

## Multiple Spectacular Identities or about variations of artistic forms on the same subject

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**Abstract:** In the creation of humanity, there are several subjects that have proven universal, crossing the ages. They have been individually approached by most of the arts, notably by the performing arts, thus acquiring multiple identity forms of expression. Due to the notoriety born from the fascination they have exercised over generations, some subjects have even come to be represented in all the performing formulas of art. In Romanian creation, the subjects of numerous popular or cult literary texts, lyrical or epic, became sources for the creators of the performing arts. At the same time, some of the dramatic texts crossed beyond the stage of the classical theatre. The plays of the most performed local playwright, Ion Luca Caragiale stand out here. In the relationship between classical and lyrical theatre, the most representative illustration is „O noapte furtunoasă”<sup>1</sup> Caragiale's play was turned into an opera by Paul Constantinescu, the composer thereby marking a triple national premiere: the first opera buffa, the birth of recitative in Romanian opera and the first male role en travesti for a female voice.

**Keywords:** identity, theatre, opera, I.L. Caragiale, Paul Constantinescu

From its beginnings and all through to contemporary modernity, humanity has been preoccupied with the great themes that define its anxieties and its need for knowledge and manifestation: the making of the world and the belief in supernatural forces that govern it, the meaning of one's own existence and their place in the Universe, coexistence in harmony with nature and fellow humans, feelings, and, beyond the sciences, public rhetoric and education, the richest way of approaching and expressing them was and still is through the arts. Among the arts, the performing arts exert the widest impact on the masses. This impact comes not only from the fact that they are more accessible, but also from the fact that they are actional, not object-oriented and therefore subject to ephemerality just like life itself.

Within these themes, enhanced by the very infinite diversity of human nature, an immeasurable multitude of subjects was thus born, as just as many particular

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<sup>1</sup> TN: *A Stormy Night*

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exemplifications of the inner turmoil of the being. In this way, it may seem somewhat paradoxical how, however, some subjects have not only endured over time, but have been resumed as such, even finding a multiple expression, through various artistic forms. Of course, the explanation lies in the attraction and impact that, regardless of the era, they generated on people.

It would be a Sisyphean endeavour to attempt an exhaustive inventory of all the subjects that have multiplied their identities in multiple genres and art forms. Therefore, perhaps it is enough to exemplify solely with the love story between Romeo and Juliet. Since the play of William Shakespeare (the author whose writings have transmigrated the most through the forms of performing arts), the tragedy of the two lovers has materialized in operatic transpositions (for example, "Romeo and Juliet" by Charles Gounod or "Capulet and Montague" by Vincenzo Bellini), ballet ("Romeo and Juliet" by Sergei Prokofiev) and, of course, film (the most famous and faithful adaptation being that of Franco Zeffirelli, made in 1968).

### **Reproductions of dramaturgical texts in the autochthonous lyrical art**

In Romania, among the creations intended for the performing arts, in addition to the original ones as a subject, a large part of them found their source of inspiration in the subjects of literary writings of both the lyrical and the epic genre. The fundamental myths of the Romanian people, especially the ballads "Miorița" and the ballad of master builder Manole, folkloric writings, but also those that evoke historical moments and personalities, are particularly valued. The intention was a programmatic one, meant to promote and support the national identity and the defining features of the Romanian people and their existential space, as well as their vision on faith and the human condition.

Moreover, beyond the film adaptations made notorious by the cinematographic art, numerous plays by several Romanian playwrights have crossed beyond the stage of the classical theatre and turned into performances specific to the lyrical theatre. The early beginnings can be found in the form of musical adaptations of plays by Vasile Alecsandri in Alexandru Flechtenmacher's vaudevilles, between 1845-1865, or George Stephănescu's enchanting "Sânziana and Pepelea", in 1880.

Coincidence or not, the birth of the Romanian opera of universal value took place in 1928, with the popular drama "Năpasta" musically transposed by composer Sabin Drăgoi, to his own libretto, adapting the homonymous play written by the most important Romanian playwright: Ion Luca Caragiale. In fact, apart from George Enescu's "Oedipus", inspired by universal dramaturgy<sup>2</sup>, most notable titles in the Romanian opera repertoire are invariably adaptations of Caragiale's plays: "O noapte furtunoasă" (1935) by Paul Constantinescu, "Conu Leonida față cu Reacțiunea"

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<sup>2</sup> Lyrical tragedy in 4 acts with a libretto in French by Edmond Fleg, based on Sophocles' tragedies "Oedipus Rex" and "Oedipus at Colonus".

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(1976) by Matei Socor (followed, in 1991, by "Revoluția" by Adrian Iorgulescu), "D'ale carnavalului" (1978) by Emil Lerescu and "O scrisoare pierdută" (2012) by Dan Dediu.

