

The theatre as an Expression of the Man - Camil Petrescu

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***Abstract:** Affirming himself in the interwar period and continuing his prosperous career as a playwright, and after the end of the Second World War, Camil Petrescu is a prominent figure on the stage of the Romanian theater. His dramatic contribution is significant, especially if his theatrical and theatrical criticism is also taken into account, being responsible for imposing a new barrier in the Romanian theater, which in his time has successfully become the theater of introspection, lucidity, man simply marked by existential problems.*

***Key-words:** Camil Petrescu; theatre; drama of ideas; lucidity and decline.*

1. The theater of Camil Petrescu

Throughout his career, Camil Petrescu has divided himself in so many theater directions that we can consider him a perfect theater man. Distinguishing himself as a dramatic author, director, chronicler, theorist, he can easily be considered the first serious theatrologist of Romanian literature. About the opera, man, personality were written countless studies over time, Camil Petrescu being approached from countless perspectives, being raised to the heights of the ovations and often even blamed for his intentions in literature. Not at all ignored in the Romanian literary landscape, Camil Petrescu remained paradoxical. As for the theater, at the opposite pole to Caragiale, but also to Blaga, as we shall see, Camil Petrescu presented himself seriously, with a serious theater, even though it would often cause smiles. Conceited, complexed by a world without love, feeling can be fueled by his orphan condition, Camil Petrescu will create the theater of the desperate, idealist man in his bitterness. His views on theater, illustrated in articles and theoretical works, are based on his critical sense acquired after a careful outline of a strong view of theater and what it means. Camil Petrescu creates his own system in this sense, a combination of his ideas of art and temperament. Thus, the system is divided into three categories: creation, living, thinking. In this respect, Camil Petrescu imposes in the interwar Romanian theater a drastic change of vision in dramatic criticism, which, in his opinion, must be based on truth and righteousness. According to Petrescu, "Current Prejudices in Dramatic Criticism" alters the perception of reality, while elements lacking superficial content "have the right to indulgence precisely because they are superficial." In Camil Petrescu's view, the interwar theatrical critique is only the result of public opinion, which cannot be disturbed by a contradictory opinion regarding his favorite piece. Through his critical articles and studies, Camil Petrescu aimed to direct the Romanian theater towards a new direction, thus laying the foundations for the theater that describes the drama of ideas.

1.1 Drama of ideas in Camil Petrescu's opera

The birth of the idea of dramatic ideas occurred with Henrik Ibsen, who attached to the theater a special violence targeting "high ethical ideals, also grounding a sui-generis dramatic technique". Raising to another level of dramatic art, Ibsen faced times that valued a play based on the complexity of the story, and managed to get out of this vicious circle by

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building dramatic situations, and not ending a "final catastrophe with a denouement role." Camil Petrescu managed to bring this ibexian breath to Romanian dramaturgy, naturally upholding himself by routine. The perception of confrontation of ideas remains with the heroes and not with the author. Radically portraying his aesthetic conception, Camil Petrescu finds himself an optimist who considers the "triumph of the organized idea" of great aesthetic value and believes that the theater "is not and can not be anything but a casualty" lived "before the senses of a spectator." Focusing in this direction throughout his career, Camil Petrescu never gets out of the context and manages to offer dramaturgy heroes with soul disillusionments, beginning with Gelu Ruscanu and ending with the grandiose Danton. In Camil Petrescu's view, theater is a mechanism that acts on the man and his entourage, with characters presenting bipolar tendencies, subjected to movements that lead to obsession. Typical incarnations intertwine with long processes of consciousness that break the inner balance of the being in question. Focusing especially on intellectual issues, Camil Petrescu creates a universe of avid characters of absolute, small, but with enormous dreams, which end up being destroyed by the unscrupulous world. In a cruel realism, his plays talk about problems, lived with patos of characters, who are driven by these issues throughout their evolution.

