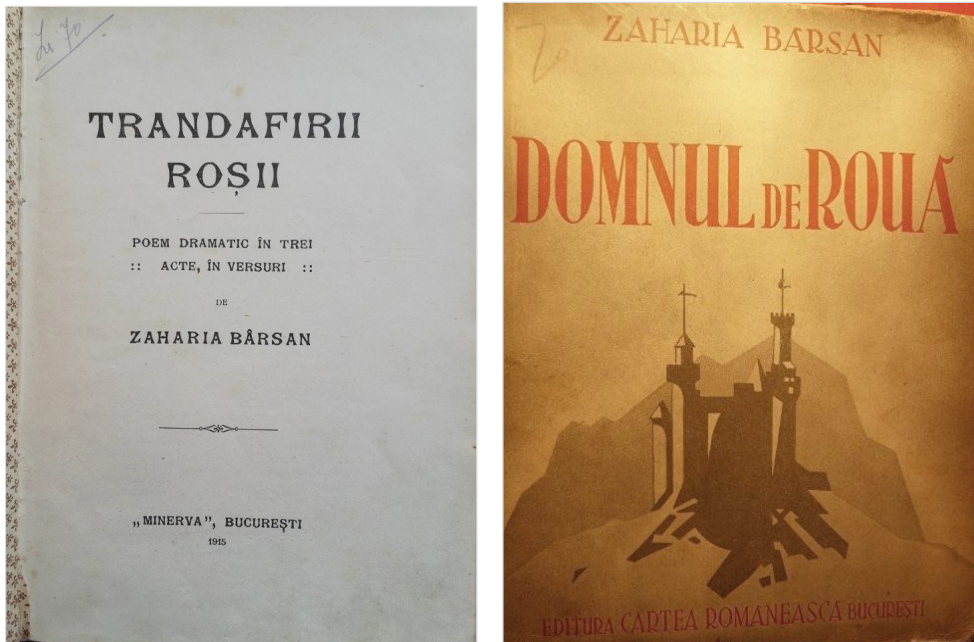


**Fig. 9:** The National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca after World War I and the Great Union

Similar to his master C. I. Nottara, his acting style belongs to Romanticism, emphasizing feelings, and fostering the musical values of words. Zaharia Bârsan adds a classicist, more restrained dimension, assumed from the theatre of Vienna, where he studied, and a natural tendency, borrowed from Italian *verismo*. The first feature, enhanced by the Enlightenment, makes the actor seem to officiate with certain solemnity, like a lay priest that reveals existential truths, while the stage turns into a secular altar. This taxonomy will long persist in the tradition of the Cluj stage. He preferred the drama, the Shakespearean and the Romantic repertory. Among his great achievements, we mention the main parts from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, all plays by W. Shakespeare, from *Ruy Blas* by Victor Hugo, *Răzvan și Vidra* by B. P. Hașdeu, *Vlaicu Vodă* by Al. Davila, other parts like Carl from *Hoții* (*The Robbers*) by Fr. Schiller, Luca Arbore from *Viforul* (*The Blizzard*) by B. P. Hașdeu.



The most lasting chapter of Zaharia Bârsan's literary creation remains his dramaturgy. The landmarks of his career are the dramatic poems *Trandafirii roșii* (*Red Roses*), *Domnul de rouă* (*The Morning Dew Gentleman*), which are in fact extravaganzas, a genre cultivated by Romanticism. Also noteworthy is the historical play *Se face ziuă*, a dense, rough evocation of the figure of Crișan, one of the heroes of the 1784 Revolution, along with Horia and Cloșca.



**Fig.10:** Front page of *The Red Roses* (first edition) and cover of the *The Morning Dew Gentleman*

*Trandafirii roșii* premiered on the stage of the National Theatre of Bucharest on 12 October 1915, was warmly welcomed. In those days, after the 1989 Revolution, it was presented at the Bulandra Theatre, during Victor Rebenciuc's directorate. The play reenacts the Romantic scenario of sacrifice. One needs self-sacrifice in order to defeat a given *fatum*, or to fulfil a destiny. This idea is embodied here through the theme of the artist, who

accomplishes his mission at the price of his own life. This intertwines with the motive of total, absolute love, also drawn from Romanticism. The artist achieves, in exchange, immortality. *Trandafirii roșii* are the metaphor of a new, non-existent before beauty, born out of the artist's sacrifice and blood, but also of his love. The text is built on the lyrical-dramatic and poetic tension of characters and verses.

The hero, Zefir, is a dreaming poet, a similarly Romantic typology. Liana was cursed to die, unless somebody would bring her every day a red rose, considering only white roses existed at the time. Zefir loves the girl endlessly and is able to overcome this fatum. During the night, he colours with his own blood a white rose, which he gifts Liana in the morning. He saves her this way, at the cost of his own life. As a consequence of that, all white roses from the garden will turn red, a phenomenon viewed as a miracle on stage. The dramatic poem is composed of harmonious, musical verses, which remind of neo-Romanticism.

*Domnul de rouă* is less valuable than *Trandafirii roșii*. Although inspired by local mythology, the legend of the sun and the moon, it is more elaborate, more polished. Certain Symbolist traits can still be perceived here. The other plays written by Zaharia Bârsan, *Mărul* (*The Apple*) from 1908 and *Sirena* (*The Mermaid*), are composed in a realist-psychological register. However, they don't display some special kind of analysis, but fall back on moralising didacticism. Zaharia Bârsan's poetry, the volumes *Visuri de noroc* (*Luck Dreams*), from 1903, and *Poezii* (*Poems*), from 1924, is subjected to usual clichés of Romanticism. His prose, gathered in the volumes *Ramuri* (*Tree Branches*), in 1906, *Nuvele* (*Short Stories*), in 1909, *Nuvele*, 1910, *Ca mâini va bate ceasul* (*Tomorrow will be the Day*), 1915, reveal the talent of a storyteller who is able to draw convincing portraits. Written in the realist-naturalist manner, this prose often tends to linger in a moral schematism, with accents of rural idealisation.

In 1945, Zaharia Bârsan was vested by academician Mihail Ralea, the then-Minister of the Arts, as a honorary lifelong director of the National Theatre in Cluj. He remains, to this day, the only one to hold this position in the history of the institution.

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## *Written on the Walls: The Hungarian-Romanian Transfer of the National Theatre Building from Kolozsvár/Cluj*

DELIA ENYEDI<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The 1918 Great Union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania had direct consequences on the theatrical landscape of the province. The present paper reconstructs the controversial transfer of the building that at the time hosted the Hungarian National Theatre from Kolozsvár/Cluj (currently Cluj-Napoca<sup>2</sup>) to the newly formed Romanian state, as recounted by its manager, Hungarian theatre and film director Jenő Janovics, and by Ștefan Mărcuș, Romanian opera singer and arts historian.

**Keywords:** theatre, national identity, Transylvania, Jenő Janovics, Ștefan Mărcuș, Cluj, Kolozsvár, Cluj-Napoca.

On 24 December 1918, Romanian troops entered Kolozsvár/Cluj. Eighteen months of political negotiations and individual uncertainties passed until the Treaty of Trianon, signed on 4 June 1920 in Versailles, recognized what the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia had declared on 1 December 1918. The peace treaty between the Allied powers and Hungary as a successor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire established the province of Transylvania as part of the Kingdom of Romania. Overnight, an approximate half of the three million Hungarians that the collapse of the Dual Monarchy has positioned outside the borders of their country of origin (Steiner 96) became a minority. The impact on the Transylvanian cultural landscape was profound, aiming among others at its Hungarian national theatre of great tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> The current name of Cluj-Napoca was established through a decree signed by Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1974.

In the history of the city, the Hungarian theatre emerged in 1792, as an initiative of the local aristocracy to support the first permanent company. By 1821 it had the first stone building in the country destined to host a theatre, located on the Wolf Street<sup>3</sup>. Under the management of Jenő Janovics, a prolific artist in both fields of theatre and silent cinema, a new theatre was inaugurated in 1906, in the Hunyadi Square. The elegant edifice designed by the Austrian office Fellner & Helmer was to become the subject of conflict in the transition of Transylvania from Hungarian to Romanian authority.

### **“We stay here!”**

On the pages dedicated to the day of 21 December 1918 of his journal, Janovics recounted the feeling of overwhelming expectancy dominating the Hungarian locals from Kolozsvár/Cluj, torn between the decision to remain in their barricaded homes or to join the tens of thousands of ragged refugees transiting the city. This tension had also permeated the theatre, with its halls emptied and its performances cancelled. Those employees of the institution, especially the ones with relatives in Budapest, were more vulnerable to the exaggerated rumors, weighing on the possibility to take refuge themselves in the border city of Nagyvárad/Oradea, before heading to the Hungarian capital.

In the shadow of this state of mind, Janovics decided to gather all of them on stage, in the early hours of the morning. In few but wisely chosen words, he informed them of his own decision to stay put in front of the uncertain immediate future. “As long as I breathe, I will defend this theatre that I was assigned to manage.

No matter what happens, I keep my post of watchman”<sup>4</sup> ({1918}[1942] 2001, 328). Not knowing what the next day would bring, he emphasized the distinction between his own resolution and the influence it might have on them. To those ready to leave, he accompanied his best wishes with the offer of financial support. To those taking into consideration to remain, he could only reassure them of his complete moral support. The question lingering was who wanted to remain by his side.

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<sup>3</sup> Today Mihail Kogălniceanu Street.

<sup>4</sup> If not specified otherwise, all translations belong to the author of this text. In original Hungarian: “Ezt a színházat, amelyet gondozásomra bízta, védeni fogom, amíg lélegzem. Bármi történik is, strázsahelyemen maradok.”

On the dimly lighted stage, the silence of about two hundred and fifty Hungarians was broken by the voice of a woman, his wife, actress Lili Poór: “We stay here!”<sup>5</sup> ([1918][1942] 2001, 328). Aware that all of her relatives had already moved to Budapest, all others present echoed her words. Famous actor István Szentgyörgyi, immediately joined by fellow actors, dancers, musicians, and technicians approached Janovics and uttered the same sentence, shaking Janovics’ hands and asking for guidance from the one who over the years had become their master. Meanwhile most of their relatives had taken refuge and the Romanian troops were about twenty kilometers away from the city.

**“Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!”**

The solidarity of the Hungarian theatre company facing the sombre premonition of the days and months to come could not stop the countdown of what was to become its last year on that stage. Consequently, Janovics tried to convert the atmosphere similar to a capital sentence inevitably surrounding the last performance into an ostentatious celebration of the era it closed. Scheduled on 30 September 1919, it was promoted throughout the city by means of lavishly decorated posters, reminiscent of the countless glamorous evenings hosted by the theatre in the past. Under the title *Hamlet* stood the names of Jenő Janovics in the lead role, Lili Poór as Ofelia and those of István Szentgyörgyi and Aranka Laczkó as the royal couple.

The Romanian authorities, with the designated role of temporary political, economical, and symbolical administration of the new territories were facing a delicate situation. Fully aware that a ban could have had more serious consequences than the actual performance, they could not ignore the influence Janovics was having on both artists and audience. The censors speculated on the decision of choosing Shakespeare’s text to justify its altering. Lines were cut out and the final scene disappeared altogether.

To the spectators these details mattered too little. Hours before the performance crowds invaded the hall filling every inch of available space, from the entrance to the orchestra pit. It was an impressive sight that Janovics could not forget easily twenty years later. “Never in that theatre, before or after, were so many people crammed together. Everyboby wanted to witness the grand farewell” (1937, 76).

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<sup>5</sup> In original Hungarian: “Itt maradunk!”

<sup>6</sup> In original Hungarian: “Abban a színházban soha, sem azelőtt, sem azután annyi ember nem szorongott. Mindenki jelen akart lenni a nagy bucsun.”



Fig. 1 Young Jenő Janovics as Hamlet

Once the evening started, the tension that suffocated their awaiting was exteriorized. "Every actor is greeted with applause when walking onto the stage and is accompanied with applause when exiting"<sup>7</sup> (Janovics 1937, 76). At the moment of Hamlet's monologue that the censorship had reduced to the famous interrogation, Janovics daringly addressed it to the audience: "To be, or not to be, that is the question" (Shakespeare 309). After a second of deathly silence, a woman shouted "We want to live!"<sup>8</sup> and immediately two thousand voices started shouting "We want to live!", although Janovics recollected the fact that the words could barely be distinguished in the ensuing frenzy. It was a reaction that scared him, but fortunately it diminished within minutes with spectators calming each other (*Însemnările... 77-78*).

<sup>7</sup> In original Hungarian: "Minden színészt tapsorkán fogad, amikor a színpadra lép és tapsorkán kísér, amikor kimegy."

<sup>8</sup> In original Romanian: "Vrem să trăim!"

But Romanian security forces mobilized on sight to prevent any kind of nationalistic manifestation were eager to close the evening. The irony made that the censorship transformed the last words uttered in Hungarian on that stage to be Hamlet's testamentary line: "O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,/Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!" (Shakespeare 331). Fearing supplementary outbursts, immediately after the curtain fell soldiers intervened and "violently" (Janovics 1941, 314) scattered the exhilarated crowd. To the Hungarian Theatre from Kolozsvár/ Cluj, the most important stage in its management under Janovics had abruptly ended. Regarding the events sealing this fate, the two sides involved would confront before and after the famous evening.

### **A Matter of National Pride**

Through the decree establishing the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, issued by King Ferdinand I, on 24 December 1918, the public services of the province were under the authority of a Governing Council<sup>9</sup>. From the early separation into departments and thus the organizing of one in charge with Cults, Public Instruction, and Arts, soon reorganized as Department of Health, Arts, and Social Security, a major interest was taken into "the artistic-cultural offensive in Transylvania (...) through theatre"<sup>10</sup> (Mărcuș 469). Despite the fact the composer Tiberiu Brediceanu, assisted by the local poet Emil Isac, were in charge of the cultural politics in the region, the first initiative belonged to Ion Peretz, the head of the Governing Council of Nagyszeben/Sibiu. It consisted in an official tour of the Bucharest National Theatre company, planned to reach thirteen cities, between 27 April and 31 May. Kolozsvár/Cluj was one of them.

Witness of the reorganization of the cultural life in Transylvania under Romanian political authority was the tenor, and later on in life music and theatre historian, Ștefan Mărcuș. In his notes, one finds that behind endless departments, programs, and names there was a significant amount of disorganization and amateurishness, compensated with the enthusiasm of the political moment. "Mister Brediceanu complained to me that he had no tasks, no office and persons he could not get rid of were imposed on him"<sup>11</sup> (467).

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<sup>9</sup> In Romanian "Consiliu Dirigent", government of Transylvania that functioned between 2 December 1918 and 4 April 1920.

<sup>10</sup> In original Romanian: "Paralel cu acțiunea ofensivă a armatei, începe și ofensiva artistică-culturală în Ardeal și Banat, prin teatru."

<sup>11</sup> In original Romanian: "D-l Brediceanu mi se plângea că n-are atribuțiuni, n-are birou și i se impun persoane, de care nu se poate scăpa".



The situation of Janovics' consolidated theatrical institution had been permanently in the attention of the Romanian authorities, but its uninterrupted activity during the First World War and the firm stance of its director after the Great Union were all signals of a situation difficult to grasp. In the tour program<sup>12</sup> the plays *Răzvan and Vidra* (*Răzvan și Vidra*) by B.P. Hașdeu and *The Fountain of Blanduzia* (*Fântâna Blanduziei*) by Vasile Alecsandri were scheduled to be played in Kolozsvár/Cluj on 14 May, and "on this date it was a matter of national pride that the company would play in the Romanian theatre"<sup>13</sup> (Mărcuș 478). The stakes were high given the context generated by the Apponyi laws, passed in 1907, destined to accelerate the process of Magyarization in the Eastern partner of the Dual Monarchy. Despite two thirds of the population in Transylvania being represented by Romanians, education in their native language had been eliminated. Consequently, theatre was gradually invested not only with the role of cultivating a correct spoken language, but also of cultivating a national conscience.

As a direct response, all Romanian efforts to permeate the cultural scene of the province had been discouraged by the Hungarian authorities. Although the local Romanian press constantly informed its readers on the theatrical events from the Bucharest stage, official tours had been made practically impossible by the legislation. Non-Hungarian actors wishing to perform in the province were required to obtain special approvals from the government. While German or Italian theatre companies had been performing throughout Transylvania, the last Romanian theatrical tours dated back to 1870 and 1871, and it is a significant detail that the ones organized with great difficulty between 1906-1913 seem<sup>14</sup> to have not reached Kolozsvár/Cluj.

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<sup>12</sup> The repertoire of the tour was composed by a combination of classic and mediocre texts, a compromise generated by the lack of quality Romanian dramaturgy and the aim to select the existing plays instilling a sense of national identity to the audience. Besides the two already mentioned, it included *The Poem of the Union* (*Poemul Unirei*) by Zaharia Bârsan, *Sunset* (*Apus de soare*) by Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea, *Bimbașa Sava* by Ion Peretz and *The Red Roses* (*Trandafirii roșii*) by Zaharia Bârsan (Mărcuș 469).

<sup>13</sup> In original Romanian: "pe această dată era o chestiune de mândrie națională, ca trupa să joace în teatrul românesc."

<sup>14</sup> Precise information regarding the itineraries of the tours is hard to be established as some performances were cancelled while others were programmed spontaneously.

However, the presence in the city of Onisifor Ghibu<sup>15</sup> in 1919 as general secretary of the Department of Cults, and Arts, had nothing to do with the theatre, but with the taking over of the university. During the conversation in which he communicated the above mentioned task to his superior, publicist and politician Valeriu Braniște<sup>16</sup>, near to the latter stood Brediceanu:

who was preoccupied not only in taking over the theatre, but was searching all possibilities for the new Romanian state, as successor of the old Romanian state, to also install its rights regarding the organizing of the arts, especially the building where the old Hungarian State supported a Hungarian National Theatre.

The moment was decisive for the fate of the Hungarian theatre of Cluj. For on the solicitation of dr. T. Brediceanu, dr. V. Braniște, head of department, ordered by phone dr. Onisifor Ghibu from Cluj to also take over the theatre in which mister Ianovici's (sic!) company performed.<sup>17</sup> (Mărcuș 479)

In the morning of the next day, on 14 May, Ghibu, accompanied by the mayor of the city, Iulian Pop, the head of the local administration Vasile Hossu/Vazul Hosszu and the opera singer Constantin Pavel/László Pap were present at the theatre, where they encountered the deputy manager Lajos Parlăgi. In his 1945 account, Mărcuș cites later writings belonging to Janovics according to which Ghibu threatened with "armed force" (480) Parlăgi's refuse to cooperate<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Onisifor Ghibu (1883-1972) was a teacher of pedagogy, correspondent member of the Romanian Academy and one of the politicians directly involved in the Great Union of 1918. After the coming to power of the Communist regime, his nationalist and anti-Soviet activity would determine his forced retirement from the university, the banning of his books and ultimately three years of detention.

<sup>16</sup> Valeriu Braniște (1869-1928) was a Romanian publicist and politician, honorary member of the Romanian Academy, involved in organizing the Great National Gathering of Alba-Iulia, on 1 December 1918. As head of the Department for Cults and Public Instruction in the Governing Council of Transylvania, he manifested great interest in the education of the minorities.

<sup>17</sup> In original Romanian: "pe care îl preocupa nu numai ideea preluării teatrului, dar căuta toate posibilitățile, cum Statul nou român în calitate de succesor al vechiului Stat maghiar, ar putea să intre cât mai curând în drepturile sale, și în ceea ce privește organizarea artelor, și în special clădirea unde vechiul Stat maghiar a susținut un Teatru Național Maghiar. Momentul a fost hotărâtor pentru soarta teatrului unguresc din Cluj. Căci, la insistența d-lui Dr. T. Brediceanu, Dr. V. Braniște, șef de Resort, a dat ordin telefonic d-lui Dr. Onisifor Ghibu la Cluj, să preia și teatrul în care juca trupa d-lui Ianovici."

<sup>18</sup> Although we have been unable to identify the source, this detail stands as testimony to the note on which the Romanian side started the negotiations. At that time, Romanian troupes were stationed on the Tisza/Tisa River, preparing the offensive on Budapest.

In the text we use as reference<sup>19</sup>, Janovics recalled the events from the afternoon of the same day, when he received Ghibu and Hossu in his office. The message delivered by the two was as clear as possible, Janovics was summoned to evacuate the building and move the company in the building of the summer theatre (Színkör/Cercul teatral). As proven by a transcript written in everybody's presence, Janovics protested, invoking a contract dated 11 March 1913, signed with count Colomán Esterházy as president of a Theatre Committee, according to which the former was only renting the theatre, and thus did not own the right to cede it to a third party. He also underlined the fact that the building was not property of the Hungarian state, all expenses of constructions being loaned from the Commercial Bank of Budapest, annually paid back by means of a subvention guaranteed by the same contract. As the document would not expire until 1921, Janovics officially declared that he kept the rights to use the theatre and all catalogued belongings for the continued management of the theatrical activity. He asked for reassurances that his rights would be respected given the three hundred employees he had valid contracts with and their families whose survival depended on them (Janovics 1937, 71-76).

To the Romanian delegates, those details were no more than "subtle arguments of judicial formal order<sup>20</sup>" and consequently "the taking over the National Theatre of Cluj was made immediately<sup>21</sup>" (Mărcuș 482).

### Some Honest Words

As late as 7 May 1920, Janovics published a reponse in the form of an article titled *Honest Words* (*Őszinte szavak/Cuvinte sincere*), in both Hungarian and Romanian newspapers *Ellenzék* and *Adeverul*. The text revolved around the ownership rights regarding the theatre building. A fund was brought into discussion which had resulted from donations made by elite members from the Hungarian society and had been used to erect, in 1821, the old theatre from Wolf Street. After it had gravely degraded eight decades into its functioning, it had been sold. To the resulted amount of money were added various donations which partially represented the costs of the theatre from the Hunyadi Square. Janovics cited a document from the state archives

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<sup>19</sup> "The Theatre Life." ("A színjátszás.") *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae (Országrészonk átalakulása 1918-1936)*. Edited by Györi Illés István. Cluj: Az új Transzylvánia Kiadása, 1937. 69-93.

<sup>20</sup> In original Romanian: "argumentări subtile de ordin formal juridic".

<sup>21</sup> In original Romanian: "preluarea Teatrului Național din Cluj s-a făcut imediat".

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according to which the building, as well as the land beneath it, belonged to a society for the Hungarian Theatre of Kolozsvár. In response to this information, Mărcuș noted that further investigations proved this society to be a mere camouflage for the Hungarian Ministry of Cults and Instruction (480).



Fig. 2 The Old Theatre from Wolf Street

In the mentioned article, Janovics also described various tactics that sabotaged the remaining performances of the Hungarian theatre company on the disputed stage. They ranged from the offering of free tickets that affected its budget to spontaneous shutting down of the theatre. The hardest to endure had been the censorship that cancelled a cycle dedicated to Shakespeare, as well as various stage adaptations from the repertoire of Hungarian or French classic playwrights, with Sardou's *Fedora* for example being catalogued as nihilist propaganda.

The Romanian readers had already heard on 14 May 1919 the first words uttered in their language on the stage to be the symbolically chosen “The storm has calmed down...<sup>22</sup>” (Mărcuș 475) in a frenzy equalling that of the *Hamlet* performance. At least to them, the disclosure continued. On 16 September 1919, a decree-letter informed Janovics that the theatre would be managed by the Romanian state, offering him the role of artistic manager in return to his oath of fidelity. Aware that it was an unheard of condition and moreover that two days earlier playwright Zaharia Bârsan had been appointed to the task, Janovics cited the dialogue with the delegate sent to hand him the letter, Vasile Poruțiu: “the Governing Council would find itself in a very embarrassing situation if I were to take the oath, to which he responded smiling, we are fully aware that you can not take the oath<sup>23</sup>”.



Fig. 3 The National Theatre built in 1906

<sup>22</sup> In original Romanian: “S-a potolit furtuna...”, line from *The Poem of the Union (Poemul Unirei)*.

<sup>23</sup> In original Romanian: “Consiliul Dirigent ar ajunge într-o situație foarte penibilă dacă eu acum aş depune de fapt jurământul, mi-a răspuns surâzând, bine ştim noi că D-ta nu poţi depune jurământul.”

To theatre historians, Zaharia Bârsan is fairly considered the architect of interwar Romanian theatre in Transylvania, having previously proved his determination and resilience pursuing his goal. The tours he organized in the province between 1906 and 1913 were the result of significant efforts. Confronting the authorities, he was sometimes forced to declare his fellow actors as amateurs in order to get the permit to play (Ceuca 62-63) or employ theatre students. In front of the audience, he composed a repertoire capable of serving both the uneducated crowds and the pretentious young elite, an impossible task equally attracting praise and criticism. In addition, delays and lack of settings or costumes represented constant circumstances. While on 1 October 1919, at ten o'clock in the morning following the *Hamlet* performance, the Hungarian Theatre ceased to exist in the Kolozsvár/Cluj building, the previously persecuted Romanian one was rising under his guidance.

But the details surrounding the shifting moment have remained controversial mainly because Janovics was reassured that he could take his personal belongings out of the theatre building.

Contrary to this disposition, the appointed governmental commissary stopped me from taking out from the theatre one single peg, furthermore when I ordered my personal carpentry workshop to be removed from the basement he threatened to transport me and the workshop with police escort had I not return everything within an hour.<sup>24</sup>

There are numerous formal requests archived addressed by Janovics to various people capable to address the situation, unanswered or rejected on procedural basis. In return, he was granted the possibility to loan whatever he needed, including his own personal library. But the biggest inconvenient became the moving of the Hungarian theatre company in the summer theatre in the middle of the 1919-1920 winter. The building that had been inaugurated<sup>25</sup> in 1910 with a "lighter" repertoire was lacking a heating system and had already been altered to accommodate a cinema. Janovics had unsuccessfully searched for solutions, when he inquired on buying or renting the building of the old theatre from Wolf Street.

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<sup>24</sup> In original Romanian: "Contrar acestei dispozițiuni comisarul guvernial denumit m-a împedecat să scot din teatru măcar un cui, ba când am dispus să scoată atelierul meu propriu de dulgerie din souteraîn m-a amenințat că dacă în decurs de o oră nu voi aduce totul înapoi, mă va transporta și pe mine și atelierul cu jandarmi."

<sup>25</sup> The brick building in Secessionist style replaced an old wooden theatre dating back to 1874, on the current location of the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj.



Fig. 4 The Summer Theatre on the place of the current Hungarian Theatre of Cluj



Fig. 5 The Summer Theatre on the place of the current Hungarian Theatre of Cluj

The final section of the mentioned article approached the special condition of the summer theatre building in the context of the nationalizing of the cultural institutions in Transylvania. After significant efforts from all involved in honoring the programmed activities, Janovics started the plans to repair it. The ownership rights became an issue of debate, as the land beneath had been offered by the town council, but the erection of the building had been paid by Janovics personally. While he did not get any answer from the Town Council or the Department of Social Justice, Mărcuș insisted in his version of events that :

We must underline the fact that, on the occasion of taking over the theatre building, the existence of the Hungarian theatre company was fully insured and the renovations needed to be made to the summer theatre were made on the expenses and subsidies granted by the Romanian State and the public Romanian institutions. This was the way in which the Romanian State considered from the very start to protect the cultural progress of all minorities<sup>26</sup> (...). (484-485)

At the time, a written response from Janovics published in the local Hungarian papers regarding the crisis of his theatre prompted an immediate visit of a committee of experts at the end of March. The conclusions were the same, the building needed significant renovations but the proposed solution came as more than unexpected. He was assured that he could conceive a plan and proceed with applying it all while renting the building for twenty five years a period through which he could redeem the loan. Under the pressure of time, Janovics conceived a plan regarding only the absolutely needed immediate renovations and addressed it to the Department of Social Justice. He received no response and the local authorities dismissed the matter as not being under their jurisdiction.

Janovics ended his 1920 manifesto in a desperate note, reminding the fact that he represented one of the most important tax payers and demanded to know what had happened to the significant amount of money that the Governing Council had offered the Romanian Theatre. But regardless of his bitter remarks, he condemned the violation of a private contract and the confiscation of his personal belongings. He spoke of a memorandum written

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<sup>26</sup> In original Romanian: "Trebuie să accentuăm că, cu ocazia preluării clădirii Teatrului, existența trupei de teatru maghiar a fost pe deplin asigurată și reparațiile necesare la clădirea Teatrului de vară s-au făcut pe cheltueala și din subvențiile acordate de Statul Român și de instituțiile publice românești. Așa a înțeles Statul Român dela Început, să protejeze înaintarea culturală a tuturor minorităților (...)."



on 10 august 1919 in which he had anticipated the fate of the Hungarian theatre in Transylvania, this precise first instance of uncertainty regarding its future. However, it was an uncertainty equaling that of the Romanian theatre developing in Kolozsvár/Cluj. The fact that political factors ultimately failed to alter the mutual respect developed between the two cultural institutions of the city was proven by the warm words addressed by Jenő Janovics to Zaharia Bârsan<sup>27</sup> in 1925, “as brothers and colleagues, as professionals and devotees to Thalia<sup>28</sup>” (qtd. in Ceuca 74).

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<sup>27</sup> On the occasion of the Zaharia Bârsan’s celebration of twenty five years of theatrical activity.

<sup>28</sup> In original Romanian: “frați și colegi, ca profesioniști și devotați Thaliei”.

## *The story of a story: the Grigoriu Theatre Company*

OANA ILIE<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** At the beginning of the past century, tenor Constantin Grigoriu began gathering the outstanding members of the Romanian Lyrical Company, historically re-labelled „The Grigoriu Company” as an homage to its founder. Even if all its years of assiduous activity seem few when compared to the grand scale of time’s passing, the Grigoriu Company’s two decades of existence have left a mark upon the history of artistic life in Romania. This was due, in part, to its self-assumed status of „competitor” of the National Theatre, aiming to offer its regionally diverse public an alternative form of entertainment. Grigoriu also discovered and promoted grandiose performers the likes of Nicolae Leonard, Velimir Maximilian, Ciucurette, Carussy, Florica Florescu. The company contributed to the formation of an extraordinary generation of vaudeville singers too: Florica Cristoforeanu, Elena Drăgulinescu-Stinghe and Virginia Miciora were some of the most talented Romanian lyrical performers.

**Key Words:** Grigoriu Theatre Company, Romanian Lyrical Company

From a political perspective, the transitional period, between the 19th and 20th century and the beginning of the First World War, was dominated by sterile, small-scale confrontations, despite the hard work of the talented politicians of the time. There was notable progress in the economic sector, but due to its regretfully uneven effectiveness, it led to the preponderant development of agriculture and the extractive industry. Class division worsened, making the chasm between elites and masses painfully obvious. The most telling example in this case is the uprising of 1907, which hit Romanian society with the force of an earthquake, shaking it to its core. This schism was also observed by contemporaries, with Constantin Bacalbaşa

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pointing out that “in the midst of the uprising, the inhabitants of Bucharest are more preoccupied with the scandal of Elena Doamna Asylum or they peacefully strut to variety theatre shows featuring French cabaret, to the cinema or to Sidoli Circus, that advertises « Fights among Ladies »”.

Great changes took place in urbanism and local administration. Modernization manifested itself through local architectonic and urban regulations which unified specific aspects of the town. Thus, a planned expansion took place through the construction of new streets and the modifications brought to their previous arrangement, the creation of recreational spaces and the placement of buildings by taking into account their surroundings. The organization of a convenient urban lifestyle, featuring lighted streets, boulevards, a sewage system and public transport, was also taken into account.

Artistic life could not be left behind these profound changes in the fabric of Romanian society. Following the expansionist trend, theatrical movement evolved spectacularly. The administration of the Bucharest National Theatre was forced to readapt to new societal demands due to its frequent budget deficits by focusing more and more on the original plays of Romanian dramatists, which inherently led to a preponderance of shows held in Romanian. One of the densest regulation periods which led to the modernization of Romanian theatre took place during the directorship of Al. Davila.

Several theatre groups were created during that time, some of ephemeral existence, others responsible for the creation of alternative performance at the National Theatre. The competition between official theatre and private establishments could only pave the way for progress. The tours that took place all around the country, even in the provinces that were not part of Romania at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prompted cultural and social effervescence.

### **The Grigoriu Theatre Company**

The information regarding the company’s inception is incomplete and, excluding memoirs, heavily sourced in a report forwarded by Constantin A. Grigoriu to the Administration of the House of Arts in the autumn of 1905.

Thus, we discover that the first lyrical Romanian troupe was founded in 1903, when 50 artists and their band united in the “Romanian Lyrical Company” for five years, taking full responsibility of the society’s administration costs. Among them were Constantin A. Grigoriu, I. Băjenaru, N. Leonard, Elena Leonard, N. Niculescu-Buzău, Ionel Cigallia, Madeleine Sion, Anna Grand, Cr. Ștefănescu, Al. Gheorghiu, M. Fotino, Olga Culitza, Luisa Ferari, Adela Marinescu, Zoe Orban, Vasilichiea Dumitrescu, Anicuța Popescu, Elena Berlescu, Eliza Ionescu, Ștefania Călinescu, Paula Ionescu, Leontina Ioanid, Ch. Ionescu, V. Grigoriu, Sv. Picvan, D. Marinescu, E. Pethen, E. Nedelcu, V. Gh. Oboini, Eugenia Stelescu, D-tru Popescu, A. Luigi, C. Iliescu and others.