Other Romanian opera compositions whose librettos are based on plays from the national or universal dramaturgy are those of Pascal Bentoiu ("Amorul doctor"<sup>3</sup> - 1964, based on Moliere's homonymous play, "Jertfirea Ifigeniei"<sup>4</sup> - 1968, based on Euripides and "Hamlet" - 1969, based on William Shakespeare's play), Nicolae Brânzeu ("Săptămâna luminată" - 1943, based on Mihail Săulescu's homonymous play, and "Cruciada copiilor" - 1961, based on Lucian Blaga's play) or Emil Lerescu ("Steaua fără nume", based on Mihail Sebastian's homonymous play).

### **Brief immersion in Caragiale's world of worlds**

The predilection for embracing and replicating, recreating on other artistic dimensions Caragiale's literary universe is quite understandable. There are not many things left to say about the Caragialian world, because it has been talked about enormously and, moreover, we feel it to a monstrous extent. We know it not only because we have studied it or watched it, we know it because, in its timeless universality, we live it contingently.

What makes Caragiale's work so fascinating is the fact that his entire writing, from moments and sketches to dramaturgical texts, is a fabric of archetypal characters multiplied in various poses that depict all the human existential forces with a blinding realism. The author's aesthetic consists of that of a lucid observer who, on the scene of a continuous present, reveals the morals of a world beyond its illusory complexion. It is the stance of an author who detaches himself, at a sufficient distance, to contemplate the human universe, thus capturing the differences between the makings of appearances and the makings of essence, between the claimed posture and the de facto imposture, that is, between the displayed mask and the true visage.

The Caragialian world is one that, alike to the genius, longs for the absolute, but which, lacking the necessary qualities, is condemned to a mere immortal comic status highlighted by the author in the light of an ironic realism, many times even cynical. Because, although necessary, only the immeasurable "ambition"<sup>5</sup> of the individual to overcome their ontological condition, determined by an insurmountable contingent, is not, however, sufficient. It is an urban world that wants to pass as honourable, with civilized manners, if not smart, at least astute, meritocratic and, thus, entitled to public affirmation and recognition, to a higher status. But this is what makes it carnivalesque and therefore comical because everything is nothing more than vain ambition and its impotence with proverbial features has no way to finally avoid

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<sup>3</sup> TN: *The Love Doctor*

<sup>4</sup> TN: *Iphigenia at Aulis*

<sup>5</sup> TN: „ambițiu” in Caragiale's original works.

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becoming ridicule. In this way, Caragiale's writing is open to an endless string of connotations that allow for as many levels of reading and comprehension.

For Caragiale, under the pressure of their own needs and aspirations, the characters almost unanimously manifest themselves as beings under permanent existential turmoil. They are disorientated at their inner core and noisy on the outside because they thus lack the quotidian balance and the saving alternative, ending up resembling each other in a jumble of situations that makes them all become of the same kidney. Their vocabulary asserts itself only as a semantic vacuum, a logorrheic chatter that makes them string together words without saying anything, to exist without being. Basically, „*the Caragialian character is a trickster, an individual who wants to fool the world, embarking on lucrative ambitions, achievable not within a normal society, but through parasocial, anarchic and versatile, divergent and opportunistic relationships*”<sup>6</sup>.

Comedy is thus inevitable and the being becomes an actor in the role of a jester or trickster.

The Caragialian world is populated by a kind of homo politicus, a character dominated to the point of obsession by a settled and well-structured society, but whose rhetoric is by no means crystallized, without any eminently coherent doctrine and is truly devoid of proper civic spirit. It is also the reason why, in the Caragialian language, the term "politics" eventually ends up wearing a meaning that deviates from its principles, rather a compromising one, identified by guile, by cunning craft, that evades everything that is logical and, consequently, mandatory.

Among his dramatic creations, „O scrisoare pierdută”<sup>7</sup> and „O noapte furtunoasă” they have the same foundational pillars (traditional values, politics, love, upstartism) which are, however, in a relationship of opposition, upturned.

In the first one, the stage presents us with the elite, the upper class of the provincial political and civil society living with ambitions of independence as puppets manipulated "on a string", from the "centre". In a setting that emphatically expresses its belonging to fundamental values, the political is the main writhing factor, but the spring that triggers it is an adulterous romance. Beyond their aristocratic air of important faces, those who claim to belong to the upper echelons of society and additionally pose as role models of society, behave rudely, thus managing only to raise laughs.

In the second one, the narrative moves this time to the periphery of the "centre", in Bucharest's slums, that is to say in the Drunken Citizen's<sup>8</sup> "backyard", and the spirits that dominate it, with the same declared emphasis on relying on family and

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<sup>6</sup> Vasile Fanache, *Caragiale*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (revised), Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> TN: *A Lost Letter*

<sup>8</sup> TN: „*Cetățeanul turmentat*" in *Caragiale's original works*.

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civic values, are no less "intoxicated"<sup>9</sup>, only that, this time, the action is centred on the love affair, and the political aspect is only an aspirational hook to upstartism, to overcoming the petty existential condition.