1.1.1 Approaching the Ancient Theatre

To some extent, Camil Petrescu approaches finely with the ancient theater, played with masks, and through the metaphor of the mask we can deduce that Petrescu is building many characters. Inviting his audience to a competent reading, Petrescu uses the mask to play otherwise in front of the unknown. According to Tudor Vianu, "if this mask transfiguration is a necessity determined by the relationships of people in society, there was a time when it was imposed by their relations with the powers of the unknown. The mask then played a role that modern societies can not even make us suspect. Sympathetic magic, the place of which is so important among the institutions of primitive society, required many circumstances, the assumption of a mask and the simulation of an action that the primitive wanted to see happening in reality." Thus, in Camil Petrescu's view, the theater signifies a magical atmosphere that goes towards an isolation that is approaching the sacred, with references to the exits of the theatrical temple. At the same time, his work is found in an Oedipus myth, with characters wanting to overcome their inferiority caused by suffering seeking a superior concept to dominate their existence.

Starting from somewhere in the subconscious, this search leads to knowing destiny and self-knowledge. In this respect, Petrescu will see his theater as an illustration of a dissolution of a personality in conflict with another personality. More precisely, characters are no longer simple characters. They become processes of consciousness, as the characters can not be capable of such revelations. His theater will not focus on ordinary, moral conflicts, and will be directed to the paradox, for "how much consciousness so passion, so much drama." Camilpetrescian Theater takes the form of a theater of problems rather than of events, of situations, not of characters. Camil Petrescu not only turns the way of building the action, but also the structure of the character, trying to create a harmony between circumstances and ideas.

Through all these blends, which are homogenized at the perception of the reader and spectator, we can see that Petrescu has built an inclined theater for reading. Unlike Caragiale, which has great value for interpretation, gesture coloring, subjectivity, Camil Petrescu is in a totally different area. Sharpened by frequent and detailed didascals, his plays are prose on the move, and the dramatic text can be read as a non-theater without any problem. His extensive descriptive descriptions create a decor that seeks to convince the public of the inadequate

hero's intentions. Most of them have a psychological and analytical nature, and their sphere can recall an extensive process of consciousness intended for Gelu Ruscanu in the *Games of the Wicked Fairies*. Here, "Gelu first does not know what to believe. It would seem that the size of a horizon would have been overturned. He gets up and makes some dizzy steps. Hands do not know what to do, they comfort each other, they cramp each other. He stands up, takes a panoply of foliage, a thoughtful bend, strikes with it, focused."

1.2. Lucidity and Decline in the Theater of Camil Petrescu

Camil Petrescu understood that in dramaturgy, perfection is impossible. The work cannot be perfect, but it can be authentic, and the role of the writer is to cultivate this aspect using precision, fairness, clarity. Structuring his ideas about theater in the aesthetic way of theater, and among these ideas also shows that Blaga is condemned to transform the dramatic conflict into psychoanalysis. Absolute does not represent exteriority, but simply interiority and so, because only in this way the drama can be original. His characters respect this principle and are inadequate in their attempt to change the world. "Contemplating the time in the transcendental quest, Camil Petrescu... admire the traces of the absolute, meet everywhere the seduction of the feverish experiences. (...) Her heroes always commit the same mistake, arising from the desperate attempt to give the existence a complete unity." (Mândra. 1971, 203).

In *The Games of the Wicked Fairies*, "the drama of absolute concerns individual existence as a consciousness in confrontation with the collective existence of collective consciousness." The play is, after *Perpessicius*, a dialogue defined by nervousness, which is nuanced to the final results, having a superiority to Romanian literature and characters that emanate from the mood of spirit. Surprised as a confrontation of ideas in the relationship between relative and absolute, the piece apparently appears to be a simple system of debates and divisions. The synthesis of a dramaturgical series, *The Games of the Wicked Fairies* also differs by its stage design. For Camil Petrescu, the play was the occasion of the mixture of an excess of argumentation, characteristic of him, with an insistence that leads to a fascinated consistency, leaving no problems unresolved. In the play, a relationship between ideas and deeds is established in a wide variety of forms, from the suicide of the pianist to the family, and to the sequence of alteration of consciousness, the appearance of the dead aunt, or the predictions of the mad Cyriac. On the surface, Gelu Ruscanu is the one who wants to be right, threatening to publish a letter that would endanger the political future of Minister Saru-Sinesti, but this ideological conflict extends to the level of consciousness, leading Gelu Ruscanu to a soul emptiness with death.