The artist N. Niculescu-Buzău recounts the tale of the company’s founding in his memoirs: “Right after the season ended, Mihail Stere came to me and proposed that I sign a contract for next summer. I told him I don’t want to become a part of such a deal with another fifty, sixty people. « You can gild me in gold and I wouldn’t do it. I’m used to a small group, but not this madness! ». Then C. Grigoriu offered to take Oteteleşanu Park for next summer.”<sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 1:** The Grigoriu Company, first decade of the XXth century

<sup>2</sup> N. Niculescu-Buzău, *Suveniruri teatrale*, (Bucarest: E.S.P.L.A., 1956), 113

During the epoch, the group's choice to perform at Oteteleşanu terrace was considered unwise. Over the years, Velimir Maximilian wrote: "Renting this place had many thinking that Grigoriu's idea is a stillborn. Oteteleşanu Park was unknown. It had only been used for a couple of parties thrown by Bucharest's aristocrats. There was also a rumor that the park's vegetation was a health hazard. The meaner-spirited said that alongside the park entry ticket, spectators should also buy a ticket for the Techirghiol mud baths. Rheumatism was a sure thing... People also said that the park was so damp and cold, that the owner of Tomek restaurant (that stood where Estrade Theatre is today) never bought ice in the summer. He would tie the wine bottles with rope, lower them into the park and lift them frozen after a minute."<sup>3</sup>

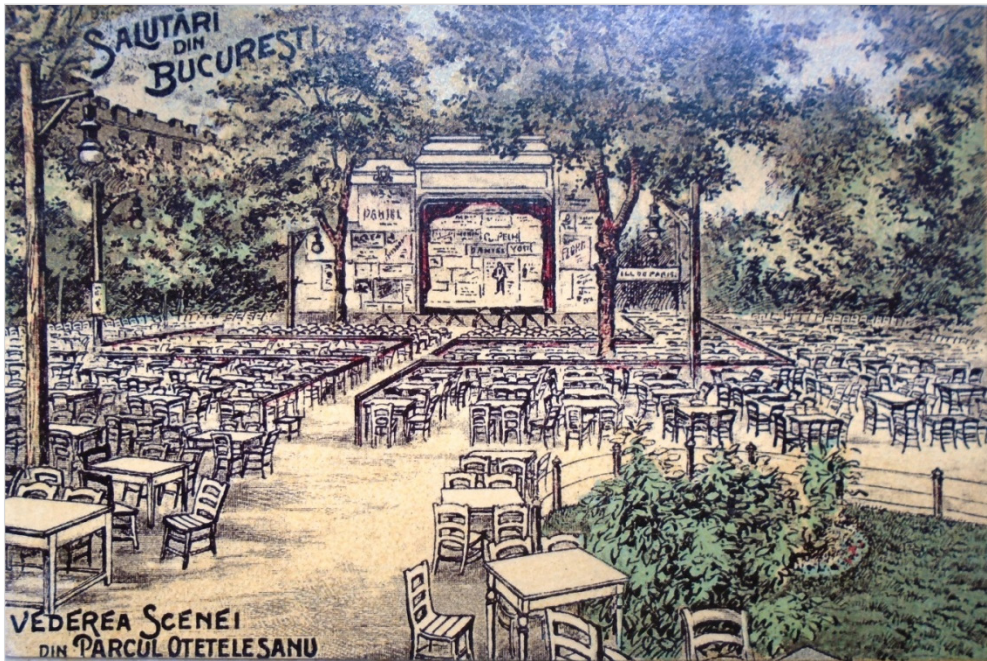


Fig. 2: Postcard with the Oteteleşanu Terrace and Summer Theatre

<sup>3</sup> Velimir Maximilian, *Evocări*, (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1962), 90

In his paper titled “Romanian Theatre”, Ioan Massoff proposes the following people as part of the founding troupe: tenors I. Băjenaru, Al. Bărcănescu, C. Stănescu-Cerna, bass D. Theodorescu, artists G. Niculescu-Basu, Velimir Maximilian, N. Niculescu-Buzău, N.P. Ciucurette, G. Carussy, Ion Cigallia, Margareta Dan, Elena Teodorescu, Aura Mihăilescu, Virginia Micioara, Leontina Ioanid, Ana Grand, band leaders O. Spirescu and I. Neuwirth, directors N. Elinescu and G. Dimitriu-Mitu. He is also the one to record the season’s opening performance of *The Princess from Canari* (music by Charles Lecocq), which took place at Oteteleşanu terrace, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1904, with Nae Ciucurette, Ion Băjenaru, N. Niculescu-Buzău, G. Carussy, Velimir Maximilian, Leontina Ioanid, Anna Grand in the main roles. In his memoir, Velimir Maximilian claims that the performance took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, “two times thirteen, said the superstitious”. It seems that these credulous fears were justified- the play wasn’t as successful as planned, and after a second performance that failed to engage the audience, it was definitively removed from the repertoire.

The newly-created troupe would perform at Oteteleşanu terrace during the summer and at the Bucharest National Theatre during the winter, or in various establishments around the country (in Galați, Brăila, Iași, Craiova), collecting “praise for Romanian talent”, as C-tin Grigoriu writes in his memoir; Ioan Massoff states that performances also took place in the Lyrical and Modern (formerly known as Edison) Theatres.

Because the play that had been chosen for the debut was a nonsuccess, Grigoriu decided to continue the season with *Spring Wind* (music by Joseph Strauss) featuring N. Leonard, Carussy, Leontina Ioanid, Al. Bărcănescu, Margareta Dan and N. Niculescu-Buzău. I. Massoff also recalls a performance of *The Fairytale with the Princess from the Dream* (Al. Davila) in the Cotroceni garden, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 1904, with Princess Maria playing the Princess from the Dream.<sup>4</sup>

Shows such as *The Vagabonds*, *The Model*, *Boccaccio*, *Races-barbecues!*, *The Gypsy King*, *Sweet Girlies*, *The Drum Major’s Daughter*, *Crispino*, *The Tittle-Tattler* were added to the debut season’s repertoire list.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc* (vol. IV), (Bucarest: Editura Minerva, 1972), xx

<sup>5</sup> see Vera Molea, *Teatrele din grădinile de vară ale Bucureștilor de altădată*, (Bucarest: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011), 71 and Nicușor Constantinescu, “Cu Elena Mavrodi despre ea și alții”, în *Rampa*, 1926, apud Vera Molea, “Constantin Grigoriu și începuturile operei române” in <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/constantin-grigoriu-si-inceputurile-opereiei-romanesti>.



**Fig. 3:** The artists N. Leonard and his wife, Elena Leonard

At the end of the first season, in September, Grigoriu disbands the troupe only to reunite it one year later, after having recruited new talent, among which Leonard. They perform *The Wizards of the Nile* (translation by Paul Gusty), *Roam the World*, *The New-York Beauty* (Sidney), and *The Happy Heirs* (Winterberg)<sup>6</sup>. Elena Mavrodi recalls the Company's activity in 1905. "On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1905 we went on tour. (...) During those times, actors would travel in first class train carriages and stay in one town for a week to play about 14-15 different vaudevilles. We were in Brăila and Galați for a month. 21 days were spent in Iași. 15 days in Botoșani, and in Craiova another month. (...) In Iași, for instance, our arrival was considered as important as a holiday. The ladies would prepare the outfits they would

<sup>6</sup> N. Niculescu-Buzău, *Suveniruri teatrale*, 113



flaunt at premiers ahead of time. Back then, theatres were like racing booths: real fashion shows. But Grigoriu disbanded the company at Christmas. Its administration was taken over by Niculescu-Buzău and Leonard, who remained until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April.”<sup>7</sup>

There were two reasons behind the disbanding of the group during the long tours of winter: some of the company’s stars signed contracts with the National Theatre and would start work there in October, while the others had no place of their own in which to perform during the cold season. Very few places were suitable for theatre/opera/vaudeville: the National Theatre, The Lyrical Theatre and the Modern Theatre, whose rent fees were much too expensive for a debuting company. But...It was all for the best. The tours contributed to the popularization of vaudeville in the countryside and helped animate artistic and social life wherever Grigoriu’s company would settle down for a while.

No more relevant information about Grigoriu’s troupe is to be found in the archives until the record of autumn 1905. Upon a closer inspection, it becomes clear that it was no easy feat to be an artist at the commencement of the past century; regardless of how assiduously the members tried to survive solely by way of the profession they had dedicated themselves to with pride and passion, state subventions given to theatres were necessary to ensure that Constantin A. Grigoriu’s company would remain on the market. “No matter how many sacrifices the private initiative makes, it is fighting a difficult battle for the progress of theatrical music against the hindrances fatally encountered in our country.”<sup>8</sup> In order to support his enterprise, C-tin A. Grigoriu also made a presentation of the history of the vaudeville theatre movement, whose debut he places in 1884, when the first attempts to introduce Opera and vaudeville in Romania were made and the first valuable performers emerged, “transcendent in the glory of our people and beyond borders”<sup>9</sup>.

The private initiative had an important role in the advent and evolution of vaudeville theatre, which was initially supported by the state through subventions. The Minister of Education, Take Ionescu, offered a

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<sup>7</sup> Nicușor Constantinescu, “Cu Elena Mavrodi despre ea și alții”, în *Rampa*, 1926, apud Vera Molea, “Constantin Grigoriu și începuturile operei române” in <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/constantin-grigoriu-si-inceputurile-opereiei-romanesti>.

<sup>8</sup> Serviciul Arhive Naționale Istorice Centrale (SANIC), a fund of the Ministry of Arts, dossier 147/ 1906, f. 139

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem



subvention of 20.000 lei in 1895 for the Romanian Opera and Vaudeville, which later on grew to be 40.000 lei. "A whole movement, a true artistic event has its foundation stone in this attempt. While the private initiative has made titanic efforts, never backing down from any sacrifice, it could only accomplish what was possible; and when all possibilities were exhausted, the authority responsible for the protection of intellectual and artistic movements comes in with the rescue boat."<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that during the directorship of Wachmann the Romanian Opera and Vaudeville made progress, the dissolution of the Opera compromised the future of a brilliant group of young Romanian artists. The subventions that were given up until that point to the Opera were now redirected towards foreign troupes. "Here we are then in front of the following painting: a national castle full of riches, with sumptuous dining tables, sheltering and feeding foreigners, while out the windows one might notice prurient Romanian artists with 20 years of work as capital and scores of talented graduates of our Conservatories. Performance made the Romanian heart bleed and that was when we rebuilt our society, once more thanks to private initiative, under the leadership of the distinguished master G. Ștefănescu."<sup>11</sup>

After sending in an official statement to the Directorate of Arts, C-tin A. Grigoriu writes an account to the Ministry of Public Instruction through which he motivates his refusal to solicit subvention: "It would be the worst gesture towards art and the taste of the general public, already tainted, to ease the lingering of vaudevilles that are, in their vast majority, null, or even distasteful, from both a musical and literary perspective."<sup>12</sup> A solution is also agreed upon, conditioning Mr. Grigoriu to respect certain commitments towards the ministry regarding his troupe, its repertoire and its performance style.

While these undertakings were ongoing, Constantin A. Grigoriu sent a statement to the ministry through which he solicited to become manager of the Opera for five years, commencing with the 1907 season, so as to offer comical opera and vaudeville shows at Bucharest National Theatre (for three months, during winter) and in the countryside for the remainder of the year. It wasn't only the need for money that prompted Grigoriu to take this step (although subvention was about 20.000 lei annually), but also the fact that Al. Davila, director of the National Theatre, asked him to renounce concessions he had in the building.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>12</sup> SANIC, a fund of the Ministry of Arts, dossier 147/ 1906, f. 134

After having left the National Theatre, Grigoriu's troupe (Margareta Dan, Elena Leonard, Florica Florescu, Ana Grand, Virginia Miciora, Leontina Ioanid, Ana Berlescu, Ioan Băjenaru, N. Leonard, Vasile Toneanu, C-tin Tănase, Alexandru Catopol, N. Niculescu-Buzău, Ionel Cigallia, Grigore Petrovicescu, Mișu Ștefănescu) performs the following vaudevilles at Oteteleşanu terrace: *The Washwoman's Daughter*, *The Gypsy King*, *Virgin Asylum*, *If I'd be King*, *Boccaccio*, *Clereta Concentrating*, *Danger*, *Voyage to China*, *The Mascot*, *Sweet Girlie*, *Ragamuffin*, *Races-barbecues*, *Small Mouth to Sample*, *Spring Wind*. Seeing how Leonard had gone to Paris to study the performances being held over there, Grigoriu opts for comedies instead of vaudevilles. After Vasile Toneanu from the National Theatre joins the group, they stage *A Debauchery* and *Ștrul Nuță*. Seeing how these fail to be successful Grigoriu decides they should opt for *The Merry Widow*. The first performances that happened during Leonard's absence did not attract great audiences, so the group went back to comedies.



**Fig. 4:** Three of the important artists of the Grigoriu Company: Velimir Maximilian, G. Carussy and N. P. Ciucurette

Not even a year had passed from the world premiere of *The Merry Widow* at the Theater der Wien, when on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1906 it was staged by the company with Leonard as the lead and music by Franz Lehar. After his performance in this show, he would thenceforth be known as “the prince of opera”. On the other hand, Leonard’s success was overshadowed by Maximilian, Ciucurette and Carussy’s catastrophic decision to leave the troupe to act at Blanduzia Garden. The “divorce” was not an amiable one, and it seemed to have been rooted in a conflict between C-tin Grigoriu and Ciucurette. Despite all this, the three stars would return a year later.

In the year of their factionalism, C-tin Tănase stars in *Boccaccio*, *Sibyl* and *Air Girl* alongside N. Leonard and Lucreția Brezeanu.

After the arrival of autumn, the tour is on the brink of recommencing and it is decided that it should take place between September 1906 and January 1907, featuring a repertoire which consisted of *The Merry Widow*, *The Charm of a Waltz*, *Three Wishes* and *The Island of Flowers*. The actual debut happened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1906, with week-long performances in Brăila, Galați, Craiova and three days of shows in Roman, Bârlad, Bacău, Focșani, Buzău, Ploiești. In Iași, no suitable venue was available and thus the troupe returned to Bucharest.<sup>13</sup> Wanting to prolong the tour, certain artists decided to form smaller troupes (with members from Grigoriu’s company) so as to continue performing in towns where Grigoriu’s group hadn’t been. It is the case of the „Niculescu-Buzău – N. Leonard” troupe, that performed in Vaslui, Râmnicu-Sărat, Mizil, Târgu-Jiu, Drăgășani, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Turnu-Măgurele.

Niculescu-Buzău recounts about the show in Turnu-Măgurele: “We got there (...) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1907. The whole venue had only 200 seats. We started our first show with “The Bird Hunter”. Full house. First act goes by. During the break, people step out for a smoke (...). We change the décor and announce the beginning of the second act. We ring once, twice, thrice, but nobody comes back in. What could it be? How strange! Nobody returns to the venue. (...) Then what do they tell me? They tell me that the peasants around Alexandria city had raided the town and left it devastated, especially certain manors of near-by estates. The people had run back to their homes. (...) We went to the hotel too. (...) We stayed in Turnu-Măgurele for 15 days without performing. In the meantime, the conservatives had surrendered the reigns of the government to the liberals (...).” The peasant uprising happened while they were in Turnu-Măgurele.

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<sup>13</sup> N. Niculescu-Buzău, *Suveniruri teatrale*, 131.

Many peasants were hit by the horsemen's swords or spears, and some were trampled by the horses. I was an eye-witness to this terrible carnage; I observed this barbaric response the authorities thought best to offer to those demanding their rights (...)<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 5:** The cover of the Minerva calendar, from 1912, illustrated with the photographs of the artists Florica Cristoforeanu, Oscar Spireanu, Elena Apăteanu and C. Grigoriu.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 132-133.

C-tin Grigoriu returns to his pursuit of the management position at the opera with a more detailed offer in March 1907. To receive this concession, he promises to hire Romanian artists, the only exception in the case of foreign staff additions being celebrities; he plans to offer job stability to performers by signing contracts binding for 11 months a year, to perform opera, comical opera and vaudeville, to self-finance production costs (décor, costumes etc.), to have his own venue for rehearsals in Bucharest (The Lyrical Theatre) where he will also perform a minimum of 40 times during the winter (thus ceasing to bother the National Theatre performers with his rehearsal schedule, as he had done before). He proposed a troupe of minimum 40 Romanian artists, with the possibility of expanding this team through the creation of a ballet group.<sup>15</sup>

For a concession of five years (the maximum period), Grigoriu's offer stipulated a performance season in Bucharest at the Lyrical Theatre between the 15<sup>th</sup> of January and the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, a summer schedule between the 1<sup>st</sup> of May and the 1<sup>st</sup> of September and four months in the countryside (Iași, Craiova etc.). He also took it upon himself to offer an annual prize for a Romanian dramatic piece and to hire the four top graduates of the Conservatory every year. <sup>16</sup>As a possible repertoire, he had nominated the plays *Zaza*, *Hoffman's Stories*, *Orpheus in Hell*, *A Thousand and One Nights*, *A Dream of a Waltz*, *The Student-Beggar* (a novelty) and as artists, for the opera he proposed: Băjenaru (tenor), Alexiu (bass), Petrovicescu (baritone), Ghimpețeanu (baritone) and the ladies Natalia Otta, Herescu, Mary Dan, El. Leonard; for vaudeville: Anna Grand, B. Movilă, Aur. Maximilian, Teodoru, V. Maximilian, Carussy, Ciucurette, Leonard, Al. Gheorghiu, Al. Ștefănescu. In addition to them, there was also a choir of 30 people, the vaudeville orchestra, made up of 24 people, the opera orchestra– 30-35 people; the ballet consisted of a foreign master, 2 main ballet dancers (also foreign) and 12-16 Romanian pupils.<sup>17</sup>

When this offer was defined, the Romanian Lyrical Company had 70 employees, most of which were graduates of the Bucharest or Iași Conservatory; they performed vaudevilles, operas and comical operas in Romanian, having a repertoire of 40 plays. In addition, Grigoriu's troupe did not survive on the state's subventions, even if it had received certain sums from the ministry.

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<sup>15</sup> SANIC, a fund of the Ministry of Arts, dossier 147/ 1906, f. 140

<sup>16</sup> SANIC, a fund of the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction, dossier 2250/ 1907, f. 3

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

In the cultural scenery of 1907, a proposition even more outrageous than Grigoriu's insinuates itself, asking for the reinstatement of the Romanian Opera within Bucharest National Theatre (BNT). Among the people who signed this document, dated May 15<sup>th</sup> 1907, there is also conductor George Stephănescu (the founder of the BNT opera troupe). The motivation behind this endeavour is important to our study because it sheds light on the beginnings of Romanian opera and vaudeville. The first attempts to found a national Opera go back to 1873; a first season of performances took place in 1885, with the famous Adelina Patti invited to star in *Traviata*, but their success was short lived because of rather subjective reasons: the star was sometimes "welcomed" and other times "shunned" from BNT. In addition, the inflation of shows (that were low-quality because of insufficient rehearsals, a problem prominent among Romanian artists), the great number of artists brought in from abroad (whose fees directly influenced the high cost of shows) and the placement of Romanian artists in supporting roles caused the demise of this type of performances and the disappearance of Romanian Opera.<sup>18</sup>

In an attempt to meet the public's opera and vaudeville needs, artists reverted to managed troupes through which they could request state subventions according to the theatre law under the pretext that Romanians performed in them. Because this solution was unsatisfactory, a large segment of artists solicited the reinstatement of the opera, motivating their gesture by invoking their need for stability and for the creation of a job market for the graduates of the Conservatory (seven classes in Iași and one in Bucharest every study cycle).

This movement remains unheard during the epoch; the ministry chose to focus on the managed troupes, which seemed much more profitable at the time. Grigoriu's offer was not unique. The atmosphere was that of "bidding", with several people sending in workbooks recording their responsibilities in exchange for the ministry's subvention.

Thus, in exchange for the subvention, Spirescu and Feder pledged to hire a troupe of Romanian artists to perform 3-4 plays in Romanian (for example, *The Rustic Cavalry*, *Rigoletto*), to invite lady Olympia Mărculescu from the Grand Opera of Paris to perform with them, to bring over a complete troupe for dramatic opera made up of first rank Italian artists and to hire the choirs and orchestras of the ministry. Because they had no venue

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, f. 5-7

at their disposal, they proposed a rent of 200 lei/night for the 1907-08' performance season and separate payment for illumination expenses, heating and maintenance; later on, the rent would be calculated proportionally to their subvention. They solicited the concurrence of BNT, which was supposed to offer them a venue and access to costumes and music sheets.<sup>19</sup>

Franassovici (who had been manager during the 1906-07' season) had an offer which encapsulated a rent of 4000 lei/ month for lighting, heating, miscellaneous services, costumes, décor, props, a troupe with "most superior elements" (which included famous foreign artists such as Luisa Tatrzzini, Hariclea Darclée, Edoardo Garbin, Mattia Battistini, Arturo Franceschini) and three shows a week between the 15<sup>th</sup> of October and the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. He pledged that the ballet (excluding the soloists) and choir would consist only of Romanians.<sup>20</sup>

The fourth offer belongs to colonel D. Gheorghe and contains similar elements: annual performance season between the 20<sup>th</sup> of October and the 20<sup>th</sup> of November with three shows a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday), a repertoire of masterpieces, preponderantly Romanian personnel. He was also lacking a venue and costumes, but proposed that the costs of décor and costumes be covered by the Opera, despite the props remaining property of BNT. Furthermore, in exchange for an annual growth of the five year subvention, he promised to stage Eduard Caudella's *Petru Rareș* again and to showcase a new Romanian opera annually beginning with 1909, provided that there was "a Romanian composer such as Enescu or Stephănescu to write it"<sup>21</sup>. A report was later on attached to this offer announcing that the famous manager Jean Feder had been chosen as head of the administration (he had organized some of the most accomplished performances of the past years)<sup>22</sup>.

All of the above-mentioned offers were analyzed at the ministry by Ștefan Sihleanu, who wrote in his report that of all propositions, "the most acceptable one belongs to Mr. Grigoriu, with certain modifications, because the troupe employs many Romanian artists, the vast majority of whom have graduated the Conservatory. It has a choir and a ballet. Unlike other groups, this one is cohesive due to many years of collaborative work. Because this troupe has seniority, its members do not squander their time and efforts to look for other sources of income. He won important points by pledging to

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<sup>19</sup> SANIC, a fund of the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction, dossier 2250/ 1907, f. 10

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, f.14

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, f.15

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, f.16

perform around the country, thus contributing to the diffusion of artistic inclinations." It mattered just as much that he had taken it upon himself to hire Romanian artists, graduates of the Conservatory, but the most important aspect was the fact that he had access to the Lyrical Theatre.<sup>23</sup>

After receiving this report, the Ministry announced the Grigorescu Company that it had received a three year concession according to their conditions, but with the following modifications: out of 40 performances, a minimum of 25 needed to be comical opera shows; the tickets for shows featuring foreign artists could not exceed a 50% addition to normal BNT fees; there should be one performance free of charge at one of the three national theatres in order to support the provisional fund for said theatres' dramatic artists; a number of representations would be held in Iași and Craiova; in the case of extraordinary performances at the BNT, they would have to pay 250 lei/evening rent.<sup>24</sup>

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1907, C-tin Grigoriu answers the official notice, stating that "I partially accept the conditions proffered" and annexes a contract proposition based on his offer, integrating the changes requested by the ministry. The differences between his version and that of the ministry are minor; Grigoriu stipulates in the contract that he will pay 200lei/ evening rent (not the requested 250), that he will negotiate the price of tickets with the ministry when it comes to celebrity performances, noting that they must take into account the artist's honorary fee, and that the BNT should not be allowed to rent the venue while they perform (even if at the Lyrical Theatre), so as not to create unwanted competition.<sup>25</sup>

During C-tin Grigoriu's epistolary exchange with the ministry, the troupe (consisting of Ioan Băjenaru, N. Leonard, V. Maximilian, N. Ciucurette, N. Soreanu, G. Carussy, Grigore Petrovicescu, Al. Gheorghiu, Marietta Ionașcu, Margareta Dan, Ana Grand, Elena Leonard, Elena Mavrodi) continues to perform the shows *The Ghost of Dâmbovița River*, *Artist's Strings* (Edmund Eysler), *The Merry Widow* (Lehar), *Races-barbecues*, *The King of Hunters* (Lehar) featuring N.P. Ciucurette, *The Happy Heirs* featuring N. Soreanu, *The Vagabonds*, *Sweet Girlie*, *The Opera's Ball* (V. Leon, Walberg), *The Bat* (Johann Strauss the son) featuring N. Leonard, Elena Leonard, Margareta Dan, V. Maximilian, Marietta Ionașcu, and *Nini* at Oteteleşanu terrace.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> SANIC, a fund of the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction, dossier 2250/ 1907, f.29-30

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, f.28

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, f.33

<sup>26</sup> Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc* (vol. IV), (Bucarest: Editura Minerva, 1972)





Fig. 6: The artists Elena Leonard and Florica Florescu

In the summer of 1907, Maximilian, Leonard and Vasile Soreanu go to Vienna to study Viennese opera. They return at the beginning of fall and join the Company's tour in Iași alongside Marieta Ionașcu, Florica Florescu, Margareta Dan, Elena Mavrodi, Ana Grand, Ion Băjenaru, Ciucurette, Carussy, Gheorghiu, Petrovicescu. The first performance took place at Sidoli Circus on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September. Thereafter, the tour was extended (there were no openings at the Lyrical Theatre) and shows were also held in Bârlad, Focșani, Bacău, Roman, Botoșani and Craiova.

A new name made its way in Grigoriu's troupe: Florica Florescu. She left an impression on C-tin Grigoriu while performing at the Craiova Theatre. When speaking about her meeting with Grigoriu, the artist said: "It wasn't just the pay that seduced me. He dictated dignified conditions and described perspectives to me; he showed me a theatrical soul of a kind I had never seen before. To me, he was an embodiment of the ideal dramatist and that sensation never left me while we worked together. As a director, Grigoriu was admirable. I'm convinced that if he would be alive today,

vaudeville would be alive in our country. He always encouraged young elements and gave them opportunities to prove their worth, but what's most important is that he was keen on discovering them. This is what vaudeville desperately needs: youth."<sup>27</sup>

Once they returned to Bucharest, the Company's artists opened the first winter performance season at the end of January 1908 with *A Thousand and One Nights* (Johann Strauss), *The Charm of a Waltz*, *The Sold Bride* (Smetana), *Hoffman's Stories* (Offenbach), *Don Pasquale* (Donizetti), *Cio-cio-san* (Puccini), *Hansel and Gretel* (Humperfing) and *Werther* (Massenet). For these shows, Natalia Otto, Mihail Nasta, Liviu Macedonescu, Andrei Niculescu and Gr. Alexiu were hired.<sup>28</sup> The normal season was opened on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May with *The Charm of a Waltz* and continued with *Artist's Strings*, *The Gypsy King*, *The Little Princess*, *The Merry Widow*, *Lumpatius Vagabondus*, *Parisian Life*, *Him and Her*, *Voyage to Africa*, *The Bat*, *The King of Hunters* etc.

The humoristic magazine *Furnica* wrote about the troupe's success: "because we predict an avalanche of music lovers come to say good bye to the artists that enchanted them all summer, Mr. Grigoriu ought to install some hammocks in the trees, otherwise the audience won't fit, no matter how vast Oteteleşanu park. A performance such as this one ought to take place in the Bărăgan fields, but there's still a chance that even there people would complain that it's too crowded."<sup>29</sup>

During the next season, with the same troupe as in 1908 (Velimir Maximilian, Nicolae Leonard, Nae Ciucurette, Gogu Carussy, Grigore Petrovicescu, Const. Stănescu-Cerna, Nicolae Soreanu, Marietta Ionaşcu, Anna Grand, Virginia Miciora, Elena Teodorescu-Leonard, Elena Apăteanu), shows such as *Hussars during Maneuvers*, *The Merry Widow*, *The Dollar Princess*, *Night in Vienna*, *Artists' Strings*, *The Bat*, *The Charm of a Waltz* and *After the Divorce* were staged. Because the Lyrical Theatre was now owned by Leon Popescu, the season of 1909-1910 took place at the Modern Theatre.

That same year, to avoid another 1906 moment, when the company's biggest stars chose to perform separately from the troupe, C-tin Grigoriu asked Leonard, Ciucurette and Maximilian to become partners in the company's administration. Another turning point would present itself in

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<sup>27</sup> Nicușor Constantinescu, „Cu Florica Florescu despre ea și despre alții”, *Rampa*, year XIII, no. 3226, 22 October 1928

<sup>28</sup> Velimir Maximilian, *Evocări*, (Bucarest: Editura Meridiane, 1962), 124

<sup>29</sup> *Furnica*, year IV, 11th of September 1908

1912. Leonard wanted to be featured in operas and threatened Grigoriu with his resignation if he wouldn't comply with his requests. The only one supporting him was Velimir Maximilian, while the other artists were openly against the idea, considering the whole ordeal too risky. "Poor Grigoriu had been caught between two stools. He was always putting things off. Even if he was Leonard's godfather for his first marriage, he still couldn't tell him that his voice wasn't suited for opera."<sup>30</sup> A streak of unexpected luck came... straight from Leonard, who, dealing with vocal indisposition, gave up his aspirations for opera.

Sadly, the story was coming to an end. In 1913, after the commencement of the second Balkan War, Grigoriu decided to disband the troupe because the conflict with Bulgaria was seen as a state of emergency in which contracts became meaningless. Left leaderless, the group chose Velimir Maximilian as its new manager. His "directorship" was off to a rocky start because in 1914, a short while after the death of the troupe's founder, Florica Florescu, Nae Ciucurette and Carussy definitively left the company to act at Blanduzia Garden alongside Anna Grand, Marioara Cinski and Stănescu-Cerna in Carussy's newly created group.

Even if Maximilian adapted quickly, replacing those who had resigned with Anny Aurian, Natalia Macri, Zizi Roșianu and George Timică and working on the shows that were most popular during the epoch, he did not manage to rent out Oteteleşanu garden anymore (their place had been taken by Grigore Gabrilescu's troupe). In its attempted survival, the group organized a tour in Constanța (during which Carussy had returned). The losses vastly outweighed the winnings. Without taking into account the financial point of view, at the end of their contract with the Constanța Casino, many artists asked to be let go and refused to go back to Bucharest. With plenty of stand-ins and no orchestra (which had remained in Constanța to play), the group went to Brăila. They then performed in Galați, Bârlad and Focșani. The troupe was becoming smaller as the days went by (recruitments had also begun and many of the artists were called upon to defend their country). The audience was becoming smaller too.

The remaining members returned to Bucharest to prepare the following season's performances. In August 1916, after the German troops had occupied the capital, shows in summer gardens were banned. They begin again one year later, but the genre had already started to slowly fade into obscurity.

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<sup>30</sup> Velimir Maximilian, *Evocări*, 171.

During the First World War, the Grigoriu Company did not seek shelter in retreats, but chose instead to lift the spirits of occupied Bucharest. Many of their shows were removed from the advertisements by German censorship. The troupe itself had become a ghost of its former glory, with Maximilian and Leonard the only remaining members from the original formation.



Fig. 7: The Square in front of the National Theatre with the Oteteleşanu Terrace in the background, on the right, 1915.

At the end of the war, a new type of theatre, which had become extremely significant when it came to raising the morale of the troops and the wounded, started gaining more and more admirers. This was variety theatre, in which Constantin Tănase excelled. The shift in the preferences of the masses naturally led to the disappearance of the Grigoriu Company, whose activity is said to have ended in 1923, when Velimir Maximilian joined the Bulandra Company. Last man standing, Leonard attempts to resuscitate the genre by founding his own company.

By comparing the lists of artists belonging to the troupe, one can notice a permanent fluctuation in members, even if the nucleus-group was maintained for a long period of time. Thus, one of the founding members, tenor N. Niculescu-Buzău, started his own troupe as early as the summer of 1907 (alongside Cazimir Belcot, G. Achile, Mișu Fotino, Olga Culitza, Mișu Ștefănescu, C. B. Penel, Al. Demetrescu-Dan, Avram Nicolau, Pepi Moor, Jenny Ioanid, Alexandrina Alexandrescu, Betina Săvulescu and others), performing at Ambassadors Garden and in cross-country tours.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, at the end of every season, the artists were free to perform in other troupes or to go on tours.



**Fig. 8:** The artists N. Leonard and Florica Christoforeanu



**Fig. 9:** The artists V. Maximilian and N.P. Ciucurette

<sup>31</sup> Cervatiuc Ștefan, *Istoria teatrului la Botoșani. 1848-1944*, vol. II (1900-1924), Editura Quadrat, Botoșani, 2010, 73



Because the reputed journalist and theatre specialist Ioan Massoff, born in the year of Grigoriu Company's debut, chose to rely on statistics (members, repertoire), giving less importance to the characters of theatre history about which he wrote during the inter-war period, we shall try to trace a portrait of the troupe's members using memorial pieces, the press and the literature of the time.