However, from the beginning, the small universe is not only boorish, because there is a definite intention of refinement: the most notable man of his community, Master Dumitrache Titircă (also called "Bad-Heart"), lumber merchant and captain of the civic guard, cultivates himself night after night by reading in the embroiled writings of his political buddy, Nae Ipingescu, the deputy commissioner. By doing this, although he does not understand much of the affairs of political discourse, Dumitrache dreams of acquiring a greater public role, being concerned, like others and alongside them, to jump on a higher rung of the ladder of social respectability. In the same register, even Dumitrache's sister-in-law, the coquette Mistress Zița, the sister of Dumitrache's consort, Veta, feels that she can create a future advantage in gaining the family and social status of a great lady by associating with young Rică Venturiano, an archivist at a district court, law student and publicist precisely at "*Vocea Patriotului Național*"<sup>10</sup>, who is expected to play a "*dipotat*"<sup>11</sup> role and with whom she falls in love at the expense of her husband, Ghiță Târcădău, whom she is getting rid of. The state that depicts both characters is that of pretentiousness, because Master Dumitrache violently dissociates himself from all "*coate goale, mațe fripte*"<sup>12</sup>, and Zita no longer wants to have anything to do with the boors.

In this dramatic equation, the world of "O noapte furtunoasă" is described as one of theatre within the theatre, and the cavalcade of entanglements that underlies the plot and the unfolding of the action up to the denouement seems to find its origin in "*comediile alea nemțești de le joacă Ionescu*"<sup>13</sup> at "*Iunion*".

For Dumitrache, they are a fad that fills him with blindness and rage because they create the context that undermines the purity of his marital home, having no idea that it has long been compromised by the passionate love affair woven between his consort Veta and literally his most reliable man, his clerk Chiriac, subordinate sergeant in the civic guard. On the other hand, for Zița, the performances at "*Iunion*" are not an opportunity for elevation, but merely a pretext to see and know the world, to socialize, to be noticed because it is the place where her existence intersected with Rică, suspected by Dumitrache of being one of those "*coate goale, mațe fripte*" who endangers his honour as a family man.

In this way, the public comedies from "*Iunion*" prove to be contagious and arouse in Dumitrache, the lumber merchant's house, a storm of passions that emerge

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<sup>9</sup> TN: „ambetat” in Caragiale’s original works.

<sup>10</sup> TN: *The National Patriot’s Voice*

<sup>11</sup> TN: *Deputy*

<sup>12</sup> TN: *The literal translation is “barren-elbows, fried-guts”, signifying a very poor, cheap person.*

<sup>13</sup> TN: *Those German comedies played by Ionescu*

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from love in its various expressions and which, in turn, become comedies along which all the characters act their own plays against each other under the guise of good intentions and honourable aspirations, a theatre at times artificial and even grotesque. „*The forms of <<mad love>> compete in Caragiale's world with those stabilized at the calm conventions of the classicized <<triangle>>. Couples are amorous concubines, tentatively mating and unsettlingly suspecting each other of infidelity; they argue and reconcile, <<deceive>> and forgive each other, threaten and recombine under a sky freed from all constraints*”<sup>14</sup>.

The title of the piece describes a Caragialian constant: the night, as a temporal setting that disturbs all reason and brings about the darkness of the mind. By excellence, the night is a time of silence, of calmness and repose, of worldly uniformity when its diurnal boundaries fade into nothingness, of immersion into intimacy, introspection and even reverie. For Caragiale, these attributes take on completely different connotations than the natural ones. It is the artifice that allows him to investigate the human mire, by which the writer convinces us that his characters are the same during the day as we see them unleashed at night. They are restless, which justifies their existential fatigue, the fact that they cannot find peace and their incoherence, their wandering from normality. That's why "O noapte furtunoasă" is in fact a an insane night, one of erotically enhanced madness that makes most of the characters seem out of their minds.

It's an inverted world, as if by a fateful predestination, as if all the astral forces contribute to the confusion, to the disarray: the house plate with the number 9 at Master Dumitrache's home turns upside down and becomes a 6, attracting Rică to the timber merchant's house in search of Zița. It is an error ready to end in horror. It is the signal by which everything that should be precise and rigorous becomes random, aleatory, exactly the opposite of everything that is predictable, able to usher in a constellation of clashes that unleashes the comic effects. By choosing the alternation 9-6 instead of 6-9, the writer avoids both the sexual connotation and the yin and yang symbolism of 69. Instead, 96 is disharmony, a disjointed world where everyone sits back-to-back, each with their own annoyances, misfortunes, sufferings, and ambitions.

An unwritten law that Caragiale follows in the destiny of his characters is that love does not preserve though itself, but is a permanent battlefield for itself and for the others. Master Dumitrache wants his married life to be unsullied, which is why the death threats against any potential intruder, the eventual murder arisen out of jealousy is justified, devoid of any brandishing, natural even for Țarcădău, who promises to deprive Zița of her happiness („*Dar să știu de bine că merg cu el de gât*

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<sup>14</sup> Idem, p. 133

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*până la Dumnezeu, tot n-ai dumneata parte de așa ceva*"<sup>15</sup>).