Who actually was Constantin Grigoriu? There is very few information archived about him. He is mentioned in a file from 1924, in a centralization sheet of Romanian artists titled "Synoptic Representation of Drama, Comedy, Tragedy and Musical Artists that Have Graced the Romanian Stages from 1819 to present"; in the entry corresponding to his name one can read "1877", "Bucharest", "light tenor and director". The dating is done in the column generically titled "Epoch", from which we can deduce when his debut took place.



**Fig. 10:** The artists Maximilian and Florica Florescu



**Fig. 11:** The artists V. Micioara and N. Leonard

Born in Iași on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1866, Grigoriu was “discovered” by Gavril Muzicescu, who included him in the choir at 9 years of age. Passionate about music, he studied opera at the Iași Conservatory (1884-1886) and transferred to the one in Bucharest in 1887. After graduation, he was hired as a tenor by the Bucharest National Theatre. He also performed with private vaudeville troupes alongside actors Ion Brezeanu, Petre Liciu, Lucreția Brezeanu (in Nicu Poenaru’s group) and in Grigore Gabrielescu’s troupe. He was a soloist in G. Stephănescu’s lyrical company.

He was also a talented writer, responsible for two extremely successful pieces of the epoch: “The Fairy of the Carpathians” and “Don’ Vagmistru”. He wrote for many publications of his time and taught at the Pompilian Institute. His activity was not restricted to Bucharest, but also encompassed the countryside, Iași, Craiova and Chișinău, “across the border”.

In a history of Romanian ballet, Grigoriu is named as a founding figure due to the ballet group within his company. His even bigger merit was attempting to create a ballet school and associating with Oscar Schmidt in order to see it through. The choreography school was opened in 1908, but there was not much interest among young ladies. As proof, a surviving postcard sent to Grigoriu on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1908 by Oscar Schmidt informs him that the girls do not enroll for classes because they don’t see the point of them as long as there is no job security. A proposed solution was hiring the young trainees at the Lyrical Theatre.<sup>32</sup>

1908 was a year rich in significant events in the history of C-tin Grigoriu and the Romanian Lyrical Company. This was also the year in which their first international tour took place, with leading figures V. Miciora, N. Leonard, Elena Leonard and V. Maximilian performing two very well-received shows in Chișinău.<sup>33</sup>

Constantin Grigoriu was also a grand talent scout, with people such as Nicolae Leonard, Velimir Maximilian, Ciucurette, Carussy and Florica Florescu unbreakably bound to the name of the Grigoriu Company. He also contributed to the formation of a generation of vaudeville singers such as Florica Cristoforeanu, Elena Drăgulinescu-Stinghe and Virginia Miciora, who became some of the greatest Romanian lyrical artists.

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<sup>32</sup> see “Baletul în România, considerații istorice (1)” pe <http://baletromania.ro/baletul-in-romania-consideratii-istorice>

<sup>33</sup> Traian Ichim, “Evoluția fenomenului operistic în Basarabia la începutul secolului al XX-lea”, in *Intertext*, 1-2/ 2016, 289.

When Grigoriu left the troupe's directorship in 1913, this revealed to the remaining members that aside from his uncontested talent, he had been an extraordinary leader and the only element to keep them together for so many years. Later on, Velimir Maximilian would confess that during those moments it was hard for them to accept that "vaudeville was Grigoriu himself".

This is the story of the Grigoriu Company, although we must admit that the story of a story cannot come to an end without some lines dedicated to the artists that were part of this outstanding group. Sadly, the only information available about most of them is but their name, listed in the cast list of a show at the beginning of the past century.

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## *Aesthetic Perspectives in Romanian Theatre at the End of the First World War*

ION CAZABAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The years 1919-1921 were years of nostalgia and imperative claims for the Romanian stage, years of useful comparisons with the achievements of the theatrical movements from other countries, of explorations in search for the best solutions, of enthusiastic impetuses and efforts to reach lucidity. This paper looks at the main issues and aesthetic ideas that were manifest during the controversies provoked by the premieres of several important theatrical productions within the above mentioned length of time. It also looks at the initiatives of certain cultural associations and at the discussions concerning the modern expressiveness of theatre and the creative role of the theatre director. Special consideration is given to the program and achievements of the National Theatre from Bucharest during the short period when it was led by the writer Victor Eftimiu.<sup>2</sup>

**Key words:** Romanian theatre, interwar, Bucharest, Victor Eftimiu, aesthetic ideas

Before the expressionistic enactments of Karl Heinz Martin, the experiments attempted by Marioara Voiculescu at Sidoli Circus, Armand Pascal and B. Fundoianu at "Insula," Ion Marin Sadoveanu and the "Poesis" group at the Athenaeum or Șt. I. Nenițescu at the "Teatrul Liber," before Sandu Eliad's avant-garde demonstrations for "new art," were the years 1919-1921... These scenic events – which were the turning point of our theatrical life – cannot find their complete significance in the absence of this prelude: a summary of both the values of tradition and the innovative aspirations suppressed or delayed by the war. Since nothing is ever borne

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<sup>2</sup> Translated in English by Diana Melnic

out of nothing, 1919-1921 are years of nostalgias and imperative demands, of useful comparisons and pursuits of necessary solutions, of enthusiastic impetuses and struggles for lucidity. They are years when, in the turmoil of its ambitions, the theatre lives with intensity its artistic and ideological contradictions. It experiences sharply its practical shortcomings, and yet it manifests in multiple preparatory explorations.



Fig. 1: Front page of the Journal *Teatrul de Mâine*, Year 1, no 14, 1 March 1919

At the time, much was written about the theatre “of tomorrow,” which could not be accomplished immediately, for it could no longer be a mere replay of what was before, but rather a continuation of it. As such, it had to be thought-out in relation to the social realities imposed after the global conflict, as well as to our cultural necessities and creative possibilities. A magazine actually titled *Teatrul de mâine*<sup>3</sup> (1918-1920) appeared, as its editors declared,

<sup>3</sup> “Teatrul de mâine” [“The Theatre of Tomorrow”], *Teatrul de mâine* I, no. 12, (January 15, 1919).

with its “eyes” looking up to the theatre “of tomorrow,” in the hope of at least creating an auspicious environment for the latter, if not witnessing its very becoming. But the theatre “of tomorrow” was nothing more than one generated by the present, by atrocious times, and by the exasperated sensibility and the violent tendencies of a humanity that had seen decisive, tragic experiences<sup>4</sup>. Although the magazine would discredit itself – through its superficial journalistic style, rushed and precarious research, the intrusion of personal interests upon the artistic ideal, and its declared ethical principles – it would assert itself, at the time, through the conversation it initiated regarding what the theatre of tomorrow ought to have been. A “sentimentalist” performance with its “old themes” could no longer impress anyone, except perhaps some “backward” viewer. Following the bloody clash of the war, the theatre of tomorrow would be that of social problems, and would aspire to a simpler, more direct expression, without much artifice. The text – rhetorical and imperious – was almost a manifesto, probably the first in our theatrical movement at the time<sup>5</sup>. Faced with humanity tried with deep pain, but determined to cover the traces of the war, the theatre had to shake off any glittering embellishment or artifice, which oftentimes seemed hollow and which would have then come across as indifferent frivolity. Ion Minulescu also spoke in favour of a familiar, accessible theatre, wherein quotidian life could be recognized without any intellectual effort. Although he began from several incorrect or, at the very least, confusingly formulated, considerations, and though he amalgamated and rejected, in block, pathological cases, social issues, moral conflicts, “in futurum” pleas, university lectures and a grave, pretentious “quod erat demonstratum” from among the preoccupations characteristic for theatre, Minulescu chose as a fundamental criterion the emotional complexity of everyday life, from which theatre should never depart<sup>6</sup>. Having spread to other periodicals as well, the discussion commonly emphasized this criterion of livelihood: seizing any modifications, as well as the new imperatives of the post-war period, which were not yet properly understood and for which art – in general – was not only a reflection, but also a possibility for manifestation and further study. As such, Victor Eftimiu wondered whether they should settle things as they were before or confer upon them a new foundation. For him, the changing preferences of the

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<sup>4</sup> From the anonymous introduction to *Teatrul de Mâine*, no. 1, (March 15, 1918).

<sup>5</sup> Alexandru Bălăceanu, “Teatrul de mâine,” *Teatrul de mâine*, no. 1, (March 15, 1918).

<sup>6</sup> See “Patetism și dramatism” [“Pathos and Dramatism”] and “Evoluția tehnicei dramatice” [“Evolution of the Dramatic Technique”], *Revista critică*, no. 16, (January 25, 1919), and no. 17, (February 1, 1919).

audience were conclusive, while the first to crash in their wake were the theatre “technicians,” the connoisseurs of recipes for success, which were the first to go out of fashion. Above former abilities and performance – of which Victor Eftimiu mentions the masterful exposition, the main scene, conventional situations, gradation, and the unforeseeable end of an act – was placed the “tenderness of inspiration,” the unmediated contact of artistic talent and life, unbound by rules (be they even Aristotelic) and not falsified by verified procedures. To conclude, exigencies were maximal, as usual, though not without specifications of personal taste, as Eftimiu argued that the author of tomorrow should display humanity, sincerity, simplicity, picturesque, but especially the ability to keep their audience from dozing off during a performance. However, the advice he outlined immediately following this, that the author should be varied, capricious, and mix laughter with weeping, as Shakespeare had done, somewhat limited the importance of the issue<sup>7</sup>. In a collection of notes on dramatic psychology, Al. Al. Busuioceanu considered theatre to be both life (through the profoundly experienced identification of the viewer, as a real human being, and the character on stage) and imitation of life (in that life itself was seen as nothing more than a performance exterior to each person’s soul), in an acknowledged and accepted contradiction<sup>8</sup>. With an inclination for a dialectic view of life, wherein the evolution of forms is the evolution of the soul, from which everything derived and through which everything could be understood, he viewed the changes that took place in theatre as a transition from pathos to drama, from subjectivism to objectivism, or as an increasingly exact contiguity with the material reality of life, wherein the impersonal manner of natural determinism reigned. He nevertheless underlined the necessity to emphasize the essential and the merit of suggestion in order to avoid a naturalist interpretation<sup>9</sup>.

From various points of view and with various purposes, the rapport between theatre and life was always taken into consideration. Thus, Eugen Lovinescu explained the noteworthy changes before a new staging of *Înșir-te mărgărite* – at a time when the modern and ironic spirit of the fairy tale was of interest – as results of a natural metamorphosis. As times were changing, so were the people compelled to change, and since evolution implied the negation of the past, the re-negation of the people became a sign of maturity.

<sup>7</sup> Eugen Lovinescu, “Victor Eftimiu”, in *Critiques*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, vol. VII (Bucharest: Editura Ancora, Alcalay și Calafateanu, 1922), 121-122.

<sup>8</sup> Eugen Lovinescu, “Teatrul și natura” [Theatre and Nature], in *Critiques*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. III (Bucharest: Ancora S. Benvenisti, 1928), 192.

<sup>9</sup> Tudor Vianu, “Ibsen contra Ibsen,” in *Revista critică*, no. 21, (March 1, 1919).

The eternal change was joined by an interior motive, namely, the necessity of the soul to emulate the universal<sup>10</sup>.



Fig. 2: Front cover of *Înșir-te Mărgărite* by Victor Eftimiu and *Bătrânul* by Hortensia Papadat Bengescu

The perspective was not limited, but dynamic, as the critic maintained the miniature quality and the derisory of the theatre (as nature designed in view of a purpose) by comparison to the larger, more complicated nature, which was itself a performance<sup>11</sup>.

If Ibsen, Strindberg, Kaiser or the plays of Reinhardt, Fuchs, Erler, and Meyerhold had been written about both before and during the war, new perspectives now intervened in the manner in which a drama or the ideas of foreign playwrights were commented. The issues they suggested were discussed with a different degree of attention and a different poignancy when

<sup>10</sup> Tudor Vianu, "Fatalitatea la Ibsen" ["Fate and Ibsen"], in *Rampa*, no. 418, (February 16, 1919).

<sup>11</sup> Alice Voinescu, "Henrik Ibsen," in *Ideea europeană*, no. 26, (December 14, 1919).

the theatre of tomorrow came into view. To stage Ibsen became a necessity, while the premiere of the drama *John Gabriel Borkmann* (At the National Theatre in Bucharest, in spring 1919) initiated numerous commentaries, which brought forward new perspectives not only on the play itself, but also on Theatre. The premiere would be the scenic event that would disintegrate the balanced attitude supported by the group of *Revista critică* [*The Critic Journal*]: the apparent unity of opinion would break in contact with the new theatre. While Busuioceanu desired to initiate a polemic, but giped aimlessly, Tudor Vianu opted to write an excellent study, *Ibsen contra Ibsen* [*Ibsen against Ibsen*], wherein he would argue against old views regarding the didacticism and egocentrism of the Nordic writer (whose interior was marked by the clash of the social and the individual), demonstrate his profound humanity (by drawing attention to the brotherhood of human beings found within), and seize the interior dialectic of his dramas (between the enthusiasm of a lonely and implacable power and human sociability, which pit Ibsen against Ibsen)<sup>12</sup>. Without stating it explicitly, Vianu was driving at a situation and a human attitude which defined, for him, the significance of Ibsen during that historic moment. For Busuioceanu, Ibsen was an example of the transition towards objective drama, while B. Fundoianu found an occasion to reject the critical, logical and clear representation of a world where one is not free, but smothered by the subconscious, thereby opposing Maeterlinck's shapeless heroes or automatons to the heroes in Ibsen's plays, who believed in free will, and were therefore slightly ridiculous<sup>13</sup>. In a study that was published after the premieres of *John Gabriel Borkmann* and *The Wild Duck*, Alice Voinescu supported the relation between the hero's necessary will and the aesthetic means of the drama, action. Thus, theatre achieved the impossible – the human being in all its humanity. Voinescu defended his faith in a theatre that commented upon the morality of a society through aesthetics and idealism, while viewing naturalism as a dissolvent of humanity, because it allegedly created not an image of humanity, but rather a photographic copy of unessential, transient moments of human beastliness<sup>14</sup>. With the staging of Ibsen, theoretical challenges received important arguments and reference points at the time, in our scenic practices; perspectives and objectives derived from and were differentiated by the concrete artistic act.

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<sup>12</sup> Tudor Vianu, "Ibsen contra Ibsen," *Revista Critică*, no. 21, (March 1, 1919).

<sup>13</sup> B. Fundoianu, "Fatalitatea la Ibsen," *Rampa*, no. 418, (February 16, 1919). It is noteworthy to mention that in Petre Sturdza's interpretation of *Borkmann*, T. Vianu had the revelation of "humour," thereby claiming that Sturdza's performance was not properly understood.

<sup>14</sup> Alice Voinescu, "Henrik Ibsen," *Ideea Europeană*, no. 26, (December 14, 1919).

For those who continued the political, aesthetic ideals of the *Contemporan* during the post-war years – for someone like Barbu Lăzăreanu or Iosif Nădejde – theatre could not be more than creativity engaged in the struggle for a socialist future, a type of art for which social tend and the call to action were most important. At the time, some supported, in a deliberately exclusivist and exaggerated manner, that socialism had at its disposal, for the agitation and cultivation of the masses, more effective means than theatre, such as syndicates, the press, the right to vote or the possibility of a strike. The theatre was characterized as a capitalist endeavour marked by the thirst for financial gain, economically and ideologically controlled by the dominant class. If performances with an undeniable aesthetic value were sometimes staged, the steep price of tickets made it impossible for poor people to attend<sup>15</sup>. Following the example of the Soviet and German theatre, or assimilating the ideas of French actor Firmin Gemier, the theatre “of tomorrow” would be a theatre of the masses. Alongside the articles of journalists and critics who discussed the problems and the meaning of a militant theatre in firm, ideological and practical terms, other publications tackled only administrative issues of the theatre “of the people,” featuring a repertoire of attractive comedies and tragedies for the gradual familiarization of the wide public.

These prospects, as well as the new exigencies that intervened in our theatre were fuelled and supported by information regarding the performances of great foreign directors and the aesthetic toils of French, German, and Soviet theatre, information which was received with particular curiosity.

The desire to be up to date with the issues and accomplishments of European theatres, as well as to reduce the existing distance and the need for knowledge and assimilation, are common preoccupations, debated in the press at the time.

Director T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu considered that there was no time for laments, regardless of how great the distance was between the art of our performances and the theatrical wonders easily accomplished by the Russians, the French and the Germans. At last, the time of rectification and of operative solutions was at hand, following that, through a grand reorganization, the values of modern theatre obtained in an isolated and discontinuous manner, would become permanent. A first step would be the acknowledgement of not only the coordinative role, but also the creative and performative role of the director, who was a multivalent author of the show and of whom originality, taste and competence were expected.

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<sup>15</sup> Ilie Păușescu, “Muncitorimea și teatrul,” *Viața socialistă*, no. 1, (November, 1920).





Fig. 3: Postal card with The National Theatre in Bucharest at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

What had been accomplished elsewhere was due to the conferring of an artistic status to the director, without which it would be impossible to create real theatre in the future<sup>16</sup>. The shortcomings of our situation were frequently pointed out, while negligent, outdated performances were mercilessly rejected, in a polemic tone<sup>17</sup>. In "Scrisorile către actorul X" (in *Rampa*, 1919) A. Davilă spoke about the perfection of the ensemble and the unity of aesthetic ideas, which he had noticed in the performances of Irving, Antoine, and Reinhardt. Much was written of Gémier, Copeau, Craig, Lugné Poe, Fuchs, Appia, Karl Heinz Martin, G. Pitoeff, and Reinhardt especially.

<sup>16</sup> "Teatrul nostru," *Revista critică*, no. 2, (October 12, 1918).

<sup>17</sup> We read in Alex Călin's review of *Polyeuct* (The National Theatre in Bucharest) that outdated and banal settings were used, along with old furs and columns. (*Rampa*, no. 387, January 10, 1919); Of *Oedip* (at the same theatre) we read that a setting from Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène* was used – a sacred forest grove where the trees were randomly arranged; a gorgeous palace of Oedip contrasting with carton shields; a juvenile temple of Apollo; and a scandalous performance with actors dressed in costumes from all eras, from *The Fountain of Blanduzia* and *The Judge of Zalamea* (*Rampa*, no. 607, (September 27, 1919).

Publications included viewers' testimonies (usually translated), interviews, expository texts and programs of the above mentioned actors<sup>18</sup>.

What seemed clear – aside from various preferences for different theatre movements – was the necessity for an atmosphere of emulation and creative efforts. Only under these circumstances, the actor-director was possible, bringing forward their own representative artistic universe in an agitated spiritual environment. The cultural circles established in these years had in mind the fertilization of art – not only theatre – and the stimulation of ambitions and initiatives with the power of prestigious examples. During its short existence (September-December 1920), "Studio" – with its plastic, theatrical, musical and choreographic preoccupations – aspired to contribute to the artistic education of the public through lectures, special courses and performances. Within the theatre department (including P. Sturdza, V.D. Bumbesti, Lily Popovici), Copeau's uncompromised repertoire, perseverant work and professional ethics at Vieux Colombier were admired. Numerous difficulties of all kinds prevented "Studio" from forming a theatre company and presenting a valuable repertoire (Strindberg, Shaw, Wedekind, Hauptmann, Maeterlinck, of which they had settled on *Intruder*). Its activity – under the leadership of I.D. Ștefănescu – would be limited to a series of conferences: *Arta și spiritual revoluției contimporane*<sup>19</sup> (Dem Theodorescu), *Maurice Maeterlinck* (T. Vianu), *François de Curel* (I. M. Sadoveanu), *Teatrul Nou*<sup>20</sup> (Scarlat Froda), *H. Ibsen* (A. Dominic), *Paul Claudel* (Cora Irineu)... During the following year (October 1921) the more long-lasting group "Poesis" was formed with the purpose of bringing new authors to the fore in our country. However, the group's founder, I.M. Sadoveanu, dedicated the first conference to *Mișcarea de la Vieux Colombier*<sup>21</sup> (afterwards, he would be drawn to Reinhardt and Gémier, as was obvious in the group's only performance, *Sister Beatrice* by Maeterlinck, in 1923). The activity of the

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<sup>18</sup> Among others, we mention the articles of B. Fundoianu on Copeau ("Cuvinte despre teatru" and "Un program de teatru," in *Rampa*, no. 698, (January 15, 1920) and no. 713, (February 5, 1920) of Victor D. Bumbesti on Gémier and G. Pitoeff, E.G. Craig's articles from the series "Arta punerii în scenă: Regizorul ideal," as well as the series "Ideile lui Georg Fuchs," and "Ideile lui Adolf Appia." (*Rampa*, 1921) Eman. Cerbu became a well-known commentator and supporter of German expressionist theatre, and he also published interviews with its representatives (Karl Heinz Martin, etc.).

<sup>19</sup> *The Art and Spirit of the Contemporary Revolution.*

<sup>20</sup> *The New Theatre.*

<sup>21</sup> *The Vieux Colombier Movement.*

"Poesis" group was aimed at vulgarization: conferences were held on *Shaw* (T. Vianu), *Wedekind* (Eugen Filotti), *Strindberg* (A. Dominic), *G. Hauptmann*, *Expresionismul în dramă*<sup>22</sup> (Ion Sîngiorgiu), *Drama socială contemporană*<sup>23</sup> (Aureliu Weiss), with examples interpreted by Lily Popovici, Dida Solomon, Marietta Sadova, and G. Ciprian. Following the lecture on Copeau, the words of I.M. Sadoveanu were reinterpreted and he was accused of ironic concessions, to which he replied that the group was not a branch of another institution, but nevertheless took it upon themselves to record and explain the main aesthetic formulas created by the great interpreters of theatre<sup>24</sup>. The latter could be both directors and playwrights, who – with the help of actors and scenographers – created a unique, inextricable scenic universe. Such a scenic universe could reveal national grounds in the authenticity of ideas and the directors' vision, because it involved the moulding of foreign theatre onto our own national spirit<sup>25</sup>, not through mimesis, but by acknowledging the accomplishments of European theatre, knowing itself better and recognizing its own necessities and possibilities.

Appointed director of the National Theatre in Bucharest at the end of the war, C. Rădulescu-Motru viewed dramatic art as an expression of emotions in space, which he had stated during a press conference where T. Vianu also participated. He praised theatre by means of its scenic purpose, and the performance of the actors for their spatial expressive means<sup>26</sup>. As creation in a space with specific rules and exigencies of expressivity, staging was understood more and more as the process by means of which a dramatic idea was visibly rendered for the viewer<sup>27</sup>. T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu stated as much by adding new lines to an article he had written before the war, lines which were significant for the aesthetic mutations taking place at the time. Although various derivatives of the word vision increasingly infiltrated specialized discourse, this was not, of course, due to a sudden discovery of the eye – the awareness of theatre being performed in space had always existed with its well-determined aesthetics and practical difficulties –, but rather it was due to the issue being discussed in different theoretical and aesthetic terms, particularly owing to symbolism and, later, to expressionism.

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<sup>22</sup> *Expressionism in theatre*.

<sup>23</sup> *Contemporary social theatre*.

<sup>24</sup> I.M. Sadoveanu, "Răstălmăcire," *Revista vremii*, no. 4, (December 11, 1921).

<sup>25</sup> T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu, "Repertoriul," *Revista critică*, no. 9, (November 30, 1918).

<sup>26</sup> See the footnote signed by T.V., *Literatorul*, no. 16, (October 5, 1918).

<sup>27</sup> T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu, "Stilizarea scenei," *Revista critică*, no. 14, (January 4, 1919).

A new importance was being conferred to the visual, which had a new purpose, and which was viewed from a new aesthetic perspective, to the mediated relations of the visual with the word and with the auditory elements of the play. A distinction was made between “literary theatre,” which focused on creating dramatic characters through words, and “theatre proper,” (or, as it was initially referred to, theatrical theatre) which took as its main objective the creation of a sensation of art by visually satisfying the viewer. Storytelling and plot, the attitude, gestures, movements, and the dance of the actors were used for this purpose. Not only in the latter case, but also in literary theatre, the visual had to exist in the text in a latent form, and was thereby a primordial condition for theatre<sup>28</sup>.

If before the war one of the critiques against performances was that, in the abundance of their scenic décor, they offered more to the eye than to the soul, which was actually a defence of literary theatre, as well as a reaction against the excess of naturalist décor and costumes, emphasis was now placed on the possible correspondences between the plastic, sensorial concrete, and feelings or ideas, but also on the control of the trajectory between the viewer’s visual perception and their emotion.



**Fig. 4:** Claudia Millian and her husband, the poet Ion Minulescu

<sup>28</sup> T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu, “Teatrul propriuzis,” *Revista critică*, no.6, November 9, 1918.

As before the war – when T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu directed only briefly and without consequences – the latter remained an adept of stylization, a means of expression which overcame naturalism, could outline a significant detail and enhance the suggestive nature of the performance. Stylization – seen as synthesis and suggestion – was initially applied within the sphere of verisimilitude and was used in mimetic productions. It was achieved through purification, through the conjoining and distancing of elements strictly necessary in order to indicate the time and the place, to transmit a feeling or idea. In modern theatre, drama would be defined by Busuioceanu not only through the desire to achieve objectivity, but also through the seizing of expressive possibilities specific to theatre: such as the motion of a gesture, the suddenness of an image or the suggestion of a word spoken in a particular décor and with a certain attitude<sup>29</sup>.

Compared to T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu's understanding of scenic expressivity as an ensemble of characteristic, suggestive elements put forward by the various arts that are joined in a complex performance, Claudia Millian (who also signed as Dim. Șerban) problematized the criteria of a theatrical synthesis and transfiguration. As such, what T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu saw as synecdoche and metonymy, Claudia Millian saw as metaphor and symbol. The descriptions she often used in her articles were designed to communicate a scenic vision, which she dearly appreciated, as in the staging of Maeterlinck's play *Monna Vanna*: "a tent in yellow and black stripes supported by poles covered in cuirasses and war masks, a bed with wild furs, a candleholder with four yellow candlesticks and a table with Prinzivalle's helmet, behold the tent which dawned over the blue visage of the Pisa river... Grand and simple, this is the desired synthesis." (my translation)<sup>30</sup> The criteria seem to be intrinsic to the performance, derived from the necessities of the vision and of the composition, as she argued that what theatrical décor needed was a synthesis emerging from within one's mind<sup>31</sup>. Although the criteria proposed by Claudia Millian obviously echoed theories and aesthetic aims of artists like Craig or Appia, of French symbolist theatre, of Russian scenographers (Bakst) or Dalcroze's rhythm studies, they deserve to be taken into consideration for this moment in the evolution of our theatre. Thus, harmony was the correspondence

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<sup>29</sup> Al. Al. Busuioceanu, "Patetism și dramatism," *Revista critică*, no. 16, (January 25, 1919).

<sup>30</sup> Claudia Millian, "Săptămîna teatrală," *Viitorul*, no. 3580, (January 21, 1920).

<sup>31</sup> Claudia Millian, "Săptămîna teatrală," *Viitorul*, no. 3746, (September 14, 1920).

between the various visually represented elements of a play<sup>32</sup>, among which the human being (the actor), with their plastic and dynamic qualities, played a chief role as the generator and coordinator of all others, since it was from the movement of their costume and its proportions that one could arrive at the musical harmony which ought to have been suggested by the production<sup>33</sup>. Rhythm existed as a harmonic pulse on a stage whose expressivity could only be dynamic, as movement impressed on character and spirit. The scenic vitality was an elaborate one, as a consequence of pondered proportions and emphases, of movement and of the interference between elements determined by schemes established both by sensibility and intelligence. The visual of the performance was always monitored and defended in Claudia Millian's articles, as well as imaginatively affirmed (by the poetess), with refined suggestions<sup>34</sup>.



**Fig. 5:** Al. Davila and I.L. Caragiale, famous writers and directors of the National Theatre in Bucharest (1910)

<sup>32</sup> Claudia Millian, "Săptămîna teatrală," *Viitorul*, no. 3586, (January 28, 1920).

<sup>33</sup> Claudia Millian, "Săptămîna teatrală," *Viitorul*, no. 3746, (September 14, 1920).

<sup>34</sup> Such as when she describes the costume: "Clothing is evocative and may still be eloquent (...). I see drama played in velvet: velvet has the gloss of a stone after a rain, seemingly carrying tears in folds. Comedy breaks out in muslin, light as a breeze that pushes the leaves to aside in order to glimpse the buds. Lyricism covers itself in rustling silk, like rumours of love. Here, colours are feint like pastel, in comedy, live as watercolour, in drama, pasty as oil painting, in tragedy, sinister as drawing with charcoal." (my translation; "Săptămîna teatrală," *Viitorul*, no. 3758, (September 28, 1920); republished with modifications with the title "Ritmul și armonia în teatru," *Rampa*, no. 1215, (November 14, 1921).

The writer Victor Eftimiu led the National Theatre in Bucharest from August 1920 to December 1921. During the usual inaugural press conference, as well as during interviews recorded on different occasions, V. Eftimiu expressed his determination to introduce new, original plays in the theatre's repertoire (by Ion Minulescu or Ștefan Petică), alongside those of the great world playwrights (from Shakespeare – who was thought to be the pedestal of the company –, Molière, Beaumarchais, Schiller, Goethe, and Gogol to Ibsen, Strindberg, and Gorki). He was also resolved to transform the existent manner of interpretation, then characterized by the slow tempo of the actors' speech, long pauses between lines, lagging action, and interminable intermissions<sup>35</sup>.



**Fig. 6:** The National Theatre in Bucharest before its destruction in 1944

Some expressed their reluctance regarding the possibility to accomplish such a gigantic programme (B. Fundoianu), while others saluted him with optimism (Alex. Kirișescu<sup>36</sup>). When it came to deeds, the new director would look to put into practice his ideas about the theatre “of tomorrow: he preferred to present for the first time the plays *Bătrînul* by H. Papadat-Bengescu and *Sonata umbrelor* by A. Dominic, he brought Camil Petrescu's *Suflete tari* to the attention of the theatre committee (staged after his departure), and he was

<sup>35</sup> Victor Eftimiu, “D. V. Eftimiu de vrobă cu cronicarii dramatici,” *Rampa*, no. 859, (September 5, 1920).

<sup>36</sup> Alex. Kirișescu, “Victor Eftimiu deschide întâia sa stagiune,” *Rampa*, no. 858, (September 4, 1920).

tempted by the poetic essence of certain texts like Hofmannsthal's *Electra*, Morselli's *Glauco*, and I. Minulescu's *Pleacă berzele*. Overall, considering the short duration of his directorship, V. Eftimiu kept his promises: the theatre's advertisements announce – in addition to the above-mentioned plays – plays by V. Alecsandri, Caragiale, Delavrancea, Hasdeu, A. Davila, but also Ibsen, Strindberg, and Björson... The “pedestal” of the company is, indeed, Shakespeare, with plays such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or *As You Like It*, as well as preparations for *Macbeth*... As he had declared, Eftimiu did not neglect issues of staging, and showed initiative in the support of young directors and scenographers like Victor D. Bumbęști and Traian Cornescu, in collaborations with the Russian scenographer G. Pojedaëff and in an invitation for the German expressionist director Karl Heinz Martin to work in our country. The experience of foreign theatres was studied first-hand. Director V. Enescu was sent to Berlin, where he was preoccupied especially with stage technologies (the Schwab illumination system – above the Fortuny cupola -, the gliding stage for rapid changes in décor)<sup>37</sup>. There were many, including Liviu Rebreanu, who objected to Victor Eftimiu's preoccupations with staging, which were obvious in the pages of the journal *Revista Teatrului Național*, published in September 1921. Notes signed *e.*, possibly by Eftimiu, appeared in the latter in order to expound on the development of the director's art, thanks to Antoine, Gémier, Copeau, Craig, Stanislavski, and Reinhardt, without omitting the contribution of our own theatre experts: A. Davila, Nottara, Paul Gusty, and T. Simionescu Rîmniceanu.

The very manner in which Eftimiu attempted to respond to the issues that tormented Romanian theatre at the time was criticized. His was a directorship agitated by initiatives and events, featuring many premieres that were eagerly expected, and that often constituted motives for controversy and heated disputes. The premiere of the play *Bătrînul* by H. Papadat-Bengescu

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<sup>37</sup> Accomplishing the aesthetic requirements of a performance is understood as dependent on the stage architecture and technologies. A Davila described a stage with depth, formed of three floors that would replace one another through electric power, which he had projected approximately 12 years ago, in order to replace the deficient fixed stage [“A douăsprezecea scrisoare către actorul X,” *Rampa*, no. 439, (March 13, 1919)]. The transformations in stage technology pursued by V. Eftimiu would spread: the theatre company Bulandra would also announce the extension in depth of the stage; more specifically, they would build a fixed, arched cupola, which extended itself about halfway down the sides and height of the stage; they would also forfeit the circular sky due to creases in the canvas which were unable to provide a complete illusion; part of the backstage and upper booths were destroyed as well [*Rampa*, no. 1106, (July 7, 1921)].



(March 1921) caused one such dispute, which would involve all theatre critics, the most diverse competences, as well as the most amusing incompetence. It constituted an occasion to discuss the very nature of theatre: was *Bătrînul* a play? For Minulescu, it was not: it was a nuvella with beautiful dialogue, but insufficiently theatrical, and deficient in technique<sup>38</sup>.



**Fig. 7:** Cincinat Pavelescu, Victor Eftimiu and Eugen Lovinescu, photo by Foto-Splendid, N. Buzdugan, Bucharest, Horia Petra Petrescu collection

But for Eugen Lovinescu, it was a distinguished accomplishment, which ought to have been appreciated for what it was, without being subjected to rules and models. Alex. Cătălin accused it of falsity and claimed

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<sup>38</sup> Ion Minulescu, "Cronica dramatică," *Romania noua*, no. 51, (March 7, 1921).

that it lacked psychological motive, but the same Eugen Lovinescu, its most ardent defender, considered it to be a creation with a deep interior life. Eman. Cerbu saw it as a work that affirmed the “rights of fantasy,” but not entirely so, because it did not reach, as he would have liked, a complete renunciation of space and time<sup>39</sup>. Lovinescu, on the other hand, appreciated (not far from Busuioceanu’s objective drama) that *Bătrînul* defeated the incantation of subjective inspiration<sup>40</sup>, so that even in the absence of a dramatic solution, there existed the solution of life, which itself was broken, twisted and repeated indefinitely<sup>41</sup>. Beyond the rightfulness of one opinion or another, what succeeded in the debate was a sensibility more receptive towards the phenomenon of the theatre. Neither Hafmannsthal’s *Electra* (April 1921), nor Morselli’s *Glauco* (December 1921) were plays conceived by technicians, but rather texts written by poets, which was confusing for some – the sources of certain poetic performances (directed by V. D. Bumbesti) that insist upon the rhythm and plastics of interpretation in a surprising, unusual scenography (by Pojedaeff, in the first case; by Traian Cornescu, in the second). The uncertainty and mixture of styles, the imperfections and the dissonances were those inherent to a lack of experience and a struggle for aesthetic renewal. But uncertainty also came from certain critics who, confronted with these plays, inadequately used criteria of naturalist or traditionally psychological theatre, were misinformed or, worse, misinformed regarding the trends and movements of modern art.

Through its purpose and what it brought to the stage, the directorship of Victor Eftimiu meant an addition of creative experience, which resulted in a necessary impetus for criticism: “The obligation of intellectuals – as many as there may be in our country – is not to mock trends towards the new and innovative. On the contrary, it is to support them. They are the only missionaries of culture and they have this imperious obligation... to cultivate themselves more carefully in the spirit of the times.”<sup>42</sup> In the following years of the avant-garde, with the help of B. Fundoianu and I. M. Sadoveanu, who would evoke and underline the significance of the suggestive, moving plastics of its accomplished poetic performances, the short directorship described above would become a memorable, significant moment.

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<sup>39</sup> Eman. Cerbu, “Drepturile fanteziei,” *Rampa*, no. 1016, (March 16, 1921).

<sup>40</sup> Eugen Lovinescu, “Bătrînul,” II, *Sburătorul* year 1, no. 51, (May 1, 1920).

<sup>41</sup> Eugen Lovinescu, “Bătrînul,” II, *Sburătorul* year 2, no. 46, (March 26, 1921).

<sup>42</sup> Eman. Cerbu, “Teatrul viitorului,” *Rampa*, no. 1265, (January 14, 1922).

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

**FLORIN FAIFER<sup>1</sup>**

**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.

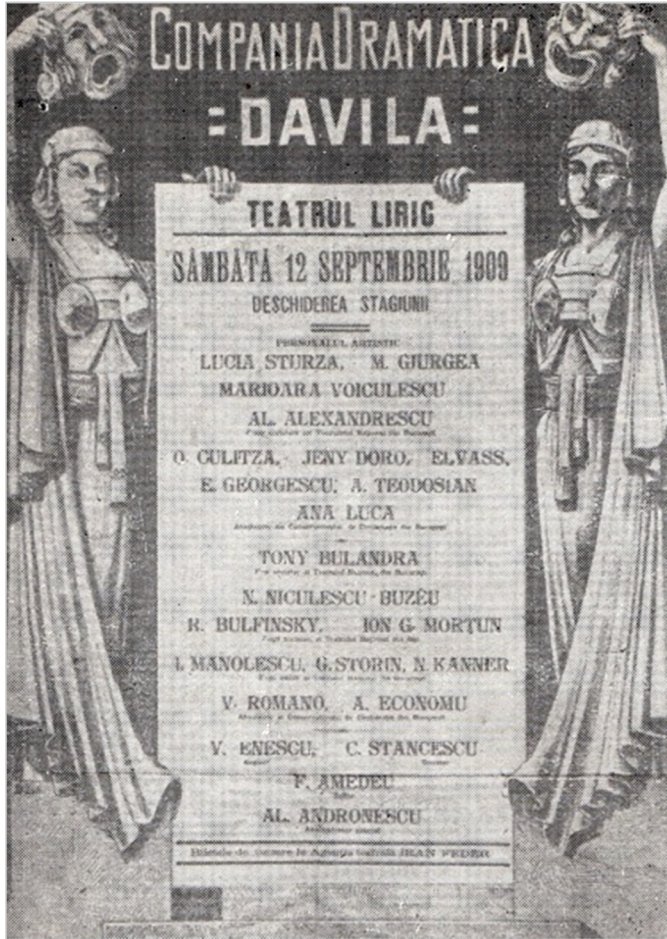


Fig. 1: The general poster of the Davila Theatre Company

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>

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

*Boieri. — Ostași. — Moșneni, etc.*

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

**INCEPUTU LA 8½ ORE SEARA PRECIS**

PREȚURILE LOCURILOR : Loje benoar, lei 30; Loje bel-étage, lei 20; Loje rangul III, lei 12; Loje de galerie, lei 8. — Stal rangul I, lei 6; Stal rangul II, lei 4; Stal rangul III, lei 3. — Galeria numerotată, lei 2; Galeria nenumerotată, 1 leu.

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.

Biletetele 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:

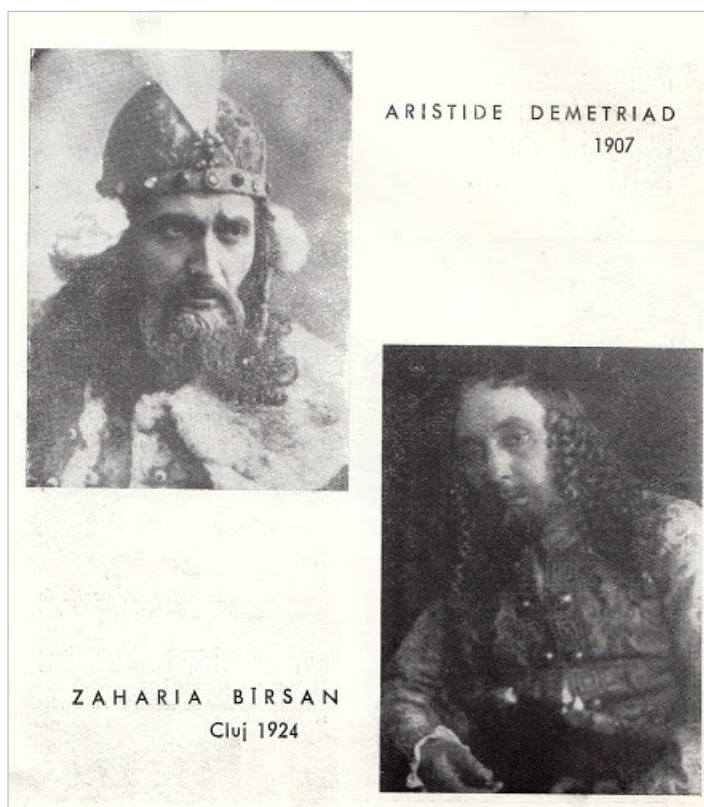
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<sup>11</sup> Lord without lordship and voivode without a people.

<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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## *Marietta Anca. A Portrait of a Lady*

LUCIAN SINIGAGLIA<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 1:** Marietta Anca.

**Abstract:** Marietta Anca was not the only artist to catch the eye of a number of personalities who wrote about theater. Alice Voinescu, Camil Petrescu, Mihail Sebastian, N. Carandino, Lucia Demetrius, Ioan Massoff, Petre Comarnescu have left testimonies about the artists who were at the heart of Bucharest's theatrical life. Their opinions, read with maximum possible objectivity, make up the portrait of an artist with a vigorous personality, over whom a veil had settled, seemingly inexplicably, since the last years of her career. She was in demand and she excelled in historical evocation tragedy and in the modern psychological analysis drama.

**Keywords:** Marietta Anca, artistic career, parts in performances, Romanian theatre, directors, theatrical columnists.

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Some biographical references, a list of roles, chronicle excerpts, memories of the contemporaries - these are the elements a theater historian has at hand to portray an artist. The challenge is to create a picture in which the objective aspects alternate with the author's subjective opinions, in a credible proportion, as in a painting where a realistic representation is discretely complemented by impressionistic nuances (and why not with some expressionistic ones).

Marietta Anca was not the only artist to catch the eye of a number of personalities who wrote about the theater. Alice Voinescu, Camil Petrescu, Mihail Sebastian, N. Carandino, Lucia Demetrius, Mircea Ștefănescu, Ioan Massoff, Petre Comarnescu have left testimonies about the artists who were at the heart of Bucharest's theatrical life. Their opinions, read with maximum possible objectivity, make up the portrait of an artist with a vigorous personality, over whom a veil has settled, seemingly inexplicably, since the last years of her career.

It is absolutely necessary to insert a minimum of biographical markings, generously offered by Lucian Anca<sup>2,3</sup>, the nephew of the artist, as preface of our incursion. Marietta Anca was born on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1911, in Copalnic Mănăștur, in Maramureș. She was the daughter of Marieta Iernea, whose evolutions in theater performances supported by high school students in Oradea were admired by Iosif Vulcan, and Iuliu Anca, who had studied medicine in Vienna. Marietta Anca also had two brothers: judge Cornel Anca and conductor Leontin Anca (the latter being the father of Lucian Anca, conductor also, who gathered with great effort details about the family history from which he comes).

The family of the future artist moved to Oradea, where doctor Anca was appointed director of the hospital. The high school student Marietta Anca had distinguished herself by her talent in reciting lyrics, treading in her mother's steps. Her talent led to her selection in the "Western Romanian Association" Theater team in the locality. This institution was created in 1928 with the purpose of supporting "theater performances in Romanian in Transylvania and Banat"<sup>4</sup>, in accordance with the principles promoted in the

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<sup>2</sup> Lucian Anca, "O scurtă istorie a familiei Anca din Copalnic Mănăștur [A Short History of the Anca Family from Copalnic Mănăștur]." *Vatra Chioreană*, (September 2006): 24-30.

<sup>3</sup> Lucian Anca, "Străbătând veșnicia: Marietta Anca [Through Eternity: Marietta Anca]," *Biblioteca Septentrionalis*, no. 2 (41), (2013): 27-31.

<sup>4</sup> According to the official letter published in *Teatrul românesc la Oradea. Perspectivă monografică* [Romanian Theater at Oradea. Monographic Perspective] (Oradea: Editura Revistei Familia, 2001), 59.

social-political context built after the Great Union of 1918. On the stage of this theater, Marietta Anca played Crina in *Patima roșie* (*The Red Passion*) by M. Sorbul and Ileana Cosânzeana in *Înșir' te mărgărite* de V. Eftimiu.

On a tour in Oradea, the famous actor and professor Ion Manolescu noted the young performer's qualities and advised her to pursue acting studies in Bucharest. As a student in the class of Professor Ion Manolescu from the Drama Art Conservatory, Marietta Anca starred in student productions *Andromaca* by Jean Racine, as Hermione, and *Fluture de noapte* (*The Moth*) by Henry Bataille. Her classmate Lucia Demetrius, the future playwright, described the young artist's features, painting an eloquent portrait of her: "Professor Manolescu rightfully appreciated my colleague Marietta Anca, a young woman of breathtaking beauty, full of heat, of force, with an emotion that could be communicated. Marietta Anca was statuesque. She was wearing a royal head on a tall neck. Under a cloth of shoulder-length black hair, licked, combed in the middle, she had a high noble forehead, gray-blue eyes, thick eyebrows, a small, slightly arched nose, a full mouth, ivory skin. She was a good colleague, a good friend, a generous person. (...) Marietta Anca was studying her roles with perseverance and passion, during the rehearsals she had no time for friends, she had no other concern than the enhancement of her role"<sup>5</sup>.

After graduation, Marietta Anca was employed in 1931 at the National Theatre of Bucharest. From the first season she spent there, out of the thirty seasons she would, she had been cast in prime roles. Olivia in *Noaptea regilor* (*Twelfth Night*) by Shakespeare, directed by Paul Gusti, together with Cleo Pan-Cernăteanu, Tantzi Cutava-Barozzi, Aurel Athanasescu, Romald Bulfinsky, Alexandru Critico, Grigore Mărculescu; Lady Milford in *Intrigă și iubire* (*Intrigue and Love*) by Schiller, directed by Soare Z. Soare, with Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, A. Pop-Marțian (the actress's first husband), Romald Bulfinsky, George Calboreanu; Isabela in *Judecătorul din Zalamea* (*The Mayor of Zalamea*) by Calderon de la Barca, having the same director, with Elvira Godeanu, Nicolae Bălțăteanu, and, again, Romald Bulfinsky as partners. Furthermore, in this first season, she played the first role in a play written by the famous historian Nicolae Iorga, the actress investing all her artistic forces for a difficult author, almost incomprehensible to a large audience. This was in *O ultimă rază* (*A Last Ray of Sunshine*), being the partner of Ion Manolescu, her first artistic mentor. Another Romanian author, Adrian Vereau, had Marietta Anca (as Chimera) and Ion Manolescu (in the title part) as protagonists in *Apolonius din Tyane* (*Apolonius from Tyane*), the director being Paul Gusti.

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<sup>5</sup> Lucia Demetrius, *Memorii* [*Memoirs*] (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 2005), 74-75.

We note Camil Petrescu's opinion expressed after a performance with *Noaptea regilor* (*Twelfth Night*): "Marietta Anca is the connection between the best National Theater today and tomorrow. The responsibility of the directors of our first scene, when they have in their care such a theater element, rich in attributes: beauty, grace, culture, and temperament (it seems), is total. If they do not get anything out of such as an exceptional debut, they deserve any reproach"<sup>6</sup>.

There were developments more or less well received by critics, in the parts such as Manon Lescaut in the homonymous dramatization after Prévost, Florica in *Ion* after Rebreanu, for the first time with Aura Buzescu, together with whom she will reunite in outstanding performances, Getta in *Fântâna Blanduziei* (*The Blanduzia Fountain*) by Alecsandri, in which Marietta Anca was the partner for Maria Filotti, Constantin Nottara, Ion Manolescu and Aurel Athanasescu (in alternation in the role of Horațiu), Alexandru Critico and George Demetru (in alternation in the role of Gallus), Ion Finteșteanu, Romald Bulfinsky. A great success for Marietta Anca was the interpretation of Lady Anne in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the director being Soare Z. Soare, about which Camil Petrescu wrote: "Marietta Anca, disturbingly beautiful, vibrant, has been a bit too much influenced by the theatricality of her «superiors» in the play"<sup>7</sup>. The «superiors» were Maria Filotti, Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, Ana Luca, Ion Manolescu or G. Ciprian in alternation in the title role, Constantin Nottara, Aurel Athanasescu, A. Pop-Marțian, Nicolae Brancomir, Nicolae Bălțățeanu.

Then followed a first presence outside the National Theater. In 1934, in the last season of Theater Maria Ventura, Marietta Anca was involved in *Crimă și pedeapsă* (*Crime and Punishment*) after Dostoyevsky. She sustained the part of Sonia Marmeladova, together with George Vraca, G. Timică, V. Valentineanu, Marietta Deculescu, Eugenia Popovici, Silvia Dumitrescu. Another presence on the stage of a private theater was in a performance with *În amurg* (*At Sunset*) by G. Hauptmann at Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin Company (1936), directed by Victor Ion Popa.

Various acting roles followed in the actress's career at the National Theater: Prothoe in *Penthesilea* by H. von Kleist (1935), in which Marioara Voiculescu had the title role; Elisa in *Avarul* (*The Miser*) by Molière (1936), together with Ion Finteșteanu, Elvira Godeanu, Sonia Cluceru, A. Pop-Marțian; Carmina in *Despot Vodă* (*The Voivode Despot*) by Alecsandri (1937), as a first approach to the role, as member in a team with A. Pop-Marțian, G. Ciprian, Aurel Athanasescu.

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<sup>6</sup> Camil Petrescu, "Cronica teatrală [The Theatrical Chronicle]." *Argus*, (October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931).

<sup>7</sup> Idem, (14<sup>th</sup> February 1934).

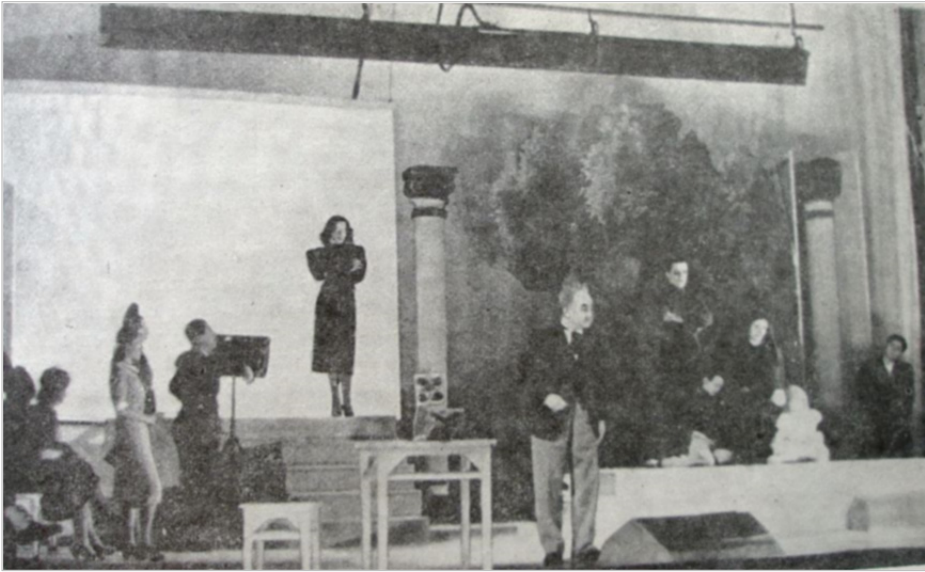
In 1937 two major moments marked her artistic career. Hermione in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Ioana Boiu in Camil Petrescu's *Suflete tari* (*Hard Souls*). These roles were representative of the two directions in which the artist was wanted and in which she excelled: the historical evocation drama (even if Shakespeare's play is more an allegory) and the modern psychological analysis drama. N. Carandino, perhaps the best theater critic of the time, noted about Marietta Anca's performance in *The Winter's Tale*: "The female cast enjoyed the input of Mrs. Marietta Anca. The woman unjustly suspected by her husband and disappearing under the burden of supposed sin, to return to life under the magic of fairy tale, found an ideal performer in the actress who played, without exaggerating, the role of blasted virtue"<sup>8</sup>. Under the artistic direction of Ion Şahighian, the actress's partners were Nicolae Bălăţeanu, Marietta Sadova, Nicolae Brancomir, Lilly Carandino, Alexandru Critico.

Re-evaluating his drama *Suflete tari* in a new version, Camil Petrescu explained why he chose Marietta Anca in the female leading role of the production he directed: "From the earliest rehearsals I realized that the great artist, as I once suspected her to be, was a reality, but so was the sinter of wrong instructions... she confessed to me, shyly, that a director had once told her that she has a forehead that is... ugly and that she must cover it with loops... And Marietta Anca has the most expressive and brightest forehead that can be imagined. When I succeeded in gaining her trust, I had the feeling that she would make a great creation in the role she was entrusted with. So much modesty in work, so much obstinacy in trying, so much devotion to nuance in art, I had rarely been given the chance to meet. ... at the last rehearsal, I understood that I had in front of me one of the greatest artists that the Romanian theater gave us. A nervous intensity like I had not witnessed since Tina Barbu... The dramatism of accents, Marietta Anca's astonishing insightful cry, in the scene of accelerated despair of the third act, could not be rendered by anyone else – by no means - in the Romanian theater today. It's a sound that goes beyond the ranges, even the extraordinary ones. For half an hour, in the second act, on the stage (thanks to her) there is a nervous fluid that, without being consumed, like fire, goes off into an endless crisscross of nuances. Ironic, authoritarian, restless, with bursts on a hieratic background, she stunnnes due to her unmatched finesse... The countless curtain raises ... did not have anything to do with the text (because it had been performed before, without such striking success), but with the main performer... Liviu

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<sup>8</sup> N. Carandino, *Cronica teatrală* [The Theatrical Chronicle]" *Reporter*, (October 3<sup>th</sup>, 1937).

Rebreanu, Mircea Eliade, professor Alexandru Rosetti, Mihail Sebastian, Petru Comarnescu, whom I saw on the evening of the premiere, were entirely under the spell of this performer, and expressed their perplexity at not having seen who she was before that"<sup>9</sup>. Also on stage were Ion Manolescu and Constantin Mitru in the other leading parts.



**Fig. 2:** Scene from *Şase personaje în căutarea unui autor* (*Six characters in Search of an Author*) by L. Pirandello directed by Ion Sava, Bucharest National Theater, 1938. Marietta Anca's silhouette can be seen in the middle of the second plane.

In 1938, after two appearances in the dramas of Nicolae Iorga, *Regina Cristina* (Queen Christina) and *Moartea marelui Alexandru* (*The Death of Great Alexander*), both directed by Ion Şahighian, Marietta Anca was part of the team that put on stage a performance entered in the history of Romanian theater. Ion Sava, one of the most interesting theater creators, staged *Şase personaje în căutarea unui autor* (*Six characters in Search of an Author*) by L. Pirandello, with a prestigious cast made up of George Calboreanu, Marietta Anca, Ion Anastasiad, Marietta Sadova, Eugenia Zaharia, Alexandru Critico, Alexandru Marius. "A theater production of European level"<sup>10</sup>, said N. Carandino. The playwright

<sup>9</sup> Camil Petrescu, "Marietta Anca", *Gazeta*, (December, 1937).

<sup>10</sup> N. Carandino, "Cronica teatrală [The Theatrical Chronicle]," *România*, (November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1938).

and novelist Mihail Sebastian noted that "the whole production was dominated by Marietta Anca, whose resources of great tragedienne are surprisingly nuanced with I do not know what kind of demonic humor, appropriate to the role".<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 3:** Scene from *The Tidings Brought to Mary* by P. Claudel, directed by Ion Sava, Bucharest National Theater, 1938.

The following year, Ion Sava cast Marietta Anca in the part of Mara in P. Claudel's *The Tidings Brought to Mary*. When she was not yet a dramatic columnist at *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (*The Royal Foundation Magazine*), Alice Voinescu noted on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1939 in her *Diary*: "A commendable show. Atmospheric lighting... Beautiful moments of Aura Buzescu, excellent, impressive Marietta Anca"<sup>12</sup>. In his monograph dedicated to the director, Petru Comarnescu said that "although it is related to Christian mysticism, the play has many secular elements that have been revealed by Ion Sava, contrasting the purity and naivety embodied by the young Violaine (Aura Buzescu) with the somatic personality of her sister, Mara (Marietta Anca)"<sup>13</sup>. The partners of the two great artists were Getta Kernbach and, despite the fact that Alice Voinescu did not appreciate them, Gheorghe Storin and Emil Botta.

<sup>11</sup> Mihail Sebastian, "Cronica teatrală [The Theatrical Chronicle]." *Viața românească*, (December 1938): 130-136.

<sup>12</sup> Alice Voinescu, *Jurnal [Diary]* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2013), vol. II, 202.

<sup>13</sup> Petru Comarnescu, *Ion Sava* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1966), 131.



In 1940, director Vasile Enescu staged *Magda* by H. Sudermann. Before the premiere, N. Carandino considered "that in the feminine talent shortage of today's Romanian stage there are some names that the audience, at the urge of the theater craftsmen, are looking forward to seeing on the poster. Among them, Marietta Anca-Sadoveanu<sup>14</sup> shines thanks to the artistic fusion of a royal beauty and the unmistakable gift of great interpretation"<sup>15</sup>. Nicolae Iorga wrote some impressions about his favorite actress's performance in the role of Magda: "I had the chance to see one of the most beautiful performances at the National Theater. This is owing to the great talent that allowed us to see, in perfect shape, the terrible excitement of a human soul longing for freedom"<sup>16</sup>.

Returning to the collaboration with director Ion Sava, Marietta Sava played in 1941 the part of Hero in *Waves of the Sea and of Love* by Franz Grillparzer, together with Al. Alexandrescu-Vrancea, Fifi Mihailovici, Nicolae Brancomir. The playwright Mircea Ștefănescu noted about the actress's performance: "The artist's deep sensitivity is found in the balance of expression, in the move, in the necessary restraint. Life has remained intense. Emotion does not defeat style. Hero's pain, the revolt of the penultimate act, as well as her total transfiguration when she understood the revelation of love, were Marietta Anca's outbursts of the warm, well-oriented temperament"<sup>17</sup>.

In the same year the actress played Tofana in *Patima roșie (The Red Passion)* by M. Sorbul. She reprised this part in several seasons, with different partners such as Anca Șahighian, Carmen Tăutu, Nicolae Bălțățeanu, Aurel Munteanu, Emil Botta, Costache Antoniu, Nicolae Brancomir. Also in 1941, Marietta Anca played the part of Mommina in *Tonight We Improvise* by L. Pirandello, directed by Fernando de Cruciatti, an artist who came from Italy, a country allied to Romania in the Second World War, as an artistic advisor. "With the right accents, painting the shades with discretion"<sup>18</sup>, the actress played together with Maria Botta, Natașa Alexandra, Cella Dima, Nelly Sterian, A. Pop-Marțian, Emil Botta, Grigore Mărculescu. In the new

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<sup>14</sup> After being married to the actor A. Pop-Marțian, Marietta Anca was married to the writer Ion Marin Sadoveanu.

<sup>15</sup> N. Carandino, "Premiere (Marietta Anca-Sadoveanu) [Premieres (Marietta Anca-Sadoveanu)]." *Azi*, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1939.

<sup>16</sup> Apud Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică [The Romanian Theater. A Historical View]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1978), vol. VII, 420.

<sup>17</sup> Apud Petru Comarnescu, *Ion Sava*, 171.

<sup>18</sup> Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc*, vol. VIII, 81.

Municipal Theater I.L. Caragiale, during the 1941-1942 season, Marietta Anca was invited to play in O. Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, having as partner the huge artist Tony Bulandra, succeeded by Alexandru Critico, also a fine artist.

Under the artistic direction of Ion Șahighian, Marietta Anca played the role of Princess Eboli in *Don Carlos* by Fr. Schiller in 1942, then in 1945, together with Aglae Metaxa, Nicolae Bălțățeanu, Alexandru Critico, A. Pop-Marțian, Nicolae Brancomir. With constant focus on her play, Ioan Massoff wrote that Marietta Anca played her part "with a vibration transmitted even in the smallest replies"<sup>19</sup>.

After the events of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, Marietta Anca was not part of the large group of artists who had begun to chant with the new power, increasingly under Soviet influence. The artist did not join the Romanian-Soviet Friendship Association, did not sign pompous declarations for peace and, especially, did not rush to play in productions with an enforced ideological substrate. She appeared in a group of coryphaei, with Aura Buzescu, Agepsina Macri-Eftimiu, and Cleo Pan-Cernățeanu, in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (1944), where the protagonists were Marioara Voiculescu and Sorana Țopa (in alternation), George Vraca and Nicolae Brancomir (in alternation too), Ion Manolescu. The next year, Marietta Anca played the title part in *Lorelay* by S. Cocorăscu, a drama of overwhelming pessimism, and reprised the role of Carmina in *Despot Vodă (The Voivode Despot)* by Alecsandri, with different partners, such as Alexandru Critico, Nicolae Brancomir, Emil Botta.



**Fig. 4 and 5:** The portrait of Marietta Anca, made by Ion Sava, and the mask designed after the portrait, worn by the actress in *Macbeth* by W. Shakespeare.

<sup>19</sup> Idem, *Teatrul românesc*, vol. VIII, 126.

The actress delivered two royal portraits in two opposite performances: Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* by Shakespeare (1946) and Maria de Neubourg in *Ruy Blas* by V. Hugo (1947), at the National Theater, and the title part in *Anna Karenina* after Lev Tolstoi at Odeon Theater.

As the first interpreter of the leading female role in the much-discussed *Macbeth* directed by Ion Sava, in which the actors wore masks, Marietta Anca said before the premiere that "the masks are exceptional, but my point of view is that we are being sacrificed. The expression of the face and of the eyes has been removed and everything is based on the modulations of our voices"<sup>20</sup>. In *Ruy Blas*, conducted by Ion Șahighian and performed with classical artistic means, Marietta Anca was integrated in a strong team, together with Alexandru Critico, Nicolae Brancomir, Nicolae Bălțățeanu.

In 1946-1947, at the new Odeon Theater, Marietta Anca played a different part in the title role in *Anna Karenina* after Lev Tolstoi, directed also by Ion Șahighian. Between the two queens, the actress found all the resources to present the Tolstoian heroine in the whirl of passion, of motherly love, of abandonment. Her partners were Nicolae Bălțățeanu and Toma Dimitriu. Back home, at the National Theater, Marietta Anca was cast by director Sică Alexandrescu as Freda Caplan in *Dangerous Corner* by J.B. Priestley (1947), together with Mihai Popescu, Vasile Lăzărescu, Ion Omescu. "Without demonstrating an in-depth study of the character, Marietta Anca plays with fervor, paying attention to the necessary tensions. We were particularly interested in harmonious transitions from one state of mind to another."<sup>21</sup>

In 1948, two performances in quite different styles included Marietta Anca. She played the Duchess of Marlborough in *The Glass of Water* by E. Scribe, then Vasilissa in *The Lower Depths* by M. Gorki. A representative of the new wave of theatrical critics, Valentin Silvestru noted, after the Scribe production: "Marietta Anca has been very well cast in this role, which requires such a smooth transition in a wide variety of states and situations"<sup>22</sup>. Among the actress's partners were Lia Șahighian and Nina Diaconescu (in alternation), Raluca Zamfirescu, Nicolae Brancomir, Victor Antonescu, Marcel Anghelescu.

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<sup>20</sup> Marietta Anca's statement from the group of opinions "Un spectacol de proporții uriașe pe scena Teatrului Național" ["A Huge Performance on the National Theater Stage"], *Spectator*, (February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1946).

<sup>21</sup> Liana Maxy, "La Teatrul Național: Viraj periculos de J.B. Priestley [At National Theater: Dangerous Corner by J.B. Priestley]," *Rampa*, (December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1947).

<sup>22</sup> Valentin Silvestru, "La Teatrul Național - Studio: Paharul cu apă de E. Scribe [At National Theater - Studio: A Glass of Water E. Scribe]," *Rampa*, (December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1947).



**Fig. 6:** Marietta Anca and Nicolae Brancomir in E. Scribe's *The Glass of Water* directed by Nicolae Massim, Bucharest National Theater, 1948.

As Vasilissa, together with Silvia Fulda, Irina Răchițeanu, Ion Manolescu, Gheorghe Storin, Nicolae Bălțățeanu, Nicoale Făgădaru, Victor Antonescu, Marietta Anca was integrated in a production appreciated as a suite of appearances of famous actors, among which there was a real artistic binder.

In 1950, Marietta Anca played in a Soviet drama *Casa cu storurile trase* (*The House With the Drawn Blinds*) by the Tur brothers. Simion Alterescu, in socialist realism jargon, commented: "The interpretation of Erna Kurtius given by Marietta Anca was just. The actress's critical position towards the character has allowed an achievement that embraces the meaning of the drama of Germany"<sup>23</sup>.

In 1954, the actress was cast in the secondary part of the housekeeper Gyarta in *The Farm Dangaard* by M. Andersen Nexø. Under the artistic direction of Moni Ghelerter, whose productions were based on the subtlety of the actors' performances, the actress had the opportunity to show her desire to integrate into a real team, despite the fact that the role did not seem to serve her qualities. The protagonists were Aura Buzescu, Eliza Petrăchescu, and the young and promising Emanoil Petruț.

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<sup>23</sup> Simion Alterescu, "Cronica teatrală [The Theatrical Chronicle]", *Contemporanul*, (January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1951).



**Fig. 7:** Marietta Anca in *The Lower Depths* by M. Gorki, directed by Fernando de Cruciatti, Bucharest National Theater, 1948.