The confusion that Rică Venturiano is „*un prăpădit de angajat fără para chioară în pungă care se ține după nevestele negustorilor, să le spargă casele*"<sup>16</sup> births Master Dumitrache's delusion that his family "ambition" is in grave danger. And his delusion is contagious because it also infects Chiriac, his wife's lover, who manifests the same madness to the despair of Veta, who feigns illness. Once this colossal drama is unleashed like a storm that threatens to destroy everything in its path, painting the terrifying prospect of an apocalypse of the senses and reason, it ceases only when, becoming clear that it is meaningless by the grace of Nae Ipingescu recognizing Rică, it turns out to have been just a storm in a teacup.

If Veta and Chiriac indulge and find satisfaction in their petty, absconding love, on the other hand, Zița, who no longer wants to be the constant victim of Țarcădău's gregariousness, longs, somewhat understandably, to emancipate herself, to become a lady of society, to escape from the slums at the arm of a capable man. In this manner, her destiny intersects with that of Rică Venturiano, the aristocrat in thought and manners, who ventures to meet her, on the reverse road to the slums, to fulfil his political ideal of government by the people through the example of satisfying his love instincts alongside a girl of the people.

In Caragiale's view, Zița is the embodiment of the woman whose sole ideal is absolute love, seen as a romantic epic full of gallantry. As an educated man, Rică masters the protocols.

For him, the madness of love manifests in melancholy, in the expression of an unconsolated loneliness and a hope Zița shares his feelings: „*Angel radios! De când te-am văzut întâiași dată pentru prima oară, mi-am pierdut uzul rațiunii*"<sup>17</sup>, ending his love letters with an erudite polyglot expression: „*Al tău pentru eternitate și per toujours*"<sup>18</sup>.

But the road to amorous fulfilment is arduous. He departs from glances thrown indefinitely on the "Iunion" terrace, passing through dangerous pursuits on the streets leading to the home of his beloved, jubilant in letters and declamations that find the wrong address and culminate with Rică's descent into Dumitrache's house, kneeling at Veta's feet, thinking that he had found the nest of his beloved. Rică's confusion causes Dumitrache's and Chiriac's as well, gives Veta the frights, and ends in hysterical laughter.

A victim with an air of innocent wallflower, "bashful" as her own husband seems to know her, but only disguised as chaste, faithful, and even a little dim, the

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<sup>15</sup> TN: *But even if I must drag him by his neck up to God Almighty, you will never have no part of such a thing*

<sup>16</sup> TN: *a penniless employee who goes after merchants' wives, to break up their homes*

<sup>17</sup> TN: *Radiant angel! Ever since I first saw you for the first time, I've lost the use of reason*

<sup>18</sup> TN: *Yours for eternity and per toujours*

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shy Veta proves to be the most capable and present of mind, measuring with her words the degree of madness of each of the other characters, finally managing, in the vindictive cavalcade, to reconcile everyone: „*Ce e, ce e! Oameni în toată firea și nu înțelegeți ce e! Umblați ca nebunii! Iaca ce e! Tânărul umblă după Zița, s-a amoretat de ea la <<lunion>>, știi, din seara când s-a luat după noi, și-a trimis unul la altul bilete de amor și-n loc să meargă la ea acasă, a greșit și a venit aici*”.<sup>19</sup>

In his turn, a victim of a comic madness, „*Dumitrache concludes his role on a joyful and authoritative note. Now he is mad with joy; a comical joy too, of course, as his rage during the night had been. For the relative tranquility acquired by the fierce merchant looms as an irony of illusion. The character re-enters the seductive delusion that Veta is a <<bashful>> woman and not <<one of those>>, that the diligent Chiriac is his devotee and not a charlatan, who could pull his strings and that, finally, his suspicions about Rică were but a regrettable moment of <<blindness>>, resulting in a fortuitous relationship of kinship. Under the favourable turn of events, the character has no choice but to recant his anger, resuming his status as a respected husband and master, which he fabricated for himself, and which those around him hypocritically maintain. He is an arrogant chump. Dumitrache, the real one, ignores himself, recognizing himself exclusively in what he imagines himself to be. With such a mask he fixes himself at the level of a perpetual irony, the assumed posture of an honourable man being contradicted by the real image of the cuckolded imbecile*”<sup>20</sup>.

If things find their way back to balance in love, the imbalance perpetually remains in the political plane. Because while entering the scene with a programmatic speech printed in the newspaper, in which he proposes an action mechanism of social salvation with messianic reverberations, Rică is nothing more than the expression of a bluff, of a pathetic fiasco of total nonsense. He enriches the tradition of Caragialian characters for snoring quotations and stereotypical ideas, devoid of meaning, which are just a carnival of words and through which their intellectually minor condition is exposed, with the expression „*vox populi, vox Dei*” mangling the Latin phrase „*vox populi, vox dei*” („*the voice of the people is the voice of God*”). For the quote has a double function: on the one hand, it depicts a character incapable of having their own thinking and ideational identity, and on the other hand, it reveals a primary need for legitimization, for anchoring in an erudite universe that would give them substance and which always ends in a phantasmagorical rigmarole.

Those who allow themselves to be "intoxicated" by this semantic delirium are simply fooled. Hearing the words of Rică Venturiano, Master Dumitrache believes

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<sup>19</sup> TN: *What is this, what is this! Full-grown man and still you do not understand what this is! Going around like madmen! Let me tell you what this is! The young man is pursuing Zița, he fell in love with her at <<lunion>>, you know, ever since the evening when he followed us, they sent each other love notes and instead of going to her house, he made a mistake and came here*

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 137.

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himself to be faced with a holy miracle that immediately turns his jealous rage into an equally insane admiration. We are witnessing a homogenization of registers, the language of young Venturiano becoming identified with the merchant's, in the words of another Caragialian character, Conu Leonida, „*toți într-o egalitate*”<sup>21</sup>, proving that, from a political point of view, they are all nothing more than surrogates.

„*The enthusiasm that concludes [...] <<O noapte furtunoasă>> [...] it is provided by the subtext of the perspective towards the world of power. Through Rică, Master Dumitrache brings into his home the political <<future>> which, a few moments before, due to a misunderstanding, he was about to <<assassinate >>*”<sup>22</sup>. Although triumphant in appearance, the Caragialian world always ends in failure because it only perpetuates the same state.

Something seems to have changed, that some progress has been made, but in reality, everything is running in place. After the desemanticization of all meaning, the only certainty remains the eternal confusion sublimely expressed by Master Dumitrache: „*Una vorbim și bașca ne înțelegem*”<sup>23</sup>.

### **Paul Constantinescu, the portrait of a composer fascinated by Caragiale**

Born in 1909, in Ploiești and therefore a fellow-citizen of Ion Luca Caragiale, the composer Paul Constantinescu began to study music in his hometown and, unlike his predecessors who studied abroad, completed his studies from 1929 to 1933, at the Bucharest Conservatory, where he was taught by renowned professors of the local music scene, including Mihail Jora, Constantin Brăiloiu and Dimitrie Cuclin. subsequently, until 1935, he refined his composing abilities in Vienna.

Later on, Paul Constantinescu became a teacher, but also a violinist and conductor, and made in-depth studies in the field of folklore, which he constantly sought to organically integrate into his musical scores. He composed in all genres of classical music, from symphonic to vocal music, vocal-symphonic and choral music, from piano music to ballet, opera and even film music.

Among his most representative creations are the Byzantine-style oratorios "Patimile și Învierea Domnului", respectively "Nașterea Domnului", the vocal-symphonic poem "Riga Crypto și Iapona Enigel" based on the poem written by Ion Barbu, the choral poem "Miorița", the "Romanian Suite" and "Simfonia ploieșteană", as well as the choreographic poem "Nuntă în Carpați" and the opera in three acts "Pană Lesnea Rusalim" based on the libretto of playwright Victor Eftimiu.

His true culmination would, however, be occasioned by his encounter with Caragiale's literature, whose writings he took with him to read so that he could feel at home during his stay in Vienna. This is how the masterpiece of his compositional

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<sup>21</sup> TN: *all in equality*

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, pag. 42.

<sup>23</sup> TN: *We discussed one thing and recognized another.*

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creation, the opera "O noapte furtunoasă", was born, but also the soundtrack of the 1945 film adaptation of Caragiale's play, directed by Jean Georgescu, followed by the 1954 film adaptation of "O scrisoare pierdută", directed by Sică Alexandrescu and Victor Iliu, which were also completed by the music for the film "Moara cu noroc" directed by Victor Iliu based on the homonymous novel by Ioan Slavici.

In interviews he gave over time, Paul Constantinescu always acknowledged that, after reading the works in depth during his time in Vienna, Caragiale's creations exerted a special fascination on him, stemming not only from their common origin, but also from a kind of ideational compatibility.

### **Paul Constantinescu's musical storm**

Paul Constantinescu started working on "O noapte furtunoasă" while he was in Vienna and completed it after returning to the country, in 1935, the year when, on October 25, it had its absolute premiere on the stage of the Romanian National Opera in Bucharest, asserting itself as the first opera buffa in the national compositional landscape, one that, over time, is unanimously acknowledged and appreciated as a masterpiece of the genre.