**Fig. 8:** Marietta Anca as Regan in *King Lear* by Shakespeare (above), National Theater, 1955.

For eleven seasons, starting from 1955, theater lovers were able to hear and see many giants of the Romanian stage in *King Lear* by Shakespeare. During this whole time, except for a few performances in which Dina Cocea played it, Marietta Anca was Regan, in an awesome companionship with Gheorghe Storin (almost blind, making an astonishing creation in the title part), Aura Buzescu, Irina Răchiteanu and Anca Șahighian (in alternation as Goneril), Marietta Deculescu and Anca Șahighian (in alternation as Cordelia), Ion Manolescu and Virgil Popovici (successively as Gloster), Nicolae Bălățeanu and Constantin Bărbulescu (successively as Edmund), Emil Botta and Mihai Berechet (in alternation as Edgar), G. Ciprian and N. Gr. Bălănescu (in alternation as The Count of Kent), Marcel Anghelescu (The Jester).



**Fig. 9:** Marietta Anca at rehearsals, with the director Sică Alexandrescu and Mihai Berechet.



**Fig. 10:** Marietta Anca at rehearsals with Aura Buzescu

The production went almost unnoticed by the theater critics, probably because they did not want to record the lack of affinity between the director and the Shakespearean tragedy.

In 1957, Marietta Anca refused to play the main role in *Judecata focului* (*The Fire's Judgement*) by Al. Adamovici. It seems that the actress's attitude was rooted in the obscure mix of religion in the play's plot, given that she was a fervent believer. Then followed the disciplinary sanctioning of the actress. The sanction appeared in the press<sup>24</sup>, an unusual fact. The sanction and its publication were probably the result of the measures taken after the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and of the fact that the author was actually Alexandru Voitinovici, the president of the High Court of Justice at that time.

Between the small parts in *Surorile Boga* (*The Boga Sisters*) by H. Lovinescu, directed by Moni Ghelerter (1959), and *Învierea* (*The Resurrection*) after Lev Tolstoi, directed by Vlad Mugur (1960), Marietta Anca played Anca in *Năpasta* (*The Scourge*) by I.L. Caragiale, being cast by directors Marietta

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<sup>24</sup> "Gestul reprobabil al unei actrițe [The Reprehensible Attitude of an Actress]" signed A.B., *Contemporanul*, (September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1957).



Sadova and Miron Niculescu (who have been involved succesively in the stage of performance<sup>25</sup>) in alternation with Irina Răchițeanu, together with Emil Botta and Toma Dimitriu. Her acting was discussed by V. Mîndra; he said that "she subtly expressed her exceptional sensitivity. In this version of the show, Anca appeared more feminine without neglecting the requirements of the text."<sup>26</sup>

In 1962, when putting on stage *Macbeth* by W. Shakespeare, director Mihai Berechet made a secondary cast, opposing Marietta Anca and Constantin Bărbulescu to the couple made of Tanți Cocea and Emil Botta. The performance was short-lived because of Emil Botta's sinuous artistic form (although a second cast was available) and because of a sanction received by the director (which led to a hostile attitude toward the performance)<sup>27</sup>.

Distributed by director Miron Niculescu as Queen Elisabeth in *Mary Stuart* by Fr. Schiller (1964), Marietta Anca performed in alternation with Dina Cocea for a short time. She was retired next year, in a context that I find unclear. It seems that the retirement was a result of the refusal to play in *Judecata focului*, this overlapping with the retirement of a group of artists distinguished with such titles as "the people's artist" or "emeritus artist". We need to clarify that Marietta Anca was not awarded any such title. These forced retirements will be the subject of future research.

Although cut short by events beyond the artistic sphere, Marietta Anca's career can be considered remarkable. The opinions of contemporaries, whose intellectual quality has resisted the passage of time, certify an artistic journey that must be taken into account in a history of the actor's art in the Romanian theater.

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<sup>25</sup> According to Vera Molea, *Marietta Sadova sau Arta de a trăi prin teatru [Marietta Sadova or The Art of Living Through the Theater]*, (Bucharest: Editura Bibliotecii Metropolitane, 2013), 163-164.

<sup>26</sup> V. Mîndra, "Cronica teatrală: Năpasta de I.L. Caragiale (II) [The Theatrical Chronicle: The Scourge by I.L. Caragiale (II)]", *Gazeta Literară*, (December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1959).

<sup>27</sup> Mihai Berechet, *9 caiete albastre [9 blue block-notes]*, (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1983), 215-218.

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*Perpetuation or Decline?*  
*The German Theatre in Sibiu at the Turning Point 1918*

URSULA WITTSTOCK<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The present paper focuses on the German theatre in Sibiu at the turning point of the year 1918. It first examines the context of the theatre within the Habsburg monarchy, its settings and the networking with other German-speaking theatres. Then it presents Leo Bauer as the long-standing director of the German theatre in Sibiu, switching to the overthrow of the theatre and its chances of survival within the new boundaries after the proclamation of the union of Transylvania with Romania.

**Keywords:** Transylvania, German theatre, 19th century, Leo Bauer, theatrical conventions, cultural transfer

**The German Theatre in Sibiu: Historic Context and Practices**

The "Radu Stanca" National Theatre in Sibiu, Romania (German: Hermannstadt, Hungarian: Nagyszeben), which has a Romanian and a German section, advertises since 2007 with the catchphrase „Founded in 1788“<sup>2</sup>. Even if one does lack the knowledge of theatre history in Sibiu, some considerations should be made: Above all, from a theatre historical perspective, the idea of a continuum would be rather disputable. It would at the most point to an institutionalised theatre tradition of the city. One cannot speak about a Romanian national theatre in Transylvania before 1918, as this province was until the beginning of the 16th century under the Hungarian Crown and became then a semi-independent state under the suzerainty of

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<sup>2</sup> In original: „Fondat 1788“. See <http://www.tnrs.ro>. [accessed on 6.01.2018]

the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the 17th century, Transylvania became part of the Habsburg monarchy and as of 1867 – with the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Ausgleich*), the emergence of the dual monarchy – it stood again under the Hungarian Crown (Transleithania). Only after the First World War, in 1918, Transylvania proclaimed the union with Romania. Sibiu was until 1790 the capital of the Grand Duchy of Transylvania and it remained the cultural centre of the Transylvanian Saxons up to 1918, as it was predominantly influenced by German culture.

Therefore, it is not possible to comprise the history of the theatre in Sibiu into one of a national theatre, due to the shifting of boundaries and the historically determined prerequisites. Although, the town could look back on a rather long tradition of German theatre, which went back to the 16th century, to the time of the Protestant school drama, but it would not come to the founding of a *national stage* for the Transylvanian Saxons. The city had a theatre, which was founded in 1788 and owned by the book printer and editor Martin von Hochmeister the Elder (1740-1789). It was built in one of the former fortification towers of the town wall and leased out to different German-speaking touring companies. The theatre went through various status changes since the middle of the 19th century: it was first a private institution, then the town theatre, until it became a theatre for the German minority.

The German theatre in Sibiu was part of a dynamic network of German-speaking theatres in the Habsburg monarchy, within which theatrical practices were exchanged, beyond the common perception of a cultural correlation between centre and periphery, in which Vienna played the role of the theatre metropolis. As Helga Mitterbauer puts it, the dynamic network considers also bypasses and interstations through which cultural elements are often transferred<sup>3</sup>. With regard to theatre, this network was not mainly powered by the fact that theatre productions circulated throughout Central Europe, but by the transfer of theatre practices like staging and acting.

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<sup>3</sup> See Helga Mitterbauer, "Dynamik-Netzwerk-Macht. Kulturelle Transfers „am besonderen Beispiel“ der Wiener Moderne" ["Dynamics-Network-Power. Cultural Transfers Illustrated by the Viennese Modern Age"] in *Ent-grenzte Räume. Kulturelle Transfers um 1900 und in der Gegenwart* [Expanded Spaces. Cultural Transfers around 1900 and Nowadays], edited by Helga Mitterbauer and Katharina Scherke (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2005), 113.



Fig. 1: Theatre in Sibiu (Hermannstadt)

The theatre of the 19th century was based on certain conventions of performance, which Marion Linhardt describes using the term "performative Stereotypen"<sup>4</sup> [performative stereotypes] and doing so she is referring not only to the stage space or the design, but to the actor himself. One of the most important stereotype was the system of dramatic roles, which strongly regulated the cast and led to a surge of new theatre plays. With the beginning of the 19th century, German theaters introduced the French model of organizing the company, in which each actor was casted according to his acting skills.<sup>5</sup> Thus, roles were not individually but standardised. This will later come to a change through naturalism and the emerge of *Regietheater* (the director's theatre). Roles like chevalier, intrigueur, burlesque were complemented by new ones, as the French comedy of manners and its

<sup>4</sup> Marion Linhardt, "Kunstwissenschaft vs. performative Stereotypen?" ["Aesthetics versus Performative Stereotypes?"] in *Zeit/Sprünge zu Aspekte des Performativen, Theatralen, Pädagogischen, Medialen und Rhetorischen im 19. Jahrhundert* [Time/Lapses on Aspects of Performativity, Theatre, Pedagogy and Rhetoric in the 19th Century] edited by Nicole Haitzinger and Claudia Jeschke (München: Epodium, 2007), 115.

<sup>5</sup> See Hans Doerrey, *Das Rollenfach im deutschen Theaterbetrieb des 19. Jahrhunderts* [The Role System in German Theatre in the 19th Century] (Berlin: Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 1926), 12-13.

German imitations were included in the repertoire: *bon viveur*, *salonnière*. These typecasts led to the expansion of personnel: from 17-20 actors in the 18th century to 25-30 actors in the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> While bigger theatres disestablished the system of dramatic roles, smaller ones in the provinces would keep it out of economical reasons, as it facilitated the engagement of actors.<sup>7</sup>

The theatre routine of the 19th century displayed the symptom of mobility, which was in contrast to the coexistent sedentism of troupes. Anja Hentschel suggests that the reestablishment of theatres induced an increased mobility of individual actors and no longer of touring companies, as it happened since the 18th century.<sup>8</sup> A quick look into the *Neuer Theater-Almanach*<sup>9</sup> would confirm the temporary structure of stage ensembles of many German-speaking theatres.

For the German theatre in Sibiu, Leo Bauer (1848-1939) is an example of such a mobility. He was born in Vienna and was at first a background actor at the "Burgtheater", while attending the drama school of Valentin Niklas<sup>10</sup> (1806-1883). His school was rather a training stage, where Heinrich Laube<sup>11</sup> (1806-1884) discovered Leo Bauer and brought him to the "Wiener Stadttheater" in 1874. Ineluctable, Bauer followed several engagements at theatres across the monarchy as a character actor and director. In 1883 he was at the "Theater in der Josefstadt" and one year later at the "Theater an der Wien". He went then to Teschen (Cieszyn/Silesia), Sarajevo (Bosnia), Pola (Croatia), Bielitz (Bielsko/Silesia), Sibiu and Brasov (Transylvania), before settling at Sibiu in 1893 and taking over the theatre for the next 27 years. He made here his stage debut on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1890 as King

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<sup>6</sup> Doerrey, *Das Rollenfach*, 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> See Judith Eisermann, *Josef Kainz – Zwischen Tradition und Moderne. [Josef Kainz - Between Tradition and Modernity]* (München: Utz Verlag, 2010), 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> See Anja Hentschel, *Mobilitätsforschung und Theatergeschichte: Zur Mobilität von Schauspielern im 19. Jahrhundert. [Mobility Research and Theatre History: The Mobility of Actors in the 19th Century]* in *Aktuelle Tendenzen der Theatergeschichtsforschung. [Recent Trends in Theatre History]* (Berlin: Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 1996), 55.

<sup>9</sup> *Neuer Theater-Almanach* was a theatre yearbook published in Berlin, which listed all German theaters in Europe with their artistic and administrative staff, starting with 1880 until 1914.

<sup>10</sup> Valentin Niklas was an actor and director at theatres in Vienna and the province until 1859, when he became stage manager and director of supernumeraries at the Burgtheater in Vienna.

<sup>11</sup> Heinrich Laube was a German dramatist and theatre director, first at the Burgtheater and then at the Stadttheater in Vienna.

Louis XI. in the one-act play *Gringoire* by Théodore de Banville (1823-1891), a repertory piece from the "Burgtheater" in Vienna. The local press complimented him as being a sensible and purposeful actor with a sonorous voice and great skills, concluding that he is an excellent acquisition.<sup>12</sup>

Leo Bauer's career until his long-term engagement in Transylvania is regarded as exemplary for a mobility that differs from the specific, convergent metropolis-province model. Despite the decisive role of Vienna, it points out to a brisk activity at the peripheries, at those locations, which were interconnected. As Philipp Ther has noticed it for the musical theatres in Central Europe, these contacts strengthen and get permanent. They formed multilateral networks amidst intensive cultural transfer processes.<sup>13</sup> To understand these dynamics one has to look at the requirements of stage engagements and the arrangement of the repertoire. A director would compile his ensemble before the season started with the help of theatre agencies to begin rehearsals on time. The above mentioned role system would play a significant part in this undertaking. The repertoire consisted of plays en vogue, then classical plays, which formed the base stock. We can therefore conclude, that the repertoire of German theatres in the Habsburg monarchy coincided, and, as the chronicler summed it up, these theatres were both in the concentric perimeter of Vienna as a theatrical metropolis, as well as part of a network of many further locations:

Für unsere Bühne ist ebenso wie für alle deutschen Provinztheater unserer Monarchie der Wiener Theatermarkt maßgebend: wir müssen von dort unsere Darsteller beziehen, nicht nur weil Berlin zu weit ist, sondern auch, weil der reichsdeutsche Schauspieler zumeist unserem Geschmack weit weniger entspricht, als der österreichische. Somit ist ein gewisser Kreislauf von selbst gegeben, der unsere Stadt mit Orten wie Laibach, Klagenfurt, Olmütz, Troppau, Czernowitz uff. verbindet.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt*, XVII, 22.10.1890.

<sup>13</sup> See Philipp Ther, *In der Mitte der Gesellschaft. Operntheater in Zentraleuropa 1815-1914*. [In the Middle of Society. Musical Theatres in Central Europe 1815-1914] (Vienna: Oldenburg, 2006), 414.

<sup>14</sup> *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt*, XL, 21.10.1913. "The theatre market in Vienna is decisive for us, as well for all German province theatres of our monarchy: we have to get our actors from there, not only because Berlin is too far away, but also because the German actor suits us less than the Austrian actor. It's a natural circuit, which ties our town to places like Ljubljana, Klagenfurt, Olomuc, Opava, Chernivtsi."

Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches
Tageblatt.

Nr. 1. Hermannstadt, Donnerstag 1. Januar. 1874.

In unserm Vater!

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Fig. 2: Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt, no 1.1874.



Fig. 3: Leo Bauer's Ensemble, 1910



The circulation of actors predestined the above mentioned analogy of the repertoires and, if some differences could be noticed, their outcome in a comparative analysis would rather be of humble importance. Required local features or selfconception would eventually shatter due to this correlations between repertoire and theatre business. The actors would produce their role range to theatre agencies and thus get their engagement. The autonomous study of a role with less diffusiveness would not have brought the desired engagement or assumed reputation.

### The Repertoire

Constantly published theatre reviews as well as the retrospect of theatre seasons and contributions to events on the stage in Sibiu and on other stages were purveyed by Ernst Jekelius the Elder (1862-1937), attorney, senator and deputy mayor of Sibiu, who monitored the theatre activity of his home town as a second profession since 1887. His reviews were one of the most widely read sections of the daily paper "Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt". Jekelius intended to write a theatre history based on his notes, all he left is a sketch of an overview, which listed first the "noble inventory" of the German theatre in Sibiu within a time span of 50 years (from 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1874 to 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1923)<sup>15</sup>: Johann Wolfgang Goethe (*Götz von Berlichingen, Clavigo, Egmont, Faust, Iphigenie*), Friedrich Schiller (*The Bride of Messina, Don Carlos, Demetrius, The Maid of Orleans, Intrigue and Love, Maria Stuart, The Robbers, Turandot, Wallenstein, Wilhelm Tell*), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (*Emilia Galotti, Minna von Barnhelm, Nathan the Wise*), William Shakespeare (*Taming of a Shrew, Henric IV, Hamlet, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Romeo and Julia, Richard III, A Midsommer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, A Winters Tale*), Franz Grillparzer (*Die Ahnfrau [The Ancestress], The Jewess of Toledo, The Fortune and Fall of King Ottokar, Des Meeres und der Liebe Wellen [Waves of Sea and Love], Medea, Sappho*), Christian Friedrich Hebbel (*Gyges and his Ring, Judith and Holofernes, Maria Magdalena*), Heinrich von Kleist (*Katie of Heilbronn, The Prince of Homburg, The Broken Jug*).

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<sup>15</sup> Ernst Jekelius, "Das deutsche Theater in Hermannstadt 1874-1924" ["The German Theatre in Sibiu 1874-1924"] in *Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tageblatt*. LI, 1.01.1924.

This list might seem misleading as it highlights a literary canon of classics. As we know now, theatre underwent a commercializing starting with the second half of the 19th century, which involved the extension of the light stage literature, automatically referred to as low-grade stage productions by the historiography. Recently, theatrical research is pleading for an enlarged perspective upon theatre, in the sense of its commercializing, beside its aesthetic factor.

Theatrical firms' fiscal practices derive not only from an aesthetic outlook but also from the interactions of consumers, producers, capital, and what was called in the nineteenth century political economy.<sup>16</sup>

Peter W. Marx describes this as a contract between the theatre and its public, not only as participants in a cultural event, but as economical partners, which are subjects to the law of demand and supply and to which the dichotomy of high and low literature is inherent:<sup>17</sup>

Though many attempts have been undertaken to overcome the simplistic dichotomy of 'high' versus 'low' culture, the implicit binary of this opposition remains present and influences the concept of modern theatre.<sup>18</sup>

Altogether, the theatre had in the above mentioned period 6792 stagings, out of which 2298 were operettas, while the rest was in large part dedicated to comedy (burlesque, farce, folk play). Jekelius' notes reveal that the stage in Sibiu was also shared by Transylvanian Saxon associations and by Romanian and Hungarian theatre companies, both professionals and dilettantes.

### **The Turning Point 1918**

Apart from those impacts and upheavals, for which certain persons take the responsibility, for instance a new theatre manager, or, apart from cultural milestones as the turn of the century at 1900, a continuum may be

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<sup>16</sup> Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), cited in Peter W. Marx, "Consuming the Canon: Theatre, Commodification, and Social Mobility in Late Nineteenth-Century German Theatre", *Theatre Research International* 31, no2 (2006): 129.

<sup>17</sup> Peter W. Marx, *Consuming the Canon*, 130.

<sup>18</sup> Peter W. Marx, *Consuming the Canon*, 130.

affected by events rooted in current political affairs, as the outbreak of the First World War or the rearrangement of states after 1918. These turning points put the theatre into new order patterns, where adaptation is called for.

The activity of the theater in Sibiu was affected by the war since its outbreak, even though the town became part of the theatre of war only in 1916, with the offensive of the Romanian army in August 1916. The theatre didn't close down, as it became a matter of distraction for the remaining population, by staging mostly comedy and operetta. War affected the repertoire also in political terms, as some authors couldn't be staged in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. French and English authors were now on the enemy side, except Shakespeare, which was still scheduled in the repertoire. While theatres in Germany reverted to national-patriotic plays, the theatre in Sibiu didn't become the stage for a nationalistic spirit. The audiences great appetite for the musical genre is reflected in the statistics of Leo Bauer's mandate.

War and political reorder after the proclamation of the Union of Transylvania with Romania in 1918 had an adverse effect on the German theatre in Sibiu. With the downfall of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy came now a series of attempts to curtail or even dissolve institutions of minority, in this case of the German minority. New legislative decrees impeded the theatre management to pick up its tradition, e.g. frontier closure, refused admission for German and Austrian artists. These led to a temporary closing of the theatre.

Starting with 1918, the German population in Transylvania came to regard its almost lost theatre as a valuable means in the preservation of their identity. The theatre reacted to it by trying to find new forms of survival. Due to the precarious financial situation, some of the actors left Bauer's ensemble. At the same time the ensemble split into smaller touring companies, which played in various Transylvanian towns, hoping for vital earnings. Simultaneously, a German theatre association was founded in Sibiu on the 23rd of April 1919 as a reaction to the predicaments caused by the war and the new state structure. The German cultural journal wrote: „Wir leben abgeschlossen von der großen Welt, ohne genügende Verbindung mit dem befruchtenden Ausland. Kein Wunder, wenn das Theater den modernen Ansprüchen nicht mehr genügen kann.“<sup>19</sup> [„We live isolated from the big world, without enough connection to the fertilising abroad. No wonder that the theatre cannot meet the high demands of modern culture.“]

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<sup>19</sup> [H.T.S.], "Theater und Theaterverein in Hermannstadt" *Ostland. Monatsschrift für die Kultur der Ostdeutschen*. I, 3rd issue, (August 1919): 160.

The association aimed to find new actors, literally out of their own ranks. Thus, they organized regular rehearsal evenings. They trusted Leo Bauer's long term experience to provide young talents. But their primary objective was the valorisation of German literature, particularly the literature of the Transylvanian Saxons. The focus on local cultural assets led to the fact, that the first play staged by the association was the historical Drama *Die Flandrer am Alt* [*The Flemish at the Olt*] by Michael Albert (1836-1893). The play portrayed the settlement of the Saxons<sup>20</sup> on the river Olt in Transylvania in the year 1150. They had been invited by the Hungarian king to protect the area from the invading Cumans and established here their homeland.

Although they played it six times to a full house, the critics rejected the choice, arguing that the play was an example for immature indigenous stage literature.<sup>21</sup> These reaction states an orientation towards up-to-date theatre practice and less a withdrawal into provincialism.

In the spring of 1921, representatives of the German theatre association in Sibiu called on Dr. Emil Isac (1886-1954), inspector general of the theatres in Transylvania and Banat to present the plans of an arrangement of the German theatre. They met the approval of Isac, the general public was then informed that all aspirations will be brought together into a memorandum. It should then be presented on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1921 in Bucharest at the congress regarding the regulation of theatres in Romania. Head of the congress was the minister of culture, Octavian Goga (1881-1938). These efforts combined with the responsiveness of the Romanian part brought the hope, that the German theatre will have a future. Even if the theatre lost its license in 1922, it will have been reestablished in the 1930s and then definitive after the war in 1956.

As for Leo Bauer, he couldn't cope with the new situation, in spite of or perhaps because of his long term experience in a lost theatre business, also refusing any support from the new structures. He represents the end of an era of theatre history, which couldn't be resurrected.

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<sup>20</sup> The term „Saxon“ is a historical misinterpretation; it applies to German-speaking population that came from the area of what today is Flandres, Wallonia, Luxemburg.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

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## *The Image of History in Matei Vişniec's Dramaturgy*

CRISTIAN GROȘU<sup>1</sup>

### **Motto**

*At the age of 17, I believed in progress, even in the utopia of science (it seemed logical to me that humanity was going to get it better due to scientific and technological discoveries). Later, when I became a teacher and I was engaging in an infernal commute between Bucharest and Dorobantu-Pătărești village, all my illusions were shattered and I understood that the communist system was impossible to reform from within. Now, after 31 years of living in the West, it seems to me that the capitalist system cannot be reformed from within either, and that the unique consumer pattern adopted by the whole planet leads us to collective suicide. In addition, we have also discovered that people never learn from the mistakes of the past, and that history repeats itself with its most macabre episodes. A new mediaeval fragmentation of human societies is possible, a return of religious obscurantism is possible, a regression of democracy is evident on the planet, and a new age of dictators (or dictatorships) seems plausible to me. History is not an exact science; it is the approximate (often politically instrumentalized) reading of human adventure.*

(Matei Vişniec)

**Abstract:** This paper aims at analyzing the dramaturgical tools in Matei Vişniec's dramaturgy, which shed light upon the relation between art and history, between art under the cover of fiction and what takes place outside the walls of the theatre. These two are never completely split, they intertwine and they empower one another. A key point in Matei Vişniec's work is the way in which history is presented like a mechanism dwelling phenomena always ready to repeat themselves, as for instance totalitarianism. The content of the paper is based on theoretical approaches, also on the opinions of the

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dramaturge in relation with his own creation and on practical assumption following a personal point of view of the actor integrated within two productions based on plays written by Matei Vişniec: *The Spectator Sentenced to Death*<sup>2</sup> and *Richard III Will Not Take Place or Scenes of the Life of Meyerhold*<sup>3</sup>

**Keywords:** history, totalitarianism, theatre, Matei Vişniec, freedom, absurd, grotesque, terror.

There are three key questions that the present paper is based upon: which are the mechanisms of history? Is there any possibility for an oppressive historical fact (dictatorship, for instance) to repeat itself in new, unrecognizable forms? Which is the relation between history and theatre, as it is presented in contemporary dramaturgy? Starting from these interrogations, I approached a few texts by Matei Vişniec, in order to outline the fact that we are caught in the trap of a historical machinery that will adapt its rules to no matter what changes and that, in very subversive ways, history can revive atrocities which seemed buried and (maybe) forgotten long time ago. From this perspective, brought in the field of art in general and in theatre especially, it is natural to ask ourselves: in what way is history supposed to influence and shape the form of certain theatrical manifestations and, in reverse, how is art meant to challenge the course of history and even change it? To these questions, Matei Vişniec answered:

Neither literature nor theatre ever overthrew a dictatorship or brought about the fall of a monstrous regime. Still, literature and theatre can become spaces of cultural resistance, zones of relative freedom, forms of direct or veiled social critique. Art and especially theatre have an influence upon history as they are able to change people, to make them think and reflect, to get worried and indignant, sometimes to the extent of revolting themselves.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Răzvan Mureşan director, *Spectatorul condamnat la moarte* by Matei Vişniec, Teatrul Naţional „Lucian Blaga”, Cluj-Napoca, premiered on 21 December 2013

<sup>3</sup> Răzvan Mureşan director, *Richard al III-lea se interzice!* by Matei Vişniec, Teatrul Naţional „Lucian Blaga”, Cluj-Napoca, premiered on 18 September 2015

<sup>4</sup> All the quotations from Matei Vişniec (the motto of the paper included) in relation with the topics of the paper are excerpts from the interview that he gave me especially for the elaboration of the present paper.

If we remain in the area of this connection between history (in its extreme forms manifested through totalitarian regimes) and art, is it obvious to point out a connection that Matei Vișniec makes in his play *Richard III Will Not Take place Or Scenes from the Life of Meyerhold* between Vsevolod Meyerhold, Stalin and the Shakespearean character Richard III. It is well known how Shakespeare deals with the issue of power: King Richard III, as Shakespeare portrayed him, is the mirror of the systems that are imposing themselves through crime, manipulation and oppression, just like in the case of Stalin. The system is legitimating itself through an ideology that brings a key figure, or a very carefully designed stereotype. As far as Stalin is concerned, this tool of manipulation and validation of his atrocities is the image of the "new man". Getting back to Matei Vișniec's dramaturgy, we are confronted with the image of history as an origin of this sort of atrocities in the scene of the birth of the new man in *Richard III Will Not Take place Or Scenes from the Life of Meyerhold*. As Laura Pavel pointed out:

One of the most grotesque scenes in the post-communist theatre that approaches political themes is, without a doubt, the birth of the "new man", of the "marionette-child" in Matei Vișniec's tragic farce *Richard al III-lea nu se mai face sau Scene din viața lui Meyerhold* [*Richard III is Forbidden or scenes from Meyerhold's life*]. Having turned into a grown-up rather suddenly, through what appears to be a genetically inherited ideological perversion, the child turns, within the span of a few moments, into a monstrous censor of the Stalinist regime. Once he has fitted the Shakespearean Richard III crown upon his head, the "newly-born comrade" brings a simultaneously nightmarish and hilarious indictment against his own father, the illustrious Russian director Meyerhold.<sup>5</sup>

As Mihai Lungeanu emphasized, the above mentioned scene is an expression of the absurd, as the child, once born, becomes "the quintessence of terror".<sup>6</sup> Also, the grotesque walks hand in hand with the absurd<sup>7</sup> in the

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Pavel, *Teatru și identitate. Interpretări pe scena interioară / Theatre and identity. Interpretations on the inner stage* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa cărții de știință, 2012), 147-148.

<sup>6</sup> Mihai Lungeanu, *Personajul virtual sau Calea către al V-lea punct cardinal la Matei Vișniec* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2014), 120

<sup>7</sup> Mihai Lungeanu, *Personajul virtual*, 120.



scene where the head of “King Richard” is served on a plate by Stalin himself. In fact this is a paradigm of the history as it is presented by Matei Vișniec in the plays in which he refers to the atrocities of totalitarianism. An important concept in the play *Richard III Will Not Take place* is the evil. We were used to the image of the Shakesperean Richard as an expression of the historical evil itself. On the contrary, the character Meyerhold created by Matei Vișniec turns Richard into another kind of character, which can be easily perceived as a positive one, as he is, in contrast with Stalin, the evil deprived of any ideological dimension.



Fig. 1: Scene from *Richard al III-lea se interzice / Richard III Will Not Take place*.  
From left to right Cristian Grosu and Matei Rotaru.

RICHARD III: I am when I can get away from a life of crime, Comrade Maestro Artiste. In the meantime, I’m still killing... I have killed the two princes, my nephews, I have killed my wife, Queen Anne, I have killed my loyal friend Lord Buckingham... All those who could lay claim to the crown and who could have stood in the way of my goal are dead. Except Lord Richmond, who has fled to France to seek out help. But I will crush him on the field of battle... Tell me, Maestro Artiste, why do you want to make me into a sympathetic character?

MEYERHOLD: Because you represent evil without the trappings of ideology. You are a dark force, but you represent honest evil. You kill to get power, but you do not kill in the name of some grand utopia. You have no scruples, no hesitation to do wrong, but you do not ask your accomplices or your victims to praise your crime. With you there is a certain grandeur in the horror, because you are not a demagogue. You fascinate and you terrify at the same time, but you do not set yourself up as God. You fake friendship and love, but one cannot deny that you do it with class. You throw a little brutality in with deceit, but your speech is subtle and surprising. You represent something humanity has lost: evil, raw, sincere, and pure. Today, evil is cloaked in a thousand promises of a better world. Today, it's not enough for evil to crush the crowd, it wants to be adored by them at the same time. The evil of today is not content to live in the palace and dominate the world, it wants to live inside the head of the people and control them from inside. The evil of today is the worst plague of our time. The evil of today is so tenacious and insidious it can leave its mark on a fetus in the womb.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that main character of the play is the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold has a very special relevance for the problematic of history in relation with the art of theatre. Meyerhold, beyond being an inventor in the field of his art<sup>9</sup>, he is the hero-artist, the one who died for what he mostly believed in, being executed by the Stalinist regime. Meyerhold had a very specific and authentic vision on how his art should be. For him, psychological states are determined by specific physiological

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<sup>8</sup> Matei Vișniec, *Richard III Will Not Take Place Or Scenes from the Life of Meyerhold*, trans. Jeremy Lawrence, in *Matei Vișniec - How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays*, ed. Jozefina Komporalý (Chicago: Seagull Books, 2015), 233-234.

<sup>9</sup> Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874 - 1940) marked the history of theater by imposing biomechanics as a training technique for performers. Meyerhold's choice of this technique was a reaction to the naturalist theater. What brings Meyerhold new is the intervention by which he changes the paradigm of production and reception of the theater performance and which consists in placing the emphasis on the physicality and plasticity of the performer (on the possibilities of the body, respectively on the form of what is represented) by contrast with traditional methods that focused on the supremacy of the text of the play, or on present psychological realism. He thus opposes his professor Constantin Stanislavki, and he finally departed from him at the end of a process of rejection of naturalism, which began approximately in 1903.

processes. By physically correcting his condition, the actor reaches the point where he experiences that type of excitation that is communicated to the spectator and thus induces his willingness to feel and be part of the show. This state is, for Meyerhold, the core of theatrical art.<sup>10</sup>

The meeting between him (as character created by Matei Vişniec) and Richard III (on one hand, as the expression of the history portrayed by Shakespeare, on the other hand as a character created by another character) on the ground of the totalitarianism proliferated by Stalin speaks a lot about the possibility of the history to return with different masks, but with similar devastating effects.



**Fig. 2:** Scene from *Richard al III-lea se interzice / Richard III Will Not Take Place*. From left to right Miron Maxim and Cristian Grosu.

Thinking about the possibility of history returning, of politics staging new tragedies, I asked Matei Vişniec what he thinks about this, about this possible return of the ideological evil. He answered, highlighting the extreme danger of nowadays directions in social behavior and politics: a deformed, absurd *déjà vu*, endangering the freedom of thought and the democratic values gained with so many historical sacrifices.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Brown, *Meyerhold – A Revolution in the Theatre* (Surrey: Methuen Drama, 1998), 67.

Absolutely, and yet how! In Turkey, the secular state, inspired by the Western model, was gradually liquidated by the so-called moderate Islamist party. In Egypt, at the time I am writing these lines, a law is being examined to ban atheism (in other words, no one will have the right to declare himself an atheist, you will have to choose a religion otherwise you would otherwise risk being declared as suffering from mental illness). Imperial nostalgia is visible in Russia, China, and even in Iran. There are many areas of the world in which the grotesque and absurd situations described by me in some plays persist. Even Europe risks to be fragmented against the background of the migrants' crisis. Some western democracies are gurgled by the power of money, like the American one. Donald Trump reminds us of *King Ubu*, he is a planetary clown who has been entrusted with the guard of the nuclear button. Italian democracy becomes a *populocracy*, in other words, a society in which populism triumphs through caricature – like characters. Berlusconi was an example, but Beppe Grillo is even more *commedia dell'arte* at the political level. A great philosopher said that history repeats itself in the following way: what was a drama comes in the form of comedy (and sometimes vice versa). I think we are witnessing today the tragedy of the disintegration of the traditional democratic model. In Western Europe, the ease with which radical Islam progresses is narcotic. Nothing is more opposite to radical Islam than Western freedom and democracy. And the "useful idiots" of radical Islam, that is to say, the left-wing intellectuals who believe that Muslim immigration is the expression of the new proletariat, are heavily involved in the total extinction of the Western way of life.

If in *Richard III Will Not Take place* history is the playground for the ideological evil which give birth to monstrous exponents of the totalitarianism, like the image of the new-man, in *The Spectator Sentenced to Death*, Matei Vișniec creates a parody against the "justice" exerted in the Stalinist totalitarian regime. Terms like guilt, innocence, evidence mingle their meaning in an absurd context where everybody can be accused, found guilty and killed. The spectator bears his guilt a priori, he is integrated in a court where roles exchange, reality and fiction being separated by a very thin and fragile border.

The distanciation and the anti-catharsis that Vişniec now proposes to the reader or spectator are no longer intended to awaken some sense attitude, or a revolutionary consciousness afflicted by surfeit; instead, like in the *The Spectator Sentenced to Death*, *The Prompter of Fear*, *Gufi's Country*, or *Decomposed Theatre*, they are meant to parody the utopian logic and mystifying verbosity that made possible the totalitarian concentration camp universe.<sup>11</sup>

At this point it is important for me to speak from the point of view of an actor who was part of two performances based on plays by Matei Vişniec, which, as it was specified, have at their core themes like history and art, or the image of history in relation with paradigms of totalitarianism.



foto: Nicu Cherciu © TNC

**Fig. 3.** Scene from *The Spectator Sentenced to Death*.

From left to right Patricia Brad, Miron Maxim Cristian Grosu and Ionuț Caras

The two shows directed by Răzvan Mureșan at the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, *The Spectator Sentenced to Death* and *Richard III Will Not Take Place Or Scenes from the Life of Meyerhold* prove to be extremely meaningful for the vision that Matei Vişniec himself has about historical traumas which do

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<sup>11</sup> Laura Pavel, *Teatru și identitate [Theatre and identity]*, 150.

not cease to be represented and questioned in contemporary dramaturgy. In both cases, the audience plays a very important role: the spectators are extremely close to the performers, they are practically placed at the reach of the actors's hands.

Beyond the sensation of deep intimacy given by the claustrophobic arrangement of the space (there seems to be no split between the acting space and the spectators' area), there is a clear feeling of having the same life, of taking part in the same history and not at all in a symbolic way, not in an abstract mode of relating to the reality referred to. The actors are clearly able to see and feel every gaze of the spectators, every gesture, every single reaction they have at what it is staged and performed. Similarly, the spectators can see each drop of sweat of the actors, every twinkle of their eyes.

This proximity generates the feeling that we are caught together in the same trap of history, in the claustrophobia of the ones that can find no escape from a history which menaces to repeat itself, even if dressed in new clothes and wearing a different make-up. Stalin's grin, the new-man's atrocity, Richard's fear, Meyerhold's nightmare, the fake tools of a fake juridical system, the set up history imposed in the name of a machinery that got to work by itself are directly in the eyes of the audience who is no longer detached, but part of the same experience shared by the actors.

It is also a great feeling, mixed with a deep emotion to have the author himself in the audience. This is why I asked Matei Vișniec how he perceived the two shows directed by the Răzvan Mureșan and I think that the answer that has been gives validates both visions:

I do not really have enough words to answer this question. I enjoyed enormously the two shows, they touched me and made me happy. They were two theatrical jewels, but what it is mostly important is the fact that the director (and the whole team together with him) plunged deeply into the core of my theater. In the small studio of the National Theater in Cluj Napoca I fully felt that it was worth dedicating my life to the theater.

Of course there are many other titles that should be taken into account when we speak about history, politics and totalitarianism in Matei Vișniec's dramaturgy. There are issues that are fully relevant for the Romanian society, for our post-revolutionary trauma. It is impossible, in this sense, not to revisit the play *How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients*, in which the author refers at a large extent to ideology.

If, with *Richard III Will Not Take Place* we face the visage of the ideological evil, in this case we are welcomed in the laboratory of the ideologist. We discover that this industry of promises functions and it is set in motion by an eternal promise that the heaven will descend on Earth. The images of the dictators are just a succession of faces that flow on the same water, masks of the same reality. No matter which kind of party or nation launches the ideological attack, it is all about the same mechanism that will finally bring about crime, repression and a complete lack of freedom. Anyway, we cannot escape the question that comes back again and again: how is it possible that the history repeats itself in this way? Maybe the answer is given by Hanna Arendt when she speaks about terror. In Matei Visniec's plays we are confronted with traumas of regimes that were built upon terror. Nowadays, more subversive systems may appear, as they are not openly using terror.

A fundamental difference between modern dictatorships and all other tyrannies of the past is that terror is no longer used as a means to exterminate and frighten opponents, but as an instrument to rule masses of people who are perfectly obedient. Terror as we know it today strikes without any preliminary provocation, its victims are innocent even from the point of view of the persecutor. (...) On the one hand, the Bolshevik system, unlike the Nazi, never admitted theoretically that it could practice terror against innocent people, and though in view of certain practices this may look like hypocrisy, it makes quite a difference. Russian practice, on the other hand, is even more "advanced" than the German in one respect: arbitrariness of terror is not even limited by racial differentiation, while the old class categories have long since been discarded, so that anybody in Russia may suddenly become a victim of the police terror. We are not concerned here with the ultimate consequence of rule by terror—namely, that nobody, not even the executors, can ever be free of fear; in our context we are dealing merely with the arbitrariness by which victims are chosen, and for this it is decisive that they are objectively innocent, that they are chosen regardless of what they may or may not have done.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hanna Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976), 6.

Matei Vișniec's dramaturgy has, thus, the function to awaken us, to help us keep in mind how even ourselves can help the totalitarian machinery go on working or even get better, if we forget and let ignorance creep in.

The image of history, through Vișniec's lenses, has a lot to do with the function of art. Even if art will not trigger a Revolution by itself it has the mission to prevent our reason from falling asleep, to be confronted to what has been done wrong and paid with too high prices.

What is mostly notable in Matei Vișniec's dramaturgy is that the author never points an accusing finger at anyone, he never morally focused, but creates characters made equally of pain, laughter, sorrow, absurdity or painful reality. Just like life. In the end, the one who can provide us with an open conclusion is the writer himself:

Whatever it is, there were millions of people who honestly believed in communism, but who ended up being manipulated and eventually massacred. How is it possible that a utopia (which seemed so generous) to dominate a whole century, start with incredible impetus, inflame the entire 20th century and end up with a hundred million dead and a the huge historical gap? Today we are talking about a new utopia, which would be globalization. Unfortunately, globalization is a utopia that has no ideology or philosophical basis. Let us not forget that the Communist utopia began with a reflection that lasted almost a hundred years, and it was only afterwards that it took place. And it came out! Communism was a utopia initially thought by thousands of people. Hundreds and hundreds of texts have been written about what should have been the great communist, social-democratic, socialist utopia ... But globalization began without any kind of thought, without any basis of reflection, and we are heading for something that is not clearly prefigured on the horizon. We navigate to the unknown in a context of terrible violence, terrible uncertainty, in a world full of monsters that can come to light every step. Who imagined, when communism collapsed, that the future great danger of mankind would be integrism? No one. Integrism was a joke, and yet, terrorism, integrism is beginning to show its grin.



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## *Theatre for Young Audience. A Romanian Cultural Landscape*

### OLTIȚA CÎNTEC<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Offering an overview of the Romanian theatre for children and teenagers, the present paper is mapping the existing public or private institutions and theatre companies that function in Romania. The main points of interest presented and discussed are: the question of the audience (age, social milieu, the means this young audience comes or is brought to the theatre, the marketing strategies elaborated by the companies); the theatre men and women (stage directors, set designers, puppeteers and playwrights or dramaturges) specialized in performances for youngsters, as well as the tendency of well-known artists to try their hand in this specific direction; the important number of festivals and theatrical encounters that appeared after the communist period and in the last years, revealing an increasing interest for this kind of theatre, coming from the professional artistic field as well as from the young and adult Romanian audience.

**Keywords:** theatre for teenagers, theatre for children, Romanian theatre, festivals for young audience

Seventeen state companies, according to the National Institute of Statistic, dedicated to young audience all over the country plus a few private companies (mainly in Bucharest) foster a solid institutional structure working for the next generations. In the years to come, will the new generations go or not to see theatre performances – will this still be a spiritual need? This is one of the bets that this type of theatre is proposing. The educational dimension is one of most importance when we speak about theatre for youngsters. And it is well known that it helps them: first – to become future adults; second – to encourage them to discover the fabulous world of imagery; third – to offer a few possible answers regarding the

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complicated part of this stage of life, because many times being a teenager is not the simplest part of our lives, as I'm sure we all remember it; fourth – to develop their curiosity. And the list still remains open.

Most of the Romanian state companies are named „theatre for children and young people”, practically indicating the fact that these artists are creating for a wide range of spectators. They have to offer an appealing repertory for children from kindergarten to elementary school, middle school and high school, providing a varied offer, if they really expect to have this demographic segment interested in coming to the theatre. And they do, as the number of spectators proves to be one of the most relevant items when it comes to success. Concerning the repertory, for the youngest, the most attractive proposals are still fairy tales: the Grimm Brothers or Charles Perrault's stories, but also the Romanian classics, the ones written by Ion Creangă, Ioan Slavici, Petre Ispirescu etc. All adapted for theatre and staged by specialised directors. Amongst this category some of the most popular figures are Cristian Pepino (Bucharest), Constantin Brehnescu (Iassy), Gavril Cadariu, Oana Leahu (Tg. Mureș), Radu Dinulescu (Arad), Gavril Pinte (Bucharest). These shows are using different ways of expression, from puppetry to acting, musical, dance, new media etc. Still very popular, puppets (string puppets, glove puppets, Bibabo, Bunraku, animated objects etc.) remain the children's favourite theatrical encounters. There are also set designers specialized in performances for youngsters such as Eustatiu Gregorian (Craiova), Eugenia Tărășcu-Jianu (Constanța), Daniela Drăgulescu (Bucharest), Gavril Sireteanu (Tg Mureș), Sandu Marian (Cluj-Napoca), etc. working with various companies. To these we can add a number of well known set designers coming from the important Romanian Theatres for adults such as Adrian Damian, Alina Herescu, Irina Moscu and others, who are willing to try their hand in this other direction. Lately, some of the top stage directors are branching out and working for children and youth too: amongst them Silviu Purcărete<sup>2</sup> (Teatrul Țăndărică Bucharest), Alexandru Dabija (Gong Theatre Sibiu), Radu Alexandru Nica (Lucașfăur Theatre in Iași).

Regarding the importance of new writing and desire to work on contemporary plays, some of the theatres for young people are very open, even if the audiences are usually more easily tempted by classics and not prone to taking risks on something with a more modern topic. Even so, there is a general interest to support the writers to develop, distribute and promote their work in theatrical circles. Some of these theatres are organizing special

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<sup>2</sup> For more informations see Oltița Cîntec, *Silviu Purcărete. Privirea care înfățișează* (București: Cheiron, 2011)

contests (Bucharest Ion Creangă Theatre), workshops and guidance during the composition of a new dramatic text (Bucharest ImPuls Festival) or assuming this aesthetic mission and staging mostly contemporary drama (Sibiu Gong Theatre).



**Fig. 1:** Set design created by Carmen and Gheorghe Rasovszky, for the performance *Cinderella*, stage direction Silviu Purcărete, Teatrul Țăndărică Bucharest, 1990.

We all know that, when it comes to children, it's usually the parents and the teachers who are deciding what they are going to see and it is very, very important how, alongside the theatres, they are overseeing this. „Family and childhood experiences of live performances not only induct young people into theatre, but influence continuing attendance.”<sup>3</sup>

Theatre can provide quality theatrical experiences for young audiences, building future engaged theatre-goers. That is the reason why Romanian Children and Young People Theatres develop creative strategies to attract a large number of viewers. In a top of the most actives theatres we can find Luceafărul Theatre in Iași (76.400 spectators in 2017), Țăndărică Theatre in Bucharest, Colibri Theatre in Craiova, Gong Theatre in Sibiu, Gulliver Theatre

<sup>3</sup> Michael Anderson, Josephine Fleming, “The TheaterSpace Project, Its Partners and Its Purposes”, *Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education*, no12: John O’Toole, Ricci-Jane Adams, Michael Anderson, Bruce Burton, Robyn Ewing editors, *Young Audiences, Theatre and the Cultural Conversation* (2014, Springer) 9.

in Galați, Puck Theatre in Cluj-Napoca. Each of these institutions do also organize International Theatre Festivals every year (The International Theatre Festival for Young Audience in Iași, 10th edition in 2017, a festival labeled by the European Theatre Association in Brussels as a „remarkable festival”<sup>4</sup>), ImPuls Festival in Bucharest (13th edition in 2017), Puppets Occupy Street in Craiova (3rd edition in 2017), Gong New Theatre Festival (3rd edition in 2017), Gulliver Festival in Galați (25th edition in 2017), Puck International Festival in Cluj-Napoca (16th edition in 2017). Financed by the Local or County Councils, these companies have their own venues (usually one or two), a stable number of actors, technicians, preparing 3 to 5 or 6 new productions per season. This strong network also include programs and projects for the minorities living in Romania, and some of these institutions have a special working departments and teams: for example in Hungarian, at Ariel Theatre in Târgu Mureș and Puck Theatre in Cluj, and in German at Gong Theatre in Sibiu.

One of the longest running directors is Constantin Brehnescu. He has worked for Luceafărul Theatre in Iași since 1953, and he is still active. One of the latest productions he imagined was *Playing Shakespeare*, a collage from Shakespeare’s most important plays mixed in a scenario imagined like a theatre lesson, interacting with young audience. Another very important artist is Cristian Pepino, who is constantly collaborating with Tândărică Theatre in Bucharest. He is also a teacher at the Bucharest National University of Arts and one of his aesthetical targets is to imagine shows with puppets for adults. Amongst his 120 creations, many of them realized together with his wife, the regretted set designer Cristina Pepino, some of them such as *Faust* and *A Midsummer Night Dream*, are addressed to adults, and point out the truth that Philippe Genty highlighted so well:

Theatre is an artificial space, an artificiality that is interesting to play with. In this context, inertness becomes extremely important and contributes to the revealing of life. Material and object stripped of their common use, the puppet or the mannequin facing the actors will exacerbate the paradoxes of life and of the inanimate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The label was decided by an international jury lead by Sir Jonathan Mills, ex-director of Edinburgh International Theatre Festival.

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Genty, *Paysages intérieurs* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2013), 131 (« Le théâtre est un lieu artificiel, une artificialité avec laquelle il est intéressant de jouer. Dans ce contexte, l’inertie prend toute son importance et participe à révéler la vie. La matière et l’objet détournés de leurs fonction première, le pantin ou le mannequin confrontés aux comédiens vont exacerber les paradoxes du vivant et de l’inanimé »).



**Fig. 2:** Scene from *A Midsummer Night Dream*, performance 16+, created by Cristian Pepino, Țândărică Theatre in Bucharest, 2017

When it comes to the tickets price, the fact that all these companies are financed by the state is of a great importance. Theatre tickets are very affordable related to the average income and cost of life. All tickets are subsidized so anyone can come to watch a show.

The well-developed state companies network is completed by a few private companies, all of them trying to impose their unique styles. *AnimArt Cluj-Napoca* is led by Dana Bontidean and it focuses on small puppet-shows for children. *Hopa-Trop* is another interesting independent company for children, directed by Beatrice Iordan with Ana-Maria Cucuta, at the Bucharest Romanian Peasant Museum Club, focusing on traditional stories or new plays. All of their shows are using shadows, some of them are nonverbal, all of them with live music at specific Romanian ancient instruments. Beatrice Iordan together with her husband, Florin Iordan, and her brother in law, Dinu Petrescu, are also playing in the *Trei parale* group, singing old Romanian folk music.

### **Theatre for teenagers**

Teenagers are not just a part of the general audience and theatres cannot see them as such. Teenagers are a varied range of people facing many issues on the path from childhood to young adults. Of course, it is not right to consider teenagers just a source of multiple existential problems like

friendship, communication with others, relationship with parents, discovering sexuality etc. Younger audiences engage with theatre if they consider it a space that stimulates their imagination, emotions and intellect. Sharing this experience with others, this time not parents or teachers, but friends with similar preferences and expectations, is the foundation to build a critical, active engagement with performing arts. When we talk about teenagers we have to think of diverse forms, styles and genres of entertainment. In this strong national state network that I have already mentioned, there are a few important stage directors drawn to this kind of theatre: Bobi Pricop for instance, Horia Suru, Alexandru Mazagreanu, Vlad Cristache and Ștefan Lupu are some of the significant presences in this theatrical area of interest.

In general, the classic repertory is a safe category and it keeps its central place. This attracts the conservative part of audience. But the repertory must evolve in new directions in order to attract new categories of spectators, and artists must take significant steps toward attendance. Interaction between young people and creators is a main way to approach new categories. Youngsters need to feel welcome if not included in what they watch. That is why discussions before creating a show or after presenting it are of great importance. Of course, there is no pattern, only a few general directions that every director or company must develop in a personal way. Discussion sessions, pre and/or post-show talks provided by the team emphasize the truth that practitioners have to be very close to their audience. Romanian artists are responsive to the needs and real expectations of teenagers and they try to do their best to increase their presence in the theatre halls.

Strategies to communicate more directly with young people were trialed at the Educational Theatre Centre REPLIKA, in Bucharest. REPLIKA Centre opened its doors in February 2015 and was "born from a need to create an interlinking artistic platform, aiming at bringing together professional artists, communities and other groups with not enough representation", as Mihaela Michailov mentioned at my request for this paper. The Centre aims at theatrical projects with social relevance, educational film projections, participating in art, workshops, debates, conferences, post-show talks, meetings with professors and theatrical scholars, educating the younger audiences. They believe in „an emotionally involved theatre, in which artists and the audience educate each other in the spirit of empathy and solidarity.” They choose and develop themes previously less explored, such as school violence, children left behind by parents gone to work abroad, children’s rights, competitiveness and the high level of pressure forced on teenagers, animal rights, discrimination, Sex Ed – which are brought into the spotlight. And they are doing this in „educational

shows focusing on directly engaging children and teenagers, as a form of discovery and collective action, in order to transform communities and reform the social classes”.



**Fig. 1:** Space and set design using the silent disco system, by Bobi Pricop in the performance *The Green Cat*, Luceafărul Theater in Iași

Seven artists are currently looking after the Educational Theatre Centre REPLIKA – Radu Apostol – stage director, Mihaela Michailov – playwright, Mihaela Rădescu – actress, Viorel Cojanu – actor, Silvana Negrutiu – actress, Gabi Albu – architect and Elena S. Găgeanu – video artist, all of them doing everything that is needed for this theatre company that has already constructed „a creative community formed by professional artists and groups without sufficient representation.”, as Michailov pointed out. All the productions are offered as a gift, given freely to all social categories, because „Art must not be a luxury, but a necessity. Educational art is a common good.” In 2017, REPLIKA Centre has worked on four productions financed as independent projects by AFCN (National Cultural Found Administration) and ArCub (Bucharest Art Center). Last year REPLIKA Centre made two co-productions with The Small Theatre in Bucharest (Teatrul Mic): the performance *Family with no sugar* and the educational program *Text Book Theatre* which sees dramatic readings of books included in the Bacalaureate exam in high schools.



REPLIKA Centre is no doubt the most active independent company for teenagers.

New directions are also provided by young and talented stage-directors such as Bobi Pricop, who staged *The Green Cat*, by Elise Wilk<sup>6</sup>, at the Luceafărul Theater in Iași, using the silent disco system for the first time in a Romanian theatre show. In a special relationship with the young audience – in which he sees himself, as he himself was not long ago the high school student who would attend festivals in English with the touring company – Bobi Pricop's priority was to address in the best possible manner this special audience.

Conceived in a "chamber" format, the production brings actors and spectators together in the same space – a club – that is reconstructed on stage, "The Periphery" emphasizing through shapes and lines the mapped contours of a town. The "texture" of the space is dense, it absorbs in its construction all those who are inside, compressing text, music, image, lighting in 1300 square feet space. The structure of the set-design underlines the link between a certain place and a specific kind of behavior, melting together the world of games, of imagination, and the world of the auditorium, the world of everyday life. This space becomes a pod in which the spectators and the actors "travel" theatrically through the lives of six teenagers who crash at great speed against reality. It is the place that shapes their relationships, all breathe as one in the series of tragic events at the end of which you find out, in an almost Hamletian way, that the essence of the world is that before you die, you must live! The urban tragedy of Dani, Bianca, Boogie, Robert, Roxana and Flori is rendered in detail in an interior space, an acting space that is simultaneously permeated by ingenuity, bitterness, lyricism, craving for love, unhappiness, feelings that bring together a transient community, abstracted from the greater world outside the walls of the set.<sup>7</sup> Or as Bobi Pricop describes it:

*The Green Cat* is a play that speaks about imaginary worlds, about adolescence, love and loneliness. The characters created by Elise Wilk almost never interact. They address the public directly, telling their own version of the same event. The challenge we present to the young public is to climb on the stage with the actors, in a club, at a silent disco party, where they will find the story of six teenagers and of an evening that will change their lives.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 2015, the show brought Bobi Pricop his first nomination to the UNITER Award for Best Director.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see *Carte cu Pisica verde / Book with The Green Cat* (Oltita Cintec coord), Iasi: Timpul, 2016

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 125

In Romania there are some festivals designed especially for teenagers. One of them is Teen Fest organized by Excelsior Theatre in Bucharest. This company had the biggest budget in Romania in 2017: 24.600 Lei/ 5 million Euros, money that came from the Bucharest Local County. Last year's edition had in the official program companies from Romania, Italy, France and Poland and also workshops for teenagers (video editing, 3D modeling, participatory theatre etc.).

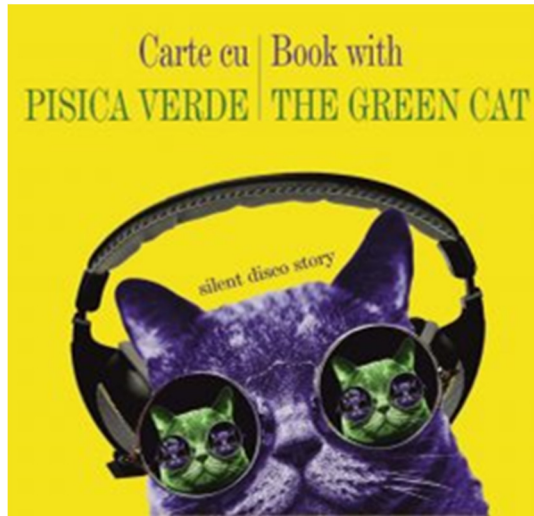


Fig. 2: Front cover of the Book with the Green Cat

One must highlight the valuable role of those working directly with young people. An other example is Ideo Ideis, a national festival for young audiences (from 2006). On the Festival website the initial statement is mentioned: "We wanted and still want, a type of theatre and an education very close to us all, that was ours." Every year, in Alexandria, teenagers and artists from all over Romania are sharing experiences, putting together projects, attending workshops, meeting actors, playwrights, choreographers etc.

In 2017, at the FestIn pe Bulevard Theatre Festival, created by the Nottara Theatre in Bucharest, the International Association of Theatre Critics Romania (IATC.Ro) organized a debate with the topic "Theatre for Teenagers, an expanding niche". We had a long and interesting range of opinions, starting from the truth that this age is synonym with shyness, non-conformism, intense emotions, and sometimes restless biological changes. How can theatre help

teenagers? A lot, and in an efficient manner if creators put themselves in the adolescents' shoes. Collaborative projects are the most important ones because they are forged on a basis that matters to the youngsters. Theatre goes give an emotional response to the work and this could be the starting point to a more critical attendance.

Concluding, I would say that teenagers have to be involved in the process of creation, to highly engage them in order to construct the foundations of future attendance. It would be a huge error to transform theatre into another class course! As Émile Lansman said, a show for teenagers has to „give the chance to discover what a good quality creation can offer him *hic et nunc*: pleasure, emotion, thinking by looking over himself and the world around him.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Émile Lansman, *Le théâtre pour ados, un théâtre à part... entière?*, dans Émile Lansman et Aurelie Bureau (coord), *Théâtre pour ados: paroles croisées*, (Manage: Lansman Editeur, 2009) 96. « lui permettre de découvrir ce que la rencontre avec une œuvre «de qualité» pouvait lui apporter *hic et nunc*: du plaisir, de l'émotion, de la réflexion à travers un regard sur lui-même et sur le monde qui l'entourait. »

*Romanian Theatre as Public Service.  
A Critical Perspective of the Last Decades*

MIRUNA RUNCAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper aims at synthetizing, from a critical perspective, the trajectory of the Romanian subsidy scheme of performance - mainly theatre - institutions, over the last century. Our basic argument is that, despite all the major political changes which took place after the First and the Second World War, despite the succession of dominant ideologies, the subsidy scheme has mainly remained the same, although the amounts invested by the authorities have varied from a time to another. The below analysis focuses on the relation between the political project, the state apparatus (both central, and local), the legislative system, the economy, and mentalities, in an attempt to prove the strange conservatism of a unique administrative model, as well as the lack of vision of the various political regimes with regard to the public service dimension of theatre art.

**Keywords:** National Theatre, Culture, Politics, Policies on culture

Long before the trend of European Cultural Capitals entered Romania through the "Sibiu Customs"<sup>2</sup>, in the summer of 1994, we came into contact with something which, back then, in the UK, was called *City of Drama*. In short, following some sort of public vote based on criteria like coherence, prestige, and municipal logic of the program, the Arts Council (a different type of Ministry of Culture) appointed a provincial capital or a smaller city which, for twelve months, became the host of a cursive, mainly (British and

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<sup>2</sup> In 2007, the very year Romania joined the European Union, the city of Sibiu was a European Capital of Culture, in partnership with Luxembourg.

international) theatre festival, to which music, dance, fine arts, ethnography, or cinema were also associated. It was a continuous celebration; to fund this, complex public-private partnerships were established, under a unique, specialized management, including logistic services only functional throughout the unfolding of the event, but supported by an impressive number of volunteers of all ages. Almost all performance spaces were involved - in their capacity of hosts, tour partners, or associate producers -, whether conventional or unconventional, from traditional venues to universities, high schools, museums, art galleries, malls, or mere cafe shops. Thus, the "theatrical" interest shifted from London, outwards, in a conscious, systematic, and programmatic movement. Or, more correctly, the City of Drama was supposed to produce a cultural re-centring, given to both the audiences and local production, through a rich, diverse, polychromous, stimulating run of cultural production, from far and wide (they, of course, included tours outside the UK).

In a way, the example above could serve as a far-away, serene starting point for a serious, non-circumstantial, unprejudiced discussion on the relations between the cities in the province and the capital. I would paraphrase one of Albee's lines in *Zoo Story*, which fits this procedure perfectly: the healthiest way to get from one point on the map to another is to take a long (reflection) detour.

### **Preliminaries: Edge and Centre**

We think it is totally irrelevant to repeat truisms about the fact that, from time to time, the province - accidentally or in a concentrated manner - creates more interesting, more courageous, or simply more famous performances than the average productions of Bucharest. Such discussions (the national theatres in Iași, Cernăuți, or Craiova producing more consistent seasons than the one in Bucharest) started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; each time, they appeared to be entirely justified, but, in the long run, they proved completely sterile.

And then, in this day and place, courageous towards what? Interesting compared to whom? Momentarily, can we still refer to a unitary theatrical canon, aesthetics, which makes such judgements partly viable or at least legitimate - as private and independent companies expand unprecedentedly and compete with subsidized theatres, often making surprising aesthetic

proposals and overcoming huge production difficulties? Any remotely pertinent critical opinion is based on a certain contextual horizon, a complex inventory of functional aesthetics and, only then, some kind of an axiology...

I would therefore, via the above-mentioned detour, start from breaking a hypocritical Romanian consensus on a principle of democratic normality, i.e. a theatre production is a public service. I call this consensus hypocritical, because no decision - including signing a management contract, the budgets, requested or approved, of institutions funded from public money - is honestly based on questioning (with a transformative purpose) the relation between the offer of theatre products and its beneficiary, the spectator.

For over 150 years, subsidized performance institutions hiding under the umbrella of "culture" have had the same functional definition: some people, the artists, employed or paid based on an individual contract, produce a show, which is part of a repertory built on the intersection of ever-changing angles: the prestige of the playwright, of the lead actor, of the director, the feasibility of production costs, the *photofits* - only confirmed through the director's/manager's pre-existing experience - of the few audience categories which go to the city or neighbourhood theatre in a more or less constant manner. Each of the first elements (artists and manager) of the above-triangle is a construct determined by the accidental context (which is, at the same time, political). However, even though, for more than half a century, we have had enough, both quantitative, and qualitative sociological tools to determine its substance, the potential audience remains an imaginary construct. And, sometimes, this is closer to reality, while, other times, it isn't, right? What remains stable, even immobile, in this algorithm is not the prestige or the costs, but the absolute passivity that makes up the profile of the audience, regardless of their age category, their profession, their knowledge interests, and spectatorial practice, etc. (As far as I know, from time to time, some institutions still use questionnaires to measure the spectators' satisfaction regarding a certain performance, repertory, etc. Nevertheless, over the last 25 years, three or four theatres have conducted some more serious studies, but their results were rather usable by the marketing departments).

In order to represent a real public service, the theatre institution should aim for a very different translation of the concept, both vertically, and horizontally: in the field of culture, a public service means a permanent mapping - starting from an assumed set of functions - of present beneficiaries, of existing or possible relations between artists and spectators,

canvassing and stimulating both artists, and spectators of the future. This cannot fulfil its meaning unless we change the perspective: the primary target is not the conservation of the apparatus but the development of new audience categories, and thus the offering of a greater access to culture<sup>3</sup>.

### Luxury Items without Excise Duties?

The defect perception - and conception - underlying the traditional immobility of Romanian cultural policies (and, in this context, theatre is just a mere space of maximum visibility) is the (hoary) conviction (signalling a serious deficit in the development of national civic culture) that acts of culture are luxury items exempt from surcharges. Simply put, the theatre, opera, or museum ticket is a kind of a symbolic replacement for the receipt issued by a perfume shop; it is less expensive because it includes no excise duties, but it is, in fact, subsidized, to an overwhelming extent, by the state (i.e. by us all). Cultural goods are no "necessities", they have nothing to do with the "daily basket", people can live - and millions actually do so - without ever setting foot in a performance hall, without ever listening to a concert, without knowing anything about Turandot, or without entering an art, history, or ethnographic museum. And a performance is still a luxury and a form of entertainment, as long as the act of subsidizing it is - consistently - seen as a type of "planned loss", bringing no tangible benefit to the budget...

Or, to strictly stick to the issue of theatre, the nineteenth-century thinking model - regarding the literacy of a small bourgeois audience and the synchronisation with European institutions and events, but ONLY at a symbolic level, through "subsidized entertainment" - is far from enough. Not that "entertainment" itself is bad or shady. But, to begin with, because the objectives which made this model legitimate, first of all those related to increasing the level of "general knowledge" of the urban population, or to ascertain national/ethnic unity and spirituality, etc., have lost their initial meaning. From the viewpoint of such objectives, the canon of a "great

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<sup>3</sup> For further details on this subject, see Iulia Popovici, "Cum am ratat iarăși reforma" ["How We Missed The Reform Again"], in *Observator cultural*, no. 539, August 27 (2010); Iulia Popovici, "Teatru fără bani de la stat?" ["Theatre Without State's Money?"], in *Dilema veche*, September 5-11 (2013); Iulia Popovici, "Pentru cine facem teatru" ["For Whom Do We Make Theatre"], in *Dilema veche*, no. 528, March 27 - April 2 (2014); Iulia Popovici, "Managementul nostru cel de toate zilele" ["Our Daily Management"], in *Observator cultural*, no. 805, January 15 (2016).

culture" (national and tending to universal) was, and remained, throughout the entire past century, indestructible, while exposure to the "masterpiece" was the strategic way (unique and indisputable) on the road to civilization, progress, and Europeanism.

Since, unlike in the case of literature or fine arts, in performing arts, this model was never contradicted by a counterculture, independent from the state subsidised one, be it in the interwar or in the communist period<sup>4</sup>, we have lost another twenty something years involuntarily, conserving the damaging vision about luxury items exempt from surcharges. And the distance between public institutions which have access to resources and the so-dynamic independent space that developed after 2000, with no or with minimum access to resources (through project bids organized by the Administration of National Cultural Fund - AFCN, or by the local authorities), has already created an apparently insuperable gap.