Between the libretto and the score of the opera and Caragiale's play there is an indestructible link stemming from the spiritual connection between the two authors. Perhaps, some are wondering why it was necessary for "O noapte furtunoasă" to also be transposed into a musical opera. The answer can only be that, through the inspiration and mastery of Paul Constantinescu, the subject is not impoverished, does not become superfluous, but is loaded with new, original images and representations determined by the mixture between text, singing and music. The score brings a new breath, specific for the ambiance in Caragiale's play, the music admirably succeeds to portray the human traits and relationships between the characters that Caragiale depicts in his play. Thus, the orchestra itself becomes a kind of a central figure that highlights all the other characters and the situations they go through. A person who knows the subject, who has seen the play performed, at the time when they encounter Paul Constantinescu's opera, will have the revelation of a stage world that is all the more lively and full of carnivalesque, while, for someone who first comes into contact with the opera, it could be possible that later, in the absence of the musical overflow of the orchestra, the theatrical performance itself will seem a bit duller, as if lacking a certain something.

If we were to force an analogy that may seem sacrilegious to the more culturally modest, the work of Paul Constantinescu is a cult universe similar to one in the style of *manele*<sup>24</sup>, governed by the same topos: love, betrayal, enemies, upstartism, and the music of the same oriental influences combined with folk motifs from the

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<sup>24</sup> TN: *Manele* (from Romanian, fem. sg. *manea*; pl. *manele*, the plural form being more common) is a genre of pop folk music from Romania

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urban outskirts.

From all of Caragiale's writings, he focused on "O noapte furtunoasă" because he felt it to be the most deliciously melodic, with an inner rhythm that made the score be born without too much trouble, favouring the perspective of an original opera in its way and of a bold score. In the libretto, the text was redone, compressed, including by changing the lines, the word order and turning some of them into stanzas, but on the same structural frame of the play. In order to transpose the plot proposed by the playwright into music in a ridiculed form, Paul Constantinescu does not discount the comic ingredient, preserving and even increasing, in some places, its dynamism and intensity, which is why, most of the time, the arias are very concise so that the action itself does not suffer too long interruptions. In addition, the great credit of the composer is to have integrated into the score the atmosphere of the period music, in a brilliant mix of folk, oriental and salon elements.

In this context, Paul Constantinescu innovates, becoming the founder of the **comic recitative in Romanian opera**, extremely faithful to the language of Caragiale, in the moments when the sung melody is subordinated in favour of the natural pronunciation of the words. The lexicon also directs the melodic to which it attributes suburban inflections and, overall, the action is dominant, but sprinkled with lyrical elements, so that the tragicomic states are sometimes strewn with the scent of romanza, in vibrant rhythms that make the violent passions short and fail every time in delightful comedy. Furthermore, the orchestration impresses with its virtuosity, with a seductive picturesqueness and the extraordinary ability to maintain the story with highly impactful dynamic alternations, of an overflowing humour.

After the 1935 premiere, performances of the show continued, being revived notably in the 1942 and 1943 seasons. Later, in 1950, Paul Constantinescu felt the need to revise his composition, so a new premiere took place, this time on May 19, 1951. But those were already completely different times and completely different ideological commandments. This is why the Plenary of the Composers' Union of 1951 remained infamous, an event during which, following the model of the proletarian criticism instituted by the Soviet regime, "O noapte furtunoasă" was artistically demolished, being criticized for the lack of positive characters and of melody, the lyrical moments being suffocated by a recitative considered excessive, so that subsequently the opera buffa as a genre itself was condemned. After this "execution", the opera was removed from the repertoire of lyric theatres, and Paul Constantinescu even ended up being defamed.

The ridiculous injustice, even more treacherous than the one occurred in Caragiale's world, was to be proven and remedied in 1960, when the Romanian National Opera of Bucharest, on tour in Moscow, included in the presented program, alongside George Enescu's "Oedip" and Gheorghe Dumitrescu's "Răscoala", a performance of "O noapte furtunoasă", which was an enormous success both with the

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public and the press. It was the international debut that paved the way for Paul Constantinescu's work to be appreciated on other stages of the world.

### **Stylistic features of the musical composition**

As the performance of performances, opera is a "genre of syncretic art, in which vocal, instrumental, orchestral music, movement, gesture, mimic, dance, decoration and other elements specific to stage performance merge into a unitary whole, for the purpose of developing and revealing a subject and, implicitly, a dramatic action"<sup>25</sup>.

Concurrently, „*opera buffa is inspired by reality, drawing its subjects from everyday life. The heroes are figures of the people, and the satirical and comical elements lash at the morals of the society. The stage dynamics of the actions are much more accentuated than in opera seria, and the preponderance of popular intonations and rhythms (sometimes also as songs) make this kind of performance very popular with the audience. Opera buffa also allows the presentation of certain lyrical elements and emphasizes the achievement of conclusive, realistic endings*”<sup>26</sup>.