No, the acts of artistic expression, cultural products, and, finally, theatre performances, are no luxury, and, at least in European culture, they only follow the rules of the free market to a negligible extent<sup>5</sup>. And their social advantage is not strictly related to "spiritual enrichment", as defined in boilerplate, since the Enlightenment until today. Especially in the field of performing arts, their social advantage stems from their cohesive-participatory function and, as a factor of the continuity with the past, from their educational function, in the broad sense<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Years ago, I spoke extensively about the fact that, starting from the 19<sup>th</sup>, and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both subsidized national theatres and private companies, reproduced the very same repertory model, with small and insignificant commercial differences; during the Communist rule, due to the centralization, the nationalization, and the exponential growth of subsidies throughout the country, the model was reproduced and preserved intact - differences only appeared after 2000, as the independent sector developed in a dynamic manner. In this sense, see Miruna Runcan, *Modelul teatral românesc [The Romanian Theatre Model]*, (Bucharest: UNITEXT, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Towse (ed.), *A Handbook for Cultural Economics*. Second Edition, (Cheltham/Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011). See also "Vasile Ernu în dialog cu Iulia Popovici" ["Vasile Ernu in a dialogue with Iulia Popovici" ], in *Adevărul*, October 25 (2017), [http://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/nimeni-n-a-descoperit-ultimii-500-ani-metoda-teatrul-opera-muzica-simfonica-devina-profitabile-vasile-ernu-dialog-iulia-popovici-1\\_59f0443b5ab6550cb877d320/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/nimeni-n-a-descoperit-ultimii-500-ani-metoda-teatrul-opera-muzica-simfonica-devina-profitabile-vasile-ernu-dialog-iulia-popovici-1_59f0443b5ab6550cb877d320/index.html)

<sup>6</sup> We should highlight that, despite the successive changes in the legislation regarding the organization and functioning of performing arts institutions, and regarding their management system, no significant improvements were seen in defining and implementing the condition of public service, as we are attempting to define here.



## Edge and Centre

That, sometimes, certain theatre performances produced outside Bucharest are more coherent, stylistically more uniform, and run "smoothly" for a longer time than those from the capital, is rather easily explained from the viewpoint of the above-described unique perspective of repertory institutions. First of all, actor teams have a greater availability for concentrated, sympathetic, "campaign" effort demanded by prestigious directors, who take great pleasure in working in places where the actual rehearsal time is not limited to the (maximum) four, super rushed hours per day, as offered by Bucharest theatres. By now, this has become common practice.

Secondly, the same teams are, to a certain extent, much more motivated to achieve critical success, to be selected by national and international festivals, precisely because their theatre as such, as well as each cast member wishes to gain higher visibility, which, in the capital, seems to be taken for granted, through television stations, advertising, etc. In Bucharest, actors are in a constant rush to earn some extra money, be it through the radio, soap operas, adds, events organized outside the institution paying their salary, or from teaching at related theatre schools. Although it hasn't yet become a secondary activity, stage acting has little to do with the apostleship still preserved by actors outside the capital.

Finally, some - few - provincial festivals have a much stronger (though not always explicit, or consciously built) connection with the city's real heart beats, with the possible functions of a multi-layered cultural policy, than similar offers in the capital, especially the National Theatre Festival (FNT). For the underlying philosophy of FNT has very rarely exceeded its dominant condition from the 1990s, i.e. the "show case": "Here you are, this is what was produced this year in Romania." This is also the reason the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, with its multi-tier profile and based on a completely different philosophy (that of an international performance market, where Romanian and foreign shows can compete) has rightfully been perceived as outshining the one in Bucharest. And it is not all due to its cosmopolitanism.

I do not think it is healthy for us to keep referring to Romanian theatre using the terms of the false dialectics of edge-centre, since, on the one hand, it is deeply untrue, and, on the other, it clearly lacks equity. I believe that, if

finally perceived as a public service, Romanian theatre (as well as numerous other strata of cultural expression) deserves a complete (long overdue) makeover of its functions, procedures, and institutions, from a totally different perspective, especially with regards to its targeted the audiences and funding systems. Clear initiatives, active consistency, dedicated projects, participation, building new audiences - these are all pillars which should build diverse artistic communities, whether traditional or independent, from Bucharest and not only, guiding and multiplying their messages, their aesthetics, and their offer.

To this end, we need a syncretic restructuring of the legal system through which acts of culture are funded, in order to encourage both the rhythmical movement of urban centres producing high quality culture, as well as a fast shift from subsidizing culture as a "planned loss", to subsidizing an efficient public service, regardless of whether its producer is a state or an independent figure. Does anybody know when we will no longer be poor? Or when we will no longer be in a crisis? One thing is clear: theatre is still a luxury, who knows for how much longer. Cheap, therefore dispensable.

By the way, do you know which is the best National Theatre in Romania? The Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj. Do you know why? Because it (still) has a referential 'nation' – a compact community identified as a potential audience. The quibble above, which I keep referring to every time I find the opportunity, includes, at its core, an answer to the question in the title. Of course, by far not the only possible answer.

### **What was, what is, and what could a "National Theatre" be?**

Like many other things whose names hide vague concepts, according to Romanian dictionaries, "*Teatru Național*" (National Theatre) is written with capitals. This shows – what else than – a symbolic status stronger than the mere and even 1/1 ratio between a signified and a signifier. In other words, as in the case of all vague concepts, the emotional-symbolic charge of the form is much greater than the material charge of its underlying content. In the modern (longer than a century and a half) life of Romanian culture, this emotional imbalance is downright hyperbolic. This teensy country, first made up through the lucky union of two mono-linguistic provinces, started with not one, but two National Theatres, in Iași, and Bucharest respectively. Then, overnight, in 1919, a third one was decreed in Cluj, during the siege;

immediately after 1920, three more, in Craiova, Cernăuți, and Chișinău (to be dissolved after more than a decade because of the economic crisis, only to be re-established four years later, just as spontaneously). Timișoara, which had suffered from the injustice of not having a subsidized theatre for a long time, received its National Theatre status after World War 2, while, through the symbolic nationalistic sowing “care” of Ceaușescu’s policy, the former Székelys Theatre of Târgu-Mureș became, firstly bilingual, in the 60s, and then, in its turn, National, in the 80s.

Don’t you find this phenomenon strange? Isn’t it shivering to realise that, in the collective subconsciousness, which dictates symbolic perceptions, representations, and acts, the frustration regarding national unity proves much stronger than the motivation of the public service, i.e. than the trivial, natural need of a city, of a region, of a county, to have a theatre of its own? From their first organization-activist stage, Communists perceived this vain imbalance, born out of frustration, quite correctly, considering they set up and fed - despite the terrific shortages caused by the Soviet semi-occupation, by paying war debts and the costs of reconstruction - almost forty “State” and five “National” (of course, also “State”) theatres.

The debate about the goal, the role, and the functions of a National Theatre (or about its mission, as we used to say) has been present in Romanian culture, like some kind of a compulsive genetic disorder, starting from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and until now, its successive platoons including irrefutable heroes, coryphaei, martyrs, as well as demagogues, parvenus, cravens, and all kinds of riffraff, questionable politicians, and loud-mouthed trumps. Sure, almost all educated people know that Ion Ghica and Vasile Alecsandri were both not only famous writers and participants to the 1848 revolution, but also directors whose portrait still hangs in National Theatres; also, everybody knows that Eminescu struggled in vain for a vivid repertory, or that Ion Luca Caragiale, the father of modern playwriting, had both managerial ideas and talent in his theatrical management of the National in Bucharest, which didn’t help him from being sabotaged and ultimately fired through the direct contribution of the associates, all of them celebrities who went down in history<sup>7</sup>.

What use is it to remember that the playwright Alexandru Davila and leading actor Nottara were at loggerheads, with the former leaving and

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<sup>7</sup> Șerban Cioculescu, *Viața lui I. L. Caragiale [The Life of I.L. Caragiale]*, (București: Editura pentru literatura, 1969).

independently establishing the most durable private company in the history of Romania, *Compania Davila*, now the *Bulandra Theatre*<sup>8</sup>? Or that Liviu Rebreanu set up the studio (that is not the *Creangă Theatre*); that, during difficult years, Camil Petrescu went above and beyond to renovate the legendary building on *Calea Victoriei St.*, but only managed to get himself cast out after only ten months, just like *Caragiale*<sup>9</sup>; that professor Tudor Vianu was the manager of a bombed building, just after the war, staging performances in the hall of the *St. Sava High School*<sup>10</sup>; that Zaharia Stancu did both good and bad things, while the new building was inaugurated by legendary actor-manager Radu Beligan, with one of Aurel Baranga's forgotten texts?

Nevertheless, far fewer people know that, to make peace, the manager who replaced Davila wrote a sample text about the purpose of the National Theatre. His name was Pompiliu Eliade and, like any self-respecting academic, decided, at that point, that the goal of the National Theatre was to be *a school for the many who searched for entertainment*<sup>11</sup>. Well, in the end, the thing about "theatre being a school" has made and continues to make history, as anyone can include whatever crosses their mind in the "educational purpose".

And even less people know that, in 1922, an ephemeral manager, the lawyer and writer I. Valjean, with a highly subtle and open mind, went fishing for talented directors (not necessarily a trend on *Calea Victoriei St.*, nor in the provincial Nationals of the time), and set up the journal *Teatrul*, a real jewel<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, few talk about the fact that, after a theoretical training that lasted for more than ten years, in the political asylum that was Marshal Antonescu's cohabitation with the fascist Legionnaires, Haig Acterian became the manager of the Bucharest National Theatre, with a view to achieving greatness, though he only managed to partially fulfil his plans, as, after the Rebellion, he was sent to the front line and died<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Mihai Vasiliu, *Alexandru Davila*, (București: Editura Meridiane, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> Aurel Petrescu, *Opera lui Camil Petrescu [The Works of Camil Petrescu]*, (București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1972).

<sup>10</sup> Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc [Romanian Theatre]*, vol VII, (București: Editura Minerva, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Ileana Berlogea; George Muntean (eds.), *Pagini din istoria gândirii teatrale românești [Pages From the History of Romanian Theatrical Thought]*, (București: Editura Meridiane, 1972), 104-106.

<sup>12</sup> Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc [Romanian Theatre]*, vol VI, (București: Editura Minerva, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Haig Acterian, *Cealaltă parte a vieții noastre [The Other Side of Our Life]*, (Iași: Institutul european, 1991).

Regarding the painful stake surrounding the National Theatres in the tumultuous debate fired by the new directing school in 1956-1957, this is hardly considered when the theatre model or, if you wish, canon, is discussed. Back then, the youngsters' united front denounced the improvisation, the imprecise repertory, the lack of professionalism in training and guiding actors, as well as (between the lines) the stubborn and gaudy sinecures of directors and playwrights who had become "people's artists" overnight (such as Sică Alexandrescu, recently awarded by the government with a tour to Paris, after a lifetime of dubious affairs and shameful plagiarism).

So many bloody wars in the history of Romanian "National" theatre! ... And for what? To be able to make good, interesting, high quality theatre for the audience? Traditionalists will not miss the chance to answer that yes, the stake was/is the audience, its configuration, its representation, and its serving. It is very difficult for one to confirm such a thesis. Most of the times, it was no longer about the audience, which has become a mere manoeuvre element in polemic confrontations. I would even go as far as saying that one of the few items over which enemies do not fight in polemics of substance, over almost the last century, was the estimation regarding the audience, which is always haemorrhagic and hard to understand. But no, these endless fights come from the very fact that, in a rather self-sufficient artistic environment, there was and still is a terrific lack of competition. And, after all, of efficiency. In our country, until not very long ago, theatre used to be just "national". Whether in Bucharest, Petroșani, Barlad, or any other place with a theatre paid by public budgets. Even if the theatre was/is... smaller, it is still seen as 'National'. Sometimes, being a theatre become a secondary term of the expression...

And the reason for this is that, when it comes to theatre, our cultural history is both placidly coherent, and limping. From the very beginning, Romanian theatre developed, as stated in the preamble, because some artists, writers, actors, musicians, later painters who became stage designers, or mere high school graduates who became theatre managers, *wanted to make theatre*. And they had the illusion that the others, the audience, *the audiences*, couldn't wait to watch them do so. This proved sometimes to be true, but other times, just an illusion.

And the people in power, from poor Vodă Caragea, whose daughter compelled him to set up a theatre for her, to present-day presidents, having passed through a huge and inchoate bureaucratic apparatus, were always

sure that, in any fussy county capital or city, the theatre was the undeniable sign of civilization and the mark of power. This also proves, in our modern history, sometimes true, but other times less so. Throughout this game, which has, in time, developed its own dynamics and become a tradition, the simplest, most fundamental question is never pronounced as a matter of principle.

I am not referring to the question of “*What does the audience want?*” This is ruinous and demagogic, as well as unpopularizing hypocrisy. Any elementary marketing course teaches (should one want to learn) that one should make people want something they’ve never thought of wanting, and enthusiastically buy things they clearly didn’t know they needed. This fundamental question is: *Why do we make theatre?* But, as strange as it may seem, the urgent, painful question, which takes us outside of the mechanics of a tradition that consumed its motivations, is the one above. The lack of interest in such simple interrogations shows that both politicians and theatre people don’t actually care about the identity of the addressee, the person sitting in front of the artists, who bought a ticket to see a performance. At the same time, this question is about legitimacy, about the other, the spectator, and about yourself, the artist; while, in this equation, the artistic product plays the part of an agent of exchanging ideas and practicing a healthy dialogue.

What is a National Theatre? Before anything else, it is one of the tens of theatres paid from public money, to offer thus a public service model. Then, we should probably find out what the meaning of “nation” and of someone who belongs to it, i.e. “national”, is, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Bucharest, Cluj, Iași, Craiova, Timișoara, Tîrgu Mureș, Sibiu. We are now touching upon dramatic/sensitive topics, where the political - and political theories, as well as history, geography, anthropology, collective psychology, symbolic imagology, and many others pull each other’s hair, starting a loud and uncontrollable carnival. Couldn’t this state-funded institution formula find a more precise status and a load of functions to clearly set it apart from other public institutions, beyond the propaganda traditionally instilled to its name?

For now, though, in Romania, the National Theatre refers to *a building*, a big one, bigger than others, possibly including several halls, which eats up funds, energy, resources, staking the final product, which is... what? A good performance? An extraordinary performance? A performance replacing required-readings?

Nowadays, I don’t think it’s wise to start from what we already have. And not because we don’t have high quality products/works, when we do,

where we do, and as many as we do. It's already very clear, to me at least, that the ambition to feed industrial complexes like the National Theatres with money, here and now, can only be justified if we fully exit this trap of producing masterpieces. I believe the "purpose" of such theatres is not (just) to create good performances, I think this is the implicit duty of any theatre, be it state or private, independent or experimental, Romanian, Hungarian, Jewish, or playing in Turkish, French, English or Swahili, in a yard or in the basement of a block of flats.

A theatre called National should produce, here and now, *national culture* - in the broad, not nationalistic sense - that is, with the status of model, in rich layers, using the performances, but not only. A National Theatre - a tradition always craved, but never truly achieved in our country - should be a nursery for domestic playwrighting, through broad talent discovery and fostering programmes, capitalizing on this literature, as well as for carrying out other collaborative creation systems, based on verbal expression or not, in the literal sense. It should set out to discover and encourage diverse creations, helping those sitting in the audience to discover themselves and ask questions. A theatre paid for with public money and receiving National as a title, should be a space of *cultural research through art*, but also of *public debate by way of art*. Not only theatre art, but also all arts combined in and claimed from the performance. Over the last four-five years, Târgu Mureş and Cluj showed the clearest signs of suiting the multi-layer condition of such an institutional status, and I think this is a first sign that things have started to move.

Most certainly, a National Theatre should constantly, and through long-term programmes, aim at getting down into the world of people, and rebuilding a healthy relation with schools and universities. (I'm not referring to the sham of buying tickets by the kilo, hauling children by the bus, but to stimulating theatre production in schools, high schools, and universities, to hosting and even organizing festivals for pupils, and many other tens of possible programmes to pull present-day youngsters from the mechanized futility in which they are soaking). More than that, of course, a National Theatre should work like a turntable, through which the voice of the present world talks to other, far-away voices of today and tomorrow. Such a theatre should, with a radar-like attention and coherence, place Romanians in relation to those outside the country, by means of the arts that fully represent them - whether through precise events, such as tours, or by organizing cyclic actions, like festivals.

A National Theatre sits as far away as possible from a museum, even when it hosts one or several museums under its roof, or when it carefully and competently does curatorial work (which they should very well do). It should be a strategic cultural institution, designed as such, but, at the same time, using complex procedures to express the live aesthetics that have not yet gone down into history.

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# **INTERVIEW**



*„ I only became a playwright when I started to direct“*

*Interview with Alina Nelega, dramatic author, professor and tutor of  
the Playwriting MA at the University of Arts in Tîrgu-Mureş*

ELISE WILK<sup>1</sup>



**Abstract:** The present interview with Alina Nelega is centred on the contemporary Romanian dramaturgy. Our discussion focuses on the existing initiatives to encourage emerging playwrights, as well as on topics like the evolution of theatre in Romania after the fall of communism, the director-playwright relationship, the transition of the playwright to the status of dramatic author but also on the image of the country in the Romanian dramaturgy.

**Keywords:** playwriting, directing, dramatic author, Romanian dramaturgy

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**Alina Nelega** (b. 1960) is one of Romania's finest playwrights and authors. Among other distinctions, she has won the prestigious UNITER award *Best Play of the Year* twice (in 2001 and in 2014). She holds the „European Author” accolade (Heidelberg 244Stueckemarkt, 2007), as well as the *Fibula de la Suseni* (2015) insignia and diploma of excellence. Since 2008, she has been an Honorary Fellow in Writing of the Iowa University, and, since 2009, a Full Professor at the University of Arts in Tîrgu-Mureş. She was an Artistic Director of the National Theatre in Tîrgu-Mureş (2012 – 2017). Her plays have been translated, published and performed in Romania and internationally, in Europe (Budapest, Prague, Zurich, Warsaw, Paris, Rome, etc.), and in the USA (New York Fringe Festival, Lark Play Development Center, University of Connecticut, hotINK festival, New York University, New York Theatre Workshop). She has benefitted from international residencies, such as *The International Writing Program*, Iowa (USA) and writing programs of *The Royal Court Theatre* and *The Bush Theatre* (London). She also runs playwriting workshops, teaches and directs new writing.

Prof. univ. dr. habil. Alina Nelega is also the tutor of the Playwriting MA at the University of Arts in Tîrgu-Mureş, a course which 90% of today's most accomplished young playwrights have graduated from.

**Elise Wilk:** *Some years ago, there were very few initiatives to encourage playwriting in Romania. Just some contests, but most of the awarded plays were never produced. The situation has meanwhile changed. From year to year, more Romanian plays are being staged, both by state theatres and independent companies.*

*Some theatres started to organise contests for young directors, based on new Romanian plays (National Theatre of Craiova, Apollo 111 Bucharest), there are even contests for teenage writers (Excelsior Theatre Bucharest, Tineretului Theatre Piatra Neamţ) and Reactor de creație și experiment, an independent theatre from Cluj, is providing a residency program for emerging playwrights.*

*20 years ago, you were one of the initiators of Dramafest, the first program which focused on the production of new plays. The 2 editions of Dramafest were followed by 5 editions of*

*DramAcum, a project that aimed at discovering new voices. And after this, dramatic writing was included in the curricula of two universities: UAT Tg. Mureş and UNATC Bucharest.*

*Still, there are not so many programs supporting young writers in their attempts to become dramatic authors, let alone residencies for writers. Considering this, do you think it's hard to become a playwright in Romania?*

**Alina Nelega:** How can you become a playwright in Romania? Well, there are two main things you need to do. The first one is to think small: work with actors of your generation, negotiate your play with directors of your generation, seek small spaces, independent companies, find support from your community, find a reward in your own work, be patient and explore the process! The second one is to think big. Get your plays translated, send them to international competitions, join international playwriting networks, apply for grants, generate your own projects, become the executive director of your thoughts and plans, never cease to fight for your rights and royalties!

**E.W.:** *At the end of 2017, Odeon Theatre hosted a meeting of Fabulamundi. Playwriting Europe, a program that reunites 80 playwrights from all across Europe. During the meeting, the 10 selected playwrights from Romania spoke about their work with theatre representatives from eight countries. In the end, somebody told me he had noticed that all of us were complaining, in our work, about the situation in our country. Our plays speak about homophobia, intolerance and racism being widely spread in Romania, about the failing of our educational system, about poverty, labour migration, corruption and inter-ethnic conflicts. "You are writing about too many negative things", he told me.*

*Do you think Romanian dramaturgy is showing a negative image of the country?*

**A.N.:** Showing a positive or a negative image of Romania is not our job, nor is it our responsibility, as playwrights. We write about what we see, like the child who sees that the emperor is naked. It is not his problem to dress the emperor, but his utterance could help the ones who are in charge do their jobs. One sure thing about theatre and writing is that you cannot lie, you only get to embarrass yourself.

Whining, on the other hand, is something else. Blaming others, too. Homophobia, racism, intolerance, education problems and poverty, corruption and nationalism are not only Romanian problems. Romania is not a champion of homophobia, nor is it number one across Europe in

terms of nationalism. To see only bad and negative parts of reality is to be extremely short-sighted. But when we imagine plays, as *play-wrights*, in our search for story, plot and characters, the negative aspects are the only productive ones. They feed our talent and creativity. What I mean is that, although talking about negative aspects of reality and human nature is perfectly legitimate, the perspective, the approach of the author is important. I should say that, even if the reality you refer to is negative, the approach needs to be positive – and what I mean does not refer to a moral thesis or to agitprop techniques, but rather to an encompassing and deeply humane perspective, which is to be found in all great plays, from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, to Garcia's *Agamemnon*. Don't ever forget to play, when you write a play. But you definitely know that, your plays are very intelligent and playful. Your *Green Cat*, for instance, deals with a negative reality, still it is touching, playful and the approach is positive, full of empathy.

**E.W:** *Some theatre critics are still talking about the “crisis of the Romanian dramaturgy”. Is this still a real problem? Is it because of the fact that in Romania, the playwright stood in the shadow for many years and there still is a supremacy of the director?*

**A. N.:** Crisis is good. It opens opportunities. You know the Chinese too often quoted the paradoxical ideogram of crisis: danger and opportunity. If the critics are right, we should celebrate the crisis... but is the supremacy of the director a reason for the crisis? Is there a real conflict between the playwright and the director? I don't think so, not any longer. We live in a postdramatic and post-directorial age. If a text is strong enough, it will find its way to the stage. And the person who directs is... always the director – he or she can be the author, one of the actors or anyone who feels that he or she can organize the show and take over the responsibilities of staging the play. My generation of directors (Măniuțiu, Dabija, Frunză) were not interested in new plays, they had other agendas, therefore we, those who were writing and looking for directors to share the energy and feeling of our plays, were extremely lost and disappointed. The numerous generations of directors were yet to come. We had to make do with our plays being published and translated, sometimes staged by international directors who had no problem in stepping back and acknowledging the playwright as one of the authors of the performance. Of course, we had to be lucky – opportunities were still very few.

At that time, I had to stage my plays, which, incidentally, was regarded as cheeky and inconsiderate towards the effigy of directorial prowess. I am very happy that I had the courage to do that, because I learned a lot. In fact, although I had been writing for more than a decade and had won the Play of the Year in 2000, I only became a playwright when I started to direct. But this is my way – others began by being directors and writing afterwards, others do not feel comfortable at all with staging their plays. There are many possibilities, but one needs to find her or his way, there are no recipes, no universal solutions. Just exemplary destinies or inspiring insights that other playwrights can share with us.

**E.W.:** *In Germany, there is a very important festival dedicated to new German dramaturgy, Mülheimer Theatertage. Every year, the jury is selecting 10 productions, taking into consideration all new German plays staged in the last season and focusing only on the play and not on the production. At this festival, I found out that 600 new German plays are produced every year in Germany. This is an astronomical amount. In Romania, I don't think we have had 600 plays since 1990. Could it be possible in the future to have, let's say, 50 new Romanian plays every year?*

**A.N.:** Ha-ha! I am not going to fall into your trap of negativity!

Some steps have been taken towards creating a context, a safe space for the emerging playwrights. We have stopped blaming the communism for manipulating playwrights and plays for propaganda, which apparently had explained the lack of appetite of theatres and directors for the new plays, in the '90s. A new play does not need a big budget, so we cannot blame the lack of funds. We are still fighting the indifference of theatres, and the lack of expertise, the traditional literacy gap regarding playwriting. I could, of course, name other obstacles that block the playwright: too few and too obscure playwriting competitions, therefore small chances to become visible, the idea that writing as it is, is a hobby and not a profession, the "genius" mythology, in a culture where people still play the national lottery, believe in becoming rich overnight, and do not believe in supporting long-term projects...

Ooops! I think I have fallen right into your trap!



**E.W.:** *What do you think is lacking in the Romanian dramaturgy?*

**A.N.:** More playwrights. A real association, a guild of playwrights who live their lives on the stage, who have found ways to empower themselves and have their voices heard.

**E.W.:** *In the last years, a certain tendency has increased: playwrights are commissioned to write about a certain topic, for a certain theatre. A director calls you and says: "I really like your writing. But don't you want to write something new, for me? Look, I have this idea". Or a theatre manager decides he wants a play about migration, and he talks to a playwright. Sometimes, the text is developed together with the actors and the director. For me, commissioned works are a little bit risky because it's almost sure that there won't be a second production. That means playwrights are encouraged to write „for single use only“. Aren't you afraid of this?*

**A.N.:** Not really, no. I have done this kind of writing myself, and it is extremely rewarding. I have also encouraged other playwrights to do it, but some find it difficult to be so flexible and not afraid of the process. After all, if you are the one and only author, you know you can count on yourself, but if you are part of a team, and do not run it (the director mostly does that), you have no control over the text that is born along with the performance, and it can escape you or take the wrong direction. The thing is, I guess, you need to be in control somehow: you either have a good chemistry with the director and you both run the team, as partners, or you just run it yourself, as an author. And that's that. But you must trust the stage, even if you are scared to death – if you trust it and pay attention to it, you can't go wrong.

**E.W.:** *You often speak about the transition of the playwright to the status of dramatic author, directing his own plays. For me, the danger is that such a work becomes so personal that nobody else would stage the play again. I believe in the traditional playwright, who is writing a play that will be directed by somebody else, giving new meanings to it. Do you think this kind of playwright will disappear?*

**A.N.:** No, not at all! You speak about a play as dramatic poetry, about playwrights who can write and construct, at the same time, a literary object for stage. These plays are very rare, very precious! Nevertheless, theatre has evolved from literary theatre to documentary theatre, devised and performative techniques of dramaturgical impact. Some great performances are not based on drama, therefore we can speak of postdramatic forms. Neither Kantor, nor Grotowski worked with respect for the text; for them, great stage authors, fathers of performance and promoters of anti-mimetic theatre, the show was the text. But you can't imagine Brecht without his plays, can you? All these forms of theatre have coexisted, some in wonderfully hybrid versions. And today, we are living all the possibilities, the stage is very open, you can experiment, explore, be non-conventional or very traditional. It is for the first time in the history of theatre that we have so many possibilities to work with multimedia, conceptual tools, in alternative spaces or on a fully-equipped stage. After all, the stage, wherever you may find it, has one fundamental rule: there is no right and wrong, there is only what functions and what doesn't.

**E.W.:** *Could you imagine living in another country and writing in another language than Romanian?*

**A.N.:** Oh, yes! I am a very imaginative person... but I'm afraid it's too late now. I need to rely on translations.

**E.W.:** *Many of the Romanian films after 2000 are dealing with the past. Some years ago, people used to say: "I'm tired of seeing another film about the Revolution". That's not the case of theatre, where plays are more about the present. You are one of the playwrights who wrote about the past - life in communism, the consequences of collaboration with the Securitate being themes you approached in your plays. Do you think we need more plays about the past? Or should theatre speak mostly about here and now?*

**A.N.:** I am not very sure about what theatre should or should not do. There are plenty of options, nobody forces you to watch a movie about the Revolution, if you couldn't care less. You needn't watch Lars von Trier, no, you can watch a film by Nora Ephron. The extraordinary thing today is that you have an option, and I wish we were intelligent enough to preserve

our options. Repertory theatres work one way, they care about tradition and conventional forms of theatre, independent theatre doesn't give a rat's arse about tradition and wants to provoke, induce reaction, it is hungry for immediacy and feedback. Theatre has invaded visual art, performing is an important part of poetry shows, you can take your pick and enjoy it!

The other half of your question – me writing about the past... a writer feeds on memory, personal memory as well as collective one. One of the consequences of playwrights being so young is that their memory expands over a short period of time. It is so natural that we have lots of plays about teenagers, when the playwrights are barely 21 or 22 years old! They cannot (with few exceptions) write about communism, since they did not live it, have no personal memories of it. And their interest lies somewhere else, good for them! They should follow their instincts and write about what tickles them!

But let me tell you a very short story: last summer, while running a workshop in Cluj, I was asked by a 20 year-old playwright, why was communism bad, since her parents and grandparents kept saying it was a lot better than what they were living at the moment. Her question triggered a huge indignation in me, a reflex anger. Not against her, but against our ability to forget.

I did write about the past, indeed, and I shall never get tired to do so, provided I can help not to repeat myself. Memory needs to be preserved and shared, and our culture is not big on preserving our memory and telling the truth about history, recent or not. If I can make a contribution to that, I shall never stop writing about the past. There are lots of young and very talented playwrights who speak loud and clear and about the present!

## **PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS**



## *“Us and Them” – A Transylvanian Story in Three Chapters*

**Performance review: 20/20, written and directed by Gianina Cărbunariu, a production of Yorick Studio, Tîrgu-Mureş; *Double Bind*, a performance by Alina Nelega and Kincses Réka, a production of The National Theatre, Tîrgu-Mureş, and MaRó by Székely Csaba, directed by Andi Gherghe, a production of Yorick Studio, Tîrgu-Mureş**

**Motto:** “And after all, we’re only ordinary men...”  
– Pink Floyd, *Us and Them* –

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 1918, Transylvania was no longer a Hungarian territory. On this historic date, it became a part of Romania, a *status quo* which was going to be officialised in 1920, as validated by the Versailles Treaty. Thus, our Great Union Day happened a hundred years ago – a cause for celebration in 2018, when most Romanian citizens are rejoicing the Centenary openly, and few of them are hindered by whatever feelings this year-long feast might cause in the hearts of our co-nationals, the members of the quite substantial Hungarian ethnic minority. However, despite extreme, nationalistic reactions having been registered over the years both amongst Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania, many of us are trying to live in the community and understand its mechanics, aiming at peaceful cohabitation.

Theatre, the most social of the arts, is a tool which cannot be ignored when one wants to deal with community-related issues. In the following “chapters”, I will analyse three performances (created by highly-qualified, awarded theatre professionals) each dealing with the relationship between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. The reason why I chose to write about this specific problem in a journal whose current issue is celebrating the Romanian Centenary is the fact that there are some countries in which the tradition states that if it is your birthday, you are the one who is supposed to offer gifts to your friends and family. Let’s imagine, for a moment, that we live in such a culture.

**Chapter I – 20/20**

**Yorick Studio, Tîrgu-Mureş – 20/20. Written and directed by Gianina Cărbunariu. Visual artist: Maria Drăghici. Translation and dramaturgy: Boros Kinga. Cast: Virgil Aioanei, Bányai Kelemen Barna, Berekméri Katalin, Carmen Florescu, Mădălina Ghiţescu, Korpos András, Rolando Matsangos, Sebestyén Aba, Cristina Toma, Tompa Klára. Opening date: the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 2009.**

*20/20* is a documentary theatre performance, the title of which consists of a term borrowed from ophtalmology – a measurement indicating perfectly-accurate (hence, normal) vision. However, this title also refers to “Black March” in Tîrgu-Mureş/Marosvásárhely, as does the entire show. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1990, not long after the fall of communism in Romania, Hungarians and Romanians clashed in an interethnic conflict the consequences of which were bloody and gruesome. This conflict is the main topic of *20/20*, a theatre performance which aims to investigate how people saw the March events twenty years after they had happened.



**Fig. 1.** *20/20* poster (by Maria Drăghici)

The concept of the show is self-referential. Thus, *20/20* approaches the documentation process itself – it tells the story of how several young theatre artists from Bucharest have come to Tîrgu-Mureş to make a show about “Black March” and to interview people for this precise purpose. They are met with reluctance and refusal by many locals. But this is just one scene of the performance. Other scenes talk about the March events from the perspective of two foreigners, about the difficulties a Romanian woman encounters when trying to learn Hungarian, about borders, and, also, about what the relationships between Romanian and Hungarian neighbours looked like in March, 1990.

This latter scene is, in my opinion, if a little biased, the central scene of the performance. Its characters are a couple of Transylvanian–Hungarians who have guests from Budapest. Suddenly, their Romanian neighbours decide to pay them a visit.