Stylistically, Paul Constantinescu's music for "O noapte furtunoasă" takes on an expressionist hue under the influence of Igor Stravinsky's muted "barbaro" style and Modest Petrovici Mussorgsky's vocal-instrumental style. The opera is the first one, after George Enescu's "Oedip", able to measure up to European exigencies, designed against the background of a caricatured, parodic comedy that gives it, at the same time, a neoclassical allure that seeks to deepen the perspective of critical realism from the Caragialian work. Programmatically, the composition is antagonistic to post-romantic or impressionist aesthetics and, above all, to the conventionalism of autochthonous music. Staying true to the authentic Caragialian spirit in the libretto, the score masterfully incorporates alternating elements from urban and fiddler's folklore, interwoven with motifs from oriental music, brass band music, pop, and religious music, including intentionally dissonant timbre overlays. Although, in support of the urban folklore specifics, several modal-chromatic elements are identified, nevertheless, overall, the harmony lies in the sillage of the tonal principles, being adorned with modulations and coloured by various chromaticisms with specific Balkan-oriental sounds.

The harmony and the orchestration are not characteristic of the symphonic pattern, but rather subordinate to the dramatic principle. The orchestral sound is thus a mixed one, played by means of wooden instruments, of string instruments, by using techniques such as pizzicato and flageolet, supported along by the piano, the triangle, the muted trumpet and even the accordion.

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<sup>25</sup> Dumitru Bughici, *Dicționar de forme și genuri muzicale*, Muzicală Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, p. 216

<sup>26</sup> Idem, p. 220.

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The score has three parts described by the allegro at the beginning and the end, respectively by *lento* in the middle. The leading theme that runs through the entire opera the "*Iunion*" theme, which was taken from the collection "*Spitalul amorului*"<sup>27</sup> by Anton Pann, in the spirit of the era in which the action is set, dominated by neo-Greek culture and in which the melismatic style was impregnated by Eastern influences.

Beyond the overall stridency that dominates the world of Caragiale, the musical depiction of the characters is carried out by Paul Constantinescu both as a group and individually, but, in the orchestral score, each one is assigned their own motive, a personal imprint specific to its characterological portrait, which operates for the audience as an identification signal, using sometimes the *arioso* or the duet, sometimes the sung recitative or the musical declamation. For example, Chiriac's entry is announced by a trumpet signal, we recognize Veta by waltz chords and chansonettes, and Zița is announced by romanzas, which are, however, distorted by the composer both harmonically and timbrally. Master Dumitrache's folksy spirit is not stripped of the slum-like air, and his leitmotifs are the well-known ones of honour as a family man and of the infamous "*Iunion*" whose music imbued with the vulgar sentimentality of the slums is rendered through a melodic line rich in trills, syncopated rhythms, *appoggiatura*, and orchestral glissandos faithfully depicting the absurdity of the characters injected with ridiculous energy.

And most of the time, during their dialogues, the characters express themselves in alert rhythms, similar to those specific to folk dances, using this technique to illustrate their verbal flow.

Thus, as Ana Buga aptly and sharply points out, „*the opera <<O noapte furtunoasă>> marks a moment of grace for the Romanian creation of the genre. It is the first musical comedy of universal amplitude composed in a modern spirit, specific to the 20th century, having artistic virtues through comic and scenic effects never before seen in our national creation*”<sup>28</sup>.

### **The inspired compositional frolic of travesti**

In the landscape of Romanian creation, Paul Constantinescu's "*O noapte furtunoasă*" also brought about **another national premiere: the first male role destined to be performed en travesti by a female voice**, which remained singular for three decades, until, in 1964, Cornel Trăilescu assigned to a soprano voice the role of the speaking tomcat in the fairy-tale opera in 3 acts, for children, "*Motanul*

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<sup>27</sup> TN: *Love Hospital*

<sup>28</sup> Buga, Ana: *Opere literare... opere muzicale*, in *Târgoviștea literară Magazine*, <http://tgvliterara.blogspot.com/2013/08/opere-literare-opere-muzicale-ana-buga.html>, 2013

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încălțat"<sup>29</sup>, composed to a libretto by Tudor Mușatescu and Nina Stoiceva, which adapted the homonymous fairy tale by Charles Perrault.

Previously, the only roles en travesti were those of female roles performed by male actors: Matei Millo in the role of the witch "Baba Hârca" (the first Romanian operetta, composed, in 1848, by Alexandru Flechtenmacher to a text by Matei Millo himself) or the role of Chirița from the vaudevilles of the same Alexandru Flechtenmacher, who musically adapted Vasile Alecsandri's plays, "Chirița în Iași sau două fete ș-o neneacă" and "„Chirița în provincie", the role of Chirița Bârzoii en travesti being continued by actors such as Miluță Gheorghiu, Petru Ciubotaru or Teodor Corban.

From all accounts, in the performing arts (theatre, vaudeville, operetta, opera) on a universal level, there has been a long tradition of roles performed en travesti, who perform a spectacular identity transmigration. And it's not just about the centuries in which female characters were played by men because access to the stage was prohibited for women. Gradually, especially in the lyrical theatre, male roles designed to be performed en travesti began to be composed, especially for voices with a graver tonality that could suggest as realistically as possible the male timbre of some characters, usually of young age. Among the most famous male roles en travesti in lyrical theatre, Cherubino from "The Marriage of Figaro" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Orpheus from "Orpheus and Eurydice" by Christoph Willibald Gluck, Nicklausse from "The Tales of Hoffmann" by Jacques Offenbach, Orlofski from "The Bat" by Johann Strauss, Hansel from "Hansel and Gretel" by Engelbert Humperdinck, Romeo from "Capulet and Montague" by Vincenzo Bellini, Adriano from "Rienzi" by Richard Wagner or Oscar from "Masked Ball", respectively Tebaldo from "Don Carlo", both by Giuseppe Verdi can be selectively exemplified.

For the purpose of inspiring as much credibility as possible, but also under the imperative of the morals of the times, the en travesti performance of male roles also imposed, on stage, a kind of relatively strict code of conduct regarding body language. In addition to costuming and make-up effects to mask female curves, the performance especially required a certain rigidity: a reduced gesticulation of the arms, the avoidance of wider movements of the hips, a certain straining of the gluteal muscles combined with an outstretched position of the legs mainly in static scenes and, above all, making possible hugs with female characters in a chaste way, with hands under the armpits, and not over the shoulders, around the neck.

Thus, among the characters created by Caragiale in "O noapte funtunoasa", there is also Spiridon, a poor teenager working as a good-for-all servant in the house of Master Dumitrache (voice of a 14-16-year-old boy). Endowed with a native intelligence that allows him to trick and make him willing to perform any tasks for a profit, his only vice is a liking for tobacco that aspirationally gives him a dose of

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<sup>29</sup> TN: *Puss in Boots*

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maturity. He endures all the harassment to which he is subjected by Master Titircă Inima-Rea, which makes him express his revolt in moments of solitude. At the same time, as the courier for the exchange of love messages between Zița and Rică, he enhances the plot during the course of the action, leading it to its climax.

In Paul Constantinescu's opera, the role is assigned to a mezzo-soprano, as an artifice of vocal compatibility with that specific to a young teenager. Spiridon appears in the beginning of the third scene, and the leitmotif of his lamentation is musically supported by the sound amalgam of clarinet and bassoon, respectively between viola and cello. His dialogue with Master Dumitrache is admirably built on a contrasting tempo alternation, with a scattered tempo for Spiridon, with a melodic thrill of folkloric substance, and the master's angry tone in an accelerated tempo.

The most poignant, however, is Spiridon's little aria in the fifth scene, transposed into rhyming stanzas, in which he expresses his social condition and feelings towards the master and, by placing them in antithesis to him, other characters such as dame Veta and Chiriac. The moment interweaves sung passages with spoken intonations, which are briskly articulated, from the area of ordinary speech, in a staccato monorhythm that suggests his status as a rebellious teenager. The music has suburban, authentically Romanian sounds that give dimension to the setting of the action in the Bucharest slums, including resonances of Serbian fiddles, the delightful feeling being created especially by the differentiated vocal emission in which Spiridon imitates the speech of Master Dumitrache.

### **A current interrogative plea for posterity**

Caragiale's plays continue to enjoy constant national and international theatrical productions, in classical or more boldly contemporary versions, similarly to the main creations inspired by the great themes and subjects of the world, regardless of whether we refer to the dramatic arts, lyrical arts or dance, perpetuating their multiple spectacular identities.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the opera creations of Romanian composers inspired by Nenea Iancu's dramaturgy, regardless of whether we refer to Paul Constantinescu, Sabin Drăgoi, Emil Lerescu, Matei Socor or Adrian Iorgulescu and, in extenso, to all the Romanian opera composers mentioned, performed sporadically, as if it would be some kind of impiety for them to figure in the repertoires of the country's operatic institutions, especially those entitled NATIONAL.

However, Paul Constantinescu's "O noapte furtunoasă" has crossed the decades and established itself as an absolutely reference creation of the national genre. However, as the musicologist Smaranda Oțeanu-Bunea also noted, „<<O noapte furtunoasă>> has been played from time to time since October 25, 1935. Skillful performances, the masters who created anthological roles... Without exception, Veta, Zița, Rică, Ipingescu, Chiriac, Spiridon, Master Dumitrache - from Paul

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*Constantinescu's score - have conquered, when they were given the opportunity, both performers and spectators. Whence the great surprise, how is it possible that such a gem does not necessarily always remain on the billboard of the first lyrical scene?"<sup>30</sup>.*

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<sup>30</sup> Oțeanu-Bunea, Smaranda: *Când se va schimba destinul „NOPTII FURTUNOASE”?*, în *Cronica muzicală online*, august 2007, <http://www.cimec.ro/Muzica/Cronici/SOteanuBunea53.htm>