Civilised conversation ensues, up to a point, and we find out that the Romanian neighbours have come to Transylvania from other regions of Romania (Oltenia, Moldova) to work at the Chemical Factory in Tîrgu-Mureş. At this point, I felt misrepresented: I was born and raised in Tîrgu-Mureş, just like my parents, and, due to cultural appropriation, I grew up listening to Hungarian rock bands such as Omega or Locomotiv GT and started using Hungarian interjections like “Na!” and “Jaj!” in my early childhood. The Romanians in this scene from *20/20* are not Transylvanian, they have peasant-like traditions and tastes. The portrait of the born-and-raised-in-Tîrgu-Mureş is absent. On the other hand, the visitors from Budapest are highly-aristocratic, they sing and recite poems and value “high culture” – an aspect which was ironically presented and accordingly laughed at by the audience.

Despite this small mishap of some Transylvanian-Romanians feeling underrepresented, the show is, otherwise, extremely lively, well-directed and professionally-acted. Theatre critic Philip Fisher writes: “*20/20* is played out in-the-round by performers sitting in a kind of sunken bear pit observed from all sides by spectators. This voyeuristic staging is effective in the light of the evening’s subject matter, events in March 1990 in the city of Tîrgu Mureş (sic!) (or Târgu Mureş) in Transylvania, during which clashes between the two ethnic groups led to fighting and five deaths.

Ten actors, split equally both male/female and Romanian/Hungarian, work with a verbatim text to illuminate the events, using virtually no costumes or props in the bare space. (...) The problems are largely related in reportage rather than action, although the strong feelings begin to emerge in a series of scenes during which the mutual hatred and suffering becomes increasingly apparent.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Fisher, “*20/20*”, in *British Theatre Guide*, <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/20-20-platform-theatr-7665>, accessed on the 18th of February, 2018;



The relationship between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania is a delicate subject matter. Gianina Cărbunariu and her team have touched upon this (un)healed wound and I remember feeling grateful for their performance and for the discussions with the audience that followed the premiere.



**Fig. 2:** Scene from *20/20* (photo by Maria Drăghici)

Simple, but not simplistic, tackling a difficult matter that still lingers upon Tîrgu-Mureş, *20/20* was a necessary performance. But have we really healed? And, if so, are our wounds old enough for us to have regained the perfect vision *20/20* refers to? Do we have the necessary distance to see things clearly, even now, after so many years have passed? The show itself ends with a question, addressed to the audience: “What do *you* think?”.

Maybe the answer to this question could be given by another performance:

## Chapter 2 – *Double Bind*

The National Theatre, Tîrgu-Mureş - *Double Bind*. A performance by Alina Nelega and Kincses Réka. Cast: Monica Ristea, Berekméri Katalin, Elena Pirea, Pál Emőke, Laura Mihalache, Csíki Szabolcs, Andrei Alexandru Chiran, Barabási Tivadar, Claudiu Banciu, Bartha László Zsolt, Cristian Iorga. Music: Ada Milea. Translation: Kacsó Judit-Andrea, Florentina Váry. Opening date: the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, 2014.

Just like *20/20*, the title of *Double Bind* is a borrowed expression. This time, the artists have approached the area of psychology, where *double bind* refers to a conflicting situation which cannot possibly generate a positive solution. Created by Kincses Réka and Alina Nelega, this theatre performance is a devised-documentary show, focusing on Tîrgu-Mureş, the same city where the “Black March” events took place, but it approaches the minority-majority issue from a wider perspective.



Fig. 3. *Double Bind* poster (by Kincses Réka)

A Hungarian reviewer of this performance states that “A megrázó előadásban sokszor előkerül a konfliktusváros motívuma is, amelyet egyik náció sem tud igazán magáénak érezni a vélt vagy valós sérelmek miatt.”<sup>2</sup> A Romanian theatre critic talks about “un oraş în care cele două comunități trăiesc alături, nu și împreună.”<sup>3</sup>

Besides life in this split city, or maybe not “besides” but rather mirroring it, *Double Bind* documents a summer workshop that preceded the performance, and in which actors from the Hungarian and Romanian companies of the National Theatre in Tîrgu-Mureş took part. The workshop was the first stage of the rehearsals - the participants told their personal stories, on which the performance is mostly based. Another similarity with *20/20: Double Bind* is self-referential, the actors play both themselves and several characters. There are many scenes which combine laughter with bittersweet mediation: a Transylvanian-Hungarian abroad can't explain her identity to two foreigners: she's Romanian, but she's also Hungarian; the writer-directors of *Double Bind* cannot agree on what a certain scene should look like in the show, because they have different views on history and on nowadays reality; a Transylvanian-Hungarian woman returns to Marosvásárhely after living abroad, only to discover that it has become Tîrgu-Mureş - meaning that the streets have changed their names from Hungarian to Romanian; a Romanian high school student, born and raised in a nationalistic family, treats a Hungarian girl badly; and, last, but not least, the central scene of the performance: a talk-show where the characters literally fight each other (Romanians against Hungarians).

I have mentioned that, having been born and raised in Tîrgu-Mureş, I had felt underrepresented in *20/20*. There were some spectators who felt the same thing about *Double Bind*; they were the sons and daughters of mixed families, i. e. one Romanian and one Hungarian parent – and the show did not talk about them. However, *Double Bind* did not aim to deal with the situation in Tîrgu-Mureş exhaustively, but rather, dynamically. And it is quite a dynamic performance! The actors masterfully switch between the documented and fictionalised scenes, between story, history and reality, while the script (the Romanian parts of which were written by Alina Nelega, while the Hungarian ones – by Kincses Réka) is beautifully-structured and thought-provoking.

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<sup>2</sup> “In this shocking theatre performance, the motive of the conflict-city appears several times, a city which none of the two ethnic groups feels it belongs to them, because of real or imaginary insults.” - Csaba Lukács, “A főtér átköltözött Marosvásárhelyről Targu-Muresbe”, in *Magyar Nemzet*, Budapest, December 18 (2017);

<sup>3</sup> “... a city in which the two communities live alongside, but not together.” – Oana Stoica, “Vorbește-mi, n-o să te ascult”, in *Dilema Veche*, issue 685, April 6-12 (2017).



Fig. 4: *Double Bind* rehearsal (photo by Sebesi Sándor)

*Double Bind* ends, just like *20/20*, with a question. Nevertheless, the question is rather different from the one in Gianina Cărbunariu's production. "Can anyone see me?" is the last line of the performance, and it is an invitation for members of both communities to look at one another, to really see each other, to live together, rather than apart.

### Chapter 3 – *MaRó*

**Yorick Studio Tîrgu-Mureş - *MaRó* by Székely Csaba. Directed by: Andi Gherghe. Set Design: Adrian Ganea. Cast: Raisa Ané, Botond Farkas Benedek, Csaba Ciugulitu, Piroska Fodor, Imelda Hajdu, Ştefan Mura, István Nagy. Opening Date: the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2015.**

Another bilingual performance. Another show about Romanians and Hungarians living in Transylvania. Another production of Yorick Studio Tîrgu-Mureş. *MaRó* completes my theatrical triad: if *20/20* left the traces of tragedy in my mind's eye, while *Double Bind* was a tragicomedy, *MaRó* is definitely a comedy. But it is a bittersweet, dark comedy. *MaRó* (the title of which means "caustic" in Hungarian and "brown" in Romanian - but is also

an abbreviation of the words “Hungarian” and “Romanian”) is a bilingual show, just like the previous two. Written by Székely Csaba, who has found the appropriate director in the person of Andi Gherghe, the performance is wonderfully played by a team of professional actors.



Fig. 5: *MaRó* poster (by Hotgyai István)

*MaRó* has two so-called “curtains”, which are amusing in themselves – animated movies the protagonists of which are caricatures of Hungarians at the Gates of Heaven. The playwright structured his scenario in ten grotesque, absurdist scenes, meant to paint a picture of the same thorny relationship between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania. In *MaRó*, everyone is (mis)represented – both Romanians and Hungarians, since it is almost cartoonish in its unorthodox approach. The show builds on clichés, on stereotypes, deconstructing them through laughter. For instance, in one of the scenes, the father doesn’t approve of his daughter wanting to marry a Romanian, but the idea suddenly seems palatable after realising that the other candidate for her hand in marriage is a gypsy. The cruelty of the play’s humour is obvious in the scene where a Hungarian employee of the City Hall is asked by the



mayor to perform the part of Avram Iancu, one of the nationalists’ heroes, in a sketch. Another example of black humour is a scene where a Romanian nationalist finds out her DNA is Hungarian up to an overwhelming proportion.



Fig. 6: Scene from *MaRó* (photo by Volker Vornehm)

I had never thought I could laugh at the serious matter of complicated interethnic relationships. But *MaRó* succeeded in entertaining the audience with therapeutic laughter. Although this was a more traditional play than both *20/20* and *Double Bind*, which were closer to the performative aspect of theatre, it is no less valuable than either.

## Epilogue

The fact that theatre professionals talk about Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania is a good sign. It means there is room for dialogue, and that the aftermath of the grim events pictured in *20/20*, namely the parallel lives the two communities live – as pointed out in *Double Bind* – can be even laughed at, as those who have attended *MaRó* can testify.

All three performances originated in Tîrgu-Mureş, a city the population of which is made of, approximately, fifty percent Hungarians and fifty percent Romanians. We have lived together before and after the incorporation of Transylvania in Romania, and Tîrgu-Mureş, with its *Secession* buildings and its mixed cultural heritage is special today due to its interculturalism. One of the proofs is represented by these three theatre shows, all of which are crossing the t's dotting the i's of Transylvania's multiethnic and intercultural dimension.

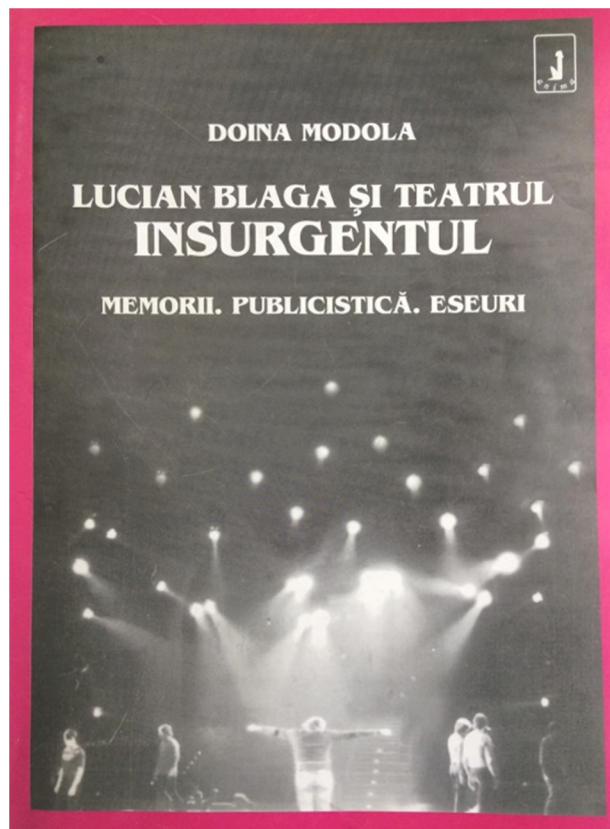
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## *Lucian Blaga as Visionary but Unfortunate Playwright*

**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

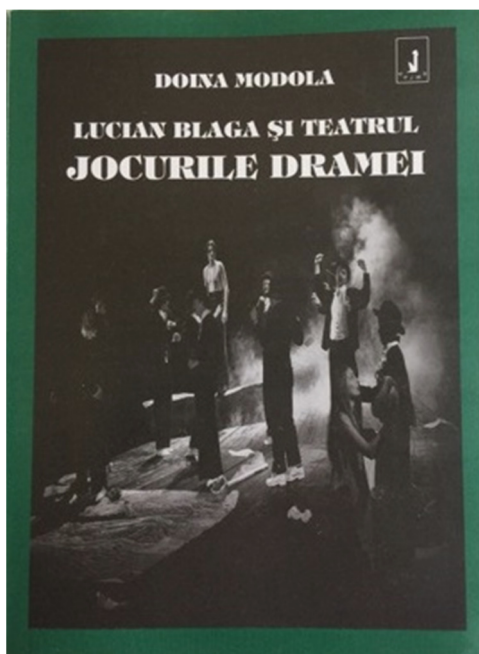
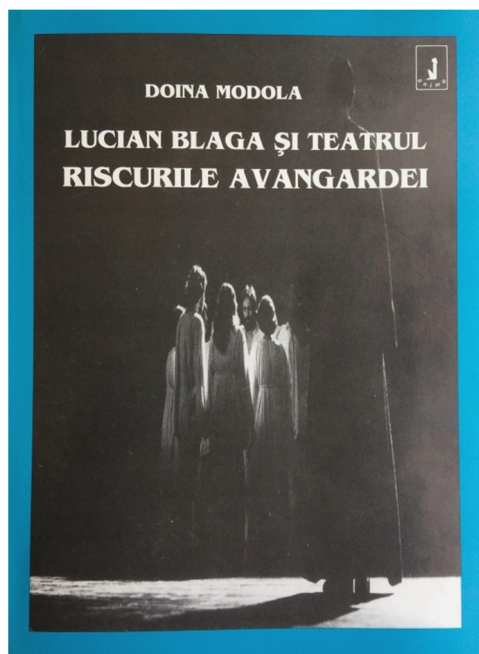




A qualified literary critic and theatrologist, rewarded in 2007 with the award of the Romanian Theatrical Union for career achievements, Doina Modola has a multi-volume publishing history: *Dramaturgia românească între 1900-1918* [Romanian Dramaturgy between 1900 and 1918] (1983); *Actori pe scena lumii* [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.)

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## *Les âges du Théâtre National de Yassy*

**Book review: Ștefan Oprea, *The Ages of the Stage*, 2 vols, Junimea Publishing House, 2016. At the celebration of the bicentenary of the first theatrical performance in Romanian – in Iași, December 27, 1816, the theatre critic Ștefan Oprea presented the analysis of the theatrical activities of the National Theatre in Iasi (performances, portraits of stage directors, actors, theatre critics) covering thus more almost 50 years of stage life in over 1000 pages.**



Réunis et secondés par Gheorghe Asachi, un groupe de jeunes, issus des boyards roumains, joua le troisième jour du Noël 1816 le tout premier spectacle en Roumain. *C'était Mirtil și Hloe [Myrtil et Chloë]*, pastorale d'après Gessner et Florian, qui eut lieu dans les maisons de la famille Ghica. Ayant un lien profond avec le courant de modernisation de la société roumaine au début du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, l'initiative de créer un théâtre à caractère national

est associée à l'affirmation de l'identité nationale. « La aniversară » (à l'occasion de l'anniversaire) – comme le disait Eminescu, car la présence de notre poète est inséparable de la vie théâtrale de la Cité, et on lui doit à toujours une juste révérence – donc au bicentenaire du premier spectacle en Roumain, paraît *Les Ages de la scène* par Ștefan Oprea, ouvrage en 2 volumes, dans la Collection *Colocvialia* de l'Édition *Junimea*, dédié aux deux siècles d'art théâtrale à Yassy.

Historien et critique du théâtre, professeur à la Faculté de Théâtre de l'Université des Arts „George Enescu” de Yassy, directeur des revues *Cronica*, *Cronica veche* et *Dacia literară*, Ștefan Oprea a depuis toujours mis sa plume et sa pensée au service du Théâtre National de Yassy. Le premier volume des *Âges de la scène* rassemble des chroniques écrites à l'occasion des premières que le Théâtre National de Yassy a eu pendant cinquante années (1966-2016) et montrent un critique attentif et enthousiaste, qui reste pourtant un lucide témoin. Le second volume rassemble des essais, des présentations de livres, des portraits et interviews d'artistes qui y ont animé la scène roumaine.

Le parcours d'un millier de pages – impressionnante preuve de conséquence et incessante curiosité professionnelle – met en évidence un instrumentaire théorique adéquat, utilisé par l'auteur pour créer une nouvelle fois le trajet de la pensée à l'acte scénique. La critique telle que Ștefan Oprea la conçoit, aborde l'analyse de l'acte théâtral en partant du texte, option due à sa formation d'homme de lettres et au fait qu'il est lui-même auteur de pièces de théâtre et docteur *ès lettres*. Les intentions de la mise en scène sont déchiffrées, et on suit la manière dont elles se définissent sur scène, on apprécie leur réalisation dans l'ensemble du spectacle, par l'intermédiaire de l'image et du rythme scéniques, par l'apport de la construction scénographique, par l'orchestration de la distribution.

L'œuvre d'artistes importants, appartenant aux générations différentes, surpris en diverses étapes de leur carrière, sans par autant négliger les productions des réalisateurs un peu plus écartés de l'excellence (qui, maintes fois, dans l'histoire du théâtre ou d'une troupe, s'avèrent inévitables) est mise en valeur par la pensée de Ștefan Oprea. Pour fournir quelques exemples, la chronique visant le début de Cătălina Buzoianu, autant bien que celles visant d'autres productions que le même metteur en scène a fait au Théâtre National de Yassy – *Celestina, Iașii în carnaval/Yassy au carnaval, Istoria ieroglifică/ Histoire hiéroglyphique, Poveste de iarnă/ Conte d'hiver*. Ce n'est pas peu chose que d'imposer un artiste, dès ses premiers pas, dès ses premiers essais scéniques, surtout quand le critique lui-même n'est encore qu'un

jeune chroniqueur théâtral (au début des années '70), mais muni d'un sens de l'observation et de l'expression bien exercé. L'ouvrage nous offre encore bien d'exemples – Anca Ovanez Doroșenco, Cristian Hadji-Culea, Irina Popescu Boieru, Ovidiu Lazăr ou d'autres personnalités que le lecteur est invité à découvrir.

Dans la *Chasse aux canards* (1983) – spectacle important pour la scène de Yassy, aussi bien que pour la compréhension d'Alexandre Vampilov en Roumanie –, Ștefan Oprea remarque la « discrète poésie du quotidien » (ce qui donne d'ailleurs le titre du matériel) comme sur-thème de la conception du metteur en scène, Nicolae Scarlat. En 1981, à la fin d'une nouvelle production de *Chirița în provincie* [*Kiritza en province*] signée par Alexandru Dabija, un couplet revenait toujours à l'esprit: „C-așa e lumea, o comedie/lar noi, artiștii care-o jucăm/N-avem dorință alta mai vie/Decât aplauze să merităm” [„Ainsi est la vie, une comédie,/ Et nous, artistes qui la jouons/ Pour plus haut désir n'avons / Que mériter d'être applaudis"]. Trente ans après, dans sa chronique couvrant la première de *Iașii în carnaval* due au même Alexandru Dabija – production qui rouvre, en 2012, la Grande Salle du Théâtre National de Yassy fraîchement restauré –, Ștefan Oprea souligne l'usage du même couplet en début du spectacle en guise d'élément de continuité. C'est un autre exemple de la perspective par laquelle le critique de théâtre construit avec rigueur ses commentaires, tout en soulignant l'élément symbolique et les directions des stratégies concernant le répertoire du théâtre, la manière dans laquelle elles se concrétisent ou, par contre, se font attendre. À cet égard, plus qu'éloquent reste l'essai *Répertoire ou programme?* compris dans l'ouvrage.

Gens de théâtre – comédiens, metteurs en scène, dramaturges, chroniqueurs et écrivains – deviennent les héros du livre *Les Âges de la scène*; dont les deux tomes s'adressent tant aux professionnels du théâtre, qu'aux différents publics de théâtre. On y trouve des invitations à la lecture faites aux spectateurs qui sont fidèles aux metteurs en scène contemporains comme Felix Alexa, Radu Afrim ou à bien d'autres encore plus jeunes; ou à ces spectateurs qui ont constamment admiré, dès leurs respective jeunesse théâtrale, un autre artiste, Teofil Vâlcu, acteur auquel Ștefan Oprea est lié d'une grande amitié et à qui il a consacré un ample étude intitulée *Măria-SA, Actorul Teofil Vâlcu* [*Sa Majesté, le comédien Teofil Vâlcu*]. Les admirateurs de Mihaela Arsenescu Werner, Sergiu Tudose, Dionisie Vitcu, Cornelia Gheorghiu, Adina Popa, Violeta Popescu, Emil Coșeru, Doina Deleanu, Despina Marcu y retrouvent leurs idoles. En surgissant des pages écrites,



s'animent, prennent contour et couleur les portraits faits aux gens ci-mentionnés, auxquels s'ajoutent les présences de Miluță Gheorghiu, Eliza Petrăchescu, Mihai Codreanu, Sorana Țopa. Une place à part est réservée dans le livre à la « génération d'or », *id est* la génération des années 1920–1970, avec un important essai sur un spectacle-événement du théâtre, *Spectacolul pensionarilor [Le Spectacle des sociétaires]* (2012) qui avait rassemblé quelques anciens comédiens comme Margareta Baci, Anny Braeschi, Ion Lascăr, Costache Sava, Costache Cadeschi ou Mihai Grosu.

Les artistes appartiennent à Yassy, et chacun lui apporte un plus, ils sont adaptés à l'esprit de la ville, aux esprits positifs des lieux de maintenant ou de jadis. L'intérêt de Ștefan Oprea porte aussi bien sur leur destinée professionnelle que sur leur trajectoire humaine, le chroniqueur fournit son compte pour les gens présents et ceux à venir; Ion Aurel Maican, Ion Sava, Sorana Coroamă Stanca, Crin Teodorescu ou Aureliu Manea – car peu sont ceux qui se souviennent de *Philoctète* (1969), par exemple, qu'il a mis en scène au Théâtre National de Yassy. Le regard pénétrant du chroniqueur redouble celui de l'incessant lecteur des livres de ses confrères; ainsi, avec leurs œuvres, Sabina Bălănescu, Constantin Paiu, Florin Faifer, Călin Ciobotari et bien d'autres encore deviennent à leur tour les héros de ces volumes.

L'élégance de l'écriture, la pertinence et l'exactitude des observations, l'humour fin – rarement, très rarement parsemé d'accents sarcastiques – font que les deux volumes donnent corps à un livre exemplaire pour la condition de chroniqueur de théâtre en Roumanie à la fin du XXème et début du XXIème siècles. Très utile est la nouvelle publication des chroniques-mêmes, telles qu'elles ont paru dans les magazines de l'époque, bien que mentionner ces publications aurait été souhaitable. Avec ces pages, l'histoire du théâtre roumain se trouve complétée car elles restent un témoignage précieux pour ceux intéressés à la connaître.

„Comme la fumée est la gloire de la scène” affirme l'auteur. Mais par ce parcours-même, il montre la nécessité d'une mémoire théâtrale et culturelle. Les centaines de pages dédiées aux créateurs qui peuplent la scène du Théâtre National de Yassy – „la Maison d'Alecsandri”, comme il lui plaît d'appeler l'institution – consacre Ștefan Oprea comme un des constructeurs inlassables de la ville culturelle de Yassy.

*Crenguța MANEA*

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*Liviu Ciulei – WANTED At Home and Abroad*

**Book review: Florica Ichim, Anca Mocanu (eds.), *Liviu Ciulei acasă și-n lume [Liviu Ciulei Home and Abroad]*, vol. I-III, Bucharest: Fundația Culturală „Camil Petrescu”, Revista „Teatrul azi”, 2016**



The release of the trilogy *Liviu Ciulei acasă și-n lume* was a veritable editorial and theatrical event in the Romanian cultural environment. The book was put together by Florica Ichim and Anca Mocanu (Bucharest, Fundația Culturală „Camil Petrescu”, Revista „Teatrul azi”). A multi-talented artist and an encyclopaedic personality, Liviu Ciulei (1923-2011) was an actor, architect, stage-designer, screenwriter, teacher and theatre theorist, but he is best known for his work as a theatre and movie director. He was a pioneer of theatre in Romania during the '70s and '80s, until he went into exile because of the increasingly severe censorship of art during communism. Occasionally, he would go back to Romania after the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in 1989 and direct several plays at the “Bulandra” Theatre in Bucharest – in which he had a special interest.

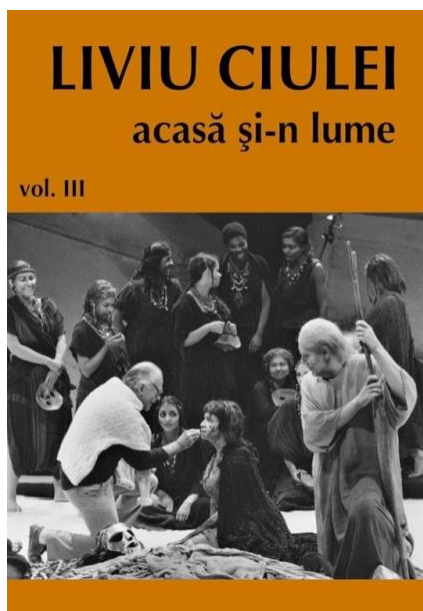
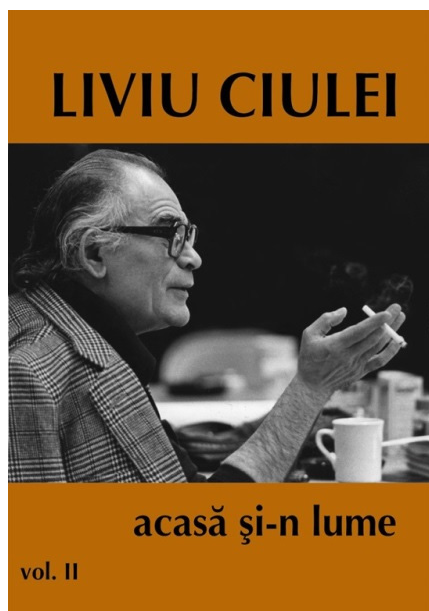
In 2009, with the help of theatrologist Mihai Lupu, Liviu Ciulei published an exceptional bilingual album: *Cu gândiri și cu imagini [With Thoughts and Images]* (Bucharest, Igloo). It was a richly illustrated "personal retrospective" of his over 60-year long theatre career, which spanned over four continents. (Starting with 1967, but mostly after the second half of the 1970s, Ciulei staged many theatrical productions in Germany, France, Italy, the U.S.A., Great Britain, Australia and Israel.) Moreover, the album focuses more on his work as a stage designer, whilst the volumes put together by Florica Ichim and Anca Mocanu, published in the prestigious *Galeria Teatrului Românesc* series of the *Teatrul Azi* magazine, offer the reader a more comprehensive picture of Liviu Ciulei's personality and creative activities.

The three volumes have a very articulated structure, mapped out by the following sections: "Articles and Communications by Liviu Ciulei", "Interviews with Liviu Ciulei", "Stage Design", "Architecture" – volume I; "Management – «Lucia Sturdza Bulandra» Theatre", "Confessions of the Creator", "Appendix. Artists Face to Face with the Censorship", "Commented Theatrography (1947-1972)" (containing vast commentaries regarding the work of Liviu Ciulei, including his teachings) – volume II; "Management - «Guthrie» Theatre, Minneapolis (U.S.A.)", "One or More Days of Liviu Ciulei's Life", "Interviews with Liviu Ciulei", "He Counseled and Supported Talents", "Commented Theatrography (1973-2005)" – volume III.

Considering that there were many sources for the materials, inevitably the information tends to be repetitive sometimes, but without it being bothersome. In the end, this results in the multiplication of perspectives – a sort of polyhedral reflection of one of the most iconic figures of Romanian and – why not? – World theatre.

Asked many times about how he manages to peacefully combine in his work so many different occupations (acting, directing, architecture, stage design, etc.), Liviu Ciulei answers simply: "My job is the show!" In this way, he asserts his respect for the complete theatre maker. Another exceptionally emphasised principle underlying his work throughout his career is that *a theatre performance aims at putting a mirror in front of our contemporary society*. We stage "the classics" not because of our love for modernism in its own, says the director, but because we find in these texts elements which must be underlined or diminished to correspond with today's world. "Museum" productions or those that lack a political/social outcome seem to be Ciulei's worst nightmare.

Regarding stage-design, Ciulei aimed at creating a set which served as a vector for the idea of theatre production, but which is not a pictorial representation of it. He was also the initiator of a revolution of post-war Romanian theatre stage design, by rejecting the naturalist sets promoted by the powerful advocates of socialist realism. He marched for treating the décor of the play in a theatrical manner: “Not cramped-up and minimized architecture on a small stage, not buildings copied in a pointless effort, made from cardboard, but theatrical, poetical and dramatic images which are made concrete in sets”. The article in which the previous quote is included (*Teatralizarea picturii de teatru [The Theatricalization of Painting in Theatre]*, in “Teatrul”, I, no. 2, June 1956), and the reply given promptly by the director and writer Radu Stanca (“*Reteatralizarea*” teatrului [“*The «Retheatricalization» of Theatre*”]), in “Teatrul”, I, no. 4, September 1956) became manifestos of the re-theatricalization movement in the 1970s and 1980s, which helped Romanian theatre to re-connect with the similar movement of the inter-war period. (One of the pioneers of this inter-war movement was the director and stage designer Ion Sava, later a mentor of Liviu Ciulei). Glancing backwards, Ciulei characterised this movement as a phase towards a theatre of the future, towards a new classical theatre. The vision and means that he sought in his theatrical productions were always realistic, so he said, but in the full meaning of the word. In this way – underlined the director – fantasy was realistic, too, as it was rooted in the real world. At Ciulei, realism simply meant ‘breathing theatre’.



The director never thought that he had invented anything new. He had a series of “role models”. Alongside Ion Sava, mentioned above, he had the upmost admiration for Peter Brook and Bertolt Brecht. Of his colleagues, he admired most Lucian Pintilie, David Esrig, Radu Penciulescu and the younger Andrei Șerban.

Liviu Ciulei was the director of the “Bulandra” Theatre (between 1963 and 1972) which he rebuilt (both literally – through the architectural reconfiguration of one of the halls – and figuratively) and transformed into one of the most appreciated institutions of its kind in Romania and abroad. His return after the long years in exile was not easy. When describing this re-encounter, the director could not really hide his bitterness as to the state of the institution when he staged *Hamlet* here after 1989. Partially equipped workshops, lack of organisation, financial problems...

On the stage of “Bulandra” Theatre, Ciulei put some of his most memorable productions: *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, *Children of the Sun* by Maxim Gorky, *The Three Penny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht, *Night Lodging* by Maxim Gorky, *Leonce and Lena* by Georg Büchner, *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, *Danton’s Death* by Georg Büchner, *Play Strindberg* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Elisabeth I* by Paul Foster, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare and so on; but also his biggest fails, such as *Macbeth*, which Ciulei, unforgiving of himself, described as his worst staging. A play that cannot be overlooked is *O scrisoare pierdută* [*A Lost Letter*], which premiered exactly 120 years after the birth of Ion Luca Caragiale, the author of the comedy. Regarding the staging of the play, the director mentioned that I.L. Caragiale is a Shakespeare of the Romanians. The same way that, each year, *Hamlet* is staged many times in England, Romania should do with *O scrisoare pierdută*, Caragiale’s best play. Theatres should collaborate, not engage in pitiful rivalry – so says Ciulei on the same occasion.

The movie considered by Ciulei (and not only by him) his biggest accomplishment in the field, i.e. *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*Forest of Hanged*], adapted from the eponymous novel by Liviu Rebreanu (Prize for Directing and Nomination for Palme d’Or at Cannes International Film Festival in 1965), dates back to the time when he was manager of “Bulandra” Theatre. His work as a movie director and actor was by no means insignificant, but political pressure and increasing censorship forced Ciulei to abandon movie-making whilst in full power of creation. Therefore, he fully dedicated himself to making theatre – seen as a refuge from the political interferences, which

turned out to be just as frail. Unable to name the real cause of his retreat from the world of filmmaking, he justified his decision then by mentioning the generally harsh working conditions and the problems which continuously arise on the movie set, as well as his very busy schedule at the theatre.

Liviu Ciulei was dismissed from the position of manager of “Bulandra” Theatre after the premiere of Gogol’s *Inspector*, directed by Lucian Pintilie, banned by the authorities after the third performance. This was perhaps one of the darkest moments in the history of Romanian theatre, leading to Pintilie’s (self)exile and later to Ciulei’s. In the second volume of the trilogy edited by Florica Ichim and Anca Mocanu, a text describes the full atrocity of the “trial” filed against the team of “Bulandra” Theatre because of the upper-mentioned play: *Cacealmaua (sau Ședința din 28.10.1972) [The Bluff (or The Assembly of the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1972)]*, written by the stage designer Dan Jitianu. The Theatre’s artists could remember well the “assembly that turned the «Bulandra» into a museum piece”, even after 1990.

After leaving the country, Liviu Ciulei left his mark on Western theatre with plays directed all over the world, from West Germany to the U.S.A. Here he later settled and became director of “Guthrie” Theatre in Minneapolis. Unsurprisingly, the establishment became one of the most valued theatres in the U.S.A. under his management. Ciulei was also professor at several American universities, where he received the appreciation of colleagues and students alike.

Ciulei died in the fall of 2011 in a hospital in Munich, Germany. Romania lost then an artist of incommensurable value, a true national symbol. Andrei Șerban noted that, when he last saw him at his home where he visited him with Radu Penciulescu, Ciulei, although not working anymore, shared with his two friends his latest discovery regarding theatre, about the centre of gravity of the characters. The books he left behind are full of such findings, of the continuous search that tormented Ciulei, with regard to theatre. They are authentic manuals of directing, acting, stage design and so on, which should be read with the upmost care.

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