Camil Petrescu's characters depend on sacrifices, often seeking to forge a blame that is virtually not theirs. In *The Strong Souls*, these sacrifices are the path to absolute, under the sign of a simple social fact. *The Venetian Act* refers to love, like all the plays and novels of Camil Petrescu, but the scenes of love go beyond the boundaries of necessity, sentimentality, and fall more in the area of morality. The beloved being becomes the rotten world the ideal, the authentic, and the disappointment caused by it is the one that generates the destruction of the hero's universe. Camil Petrescu's heroes are not afraid that they might be deceived, but that there is a possibility of being deceived about the person next to them and that only a trace of weakness is needed to destroy the ideal image. *Venetian Act* is not a drama of love, but rather a drama fit to honor a man who believes that "the mind has to dictate what is to be loved. True joys of love are joy of the mind." Not taking into account the words of her husband, Pietro Gralla, Alta is left loot to a mad, unconscious love that ultimately destroys Pietro Gralla's last shadow of light in Venice. In *Danton*, he has an "ensemble of virtues and vices intertwined in characters who break the serial patterns." (Ionescu. 1968, 116).

The hero is radical, he supports social action, being a spiritualist philosopher. From this point of view, we cannot see *Danton* as a historical drama, and it is heading more to a reconstruction of a drama that surprises historical material rich dramatically through its own existence. In the creation of the *Danton* hero, Camil Petrescu used the gestaltist method, subsuming the parts to a whole. Ovirom Ghidirmic confesses in this sense that "Danton is the illegitimate child of Camil Petrescu, born of an irresistible thirst for life. (...) In relation to Robespierre, Danton represents the triumph of life on the idea."

Thus, we can consider Camil Petrescu's characters as an ensemble of "fanatical nonconformists of ideas, broken by the drama of non-fulfillment in absolute terms of reason." Camil Petrescu's heroes become the living expression of not simple ideas but of absolute ideas, part of a theater of meanings, ideas, ideals. In this respect, Petrescu argues that "it is not hard to recognize a piece from the Idea Theater school: he is usually a hero of a ranked intellectual who has a general theory of life. He keeps showing, demonstrating with a few fantasies that are in dialogue, the fairness of his idea. There will be some actions and details of symbolic character. The hero will be a lineman of the road when he symbolizes the one who opens new roads, he will be a church painter when he has to symbolize religious magic, and he will be an aviator when he embodies an idealist who wants to make people fly."

His characters are forces that cannot be influenced, and the intelligentsia in Camil Petrescu's work is understood in a narrow sense, the characters approach chimerically absolutely and end up falling in the attempt to use wings of wax to reach the sun. Consciousness generates drama, and dramatic intensity is given by the knowledge horizon of each character. Not even in comedies, Camil Petrescu does not get away from this character ideal, and Mitică Popescu, even if it resembles much with Caragiale's universe, does not lose its essence, hides soul activity, being a profound depth of surprise, unlike his characters Caragiale, and he is a "whole and true man, always a virtually good man, in spite of his efforts to appear different than he is," which makes the play preserve its philosophical context. He manages to get out of the context of unfortunate dramas and to reach his ideal, and cannot be called a defeated in this sense.

1.3. Concepts about Direction and Actor

Approaching the actor through his theatrical system, Camil Petrescu proves to be a good connoisseur of tradition, a man who has successfully used all the ways of expressing theatrical art from the past to his present, by producing original concepts about theater, referring to his time, the mirror of his age in the field of theater. At the same time, the reformer, Camil Petrescu, also showed originality, relying on the attention given to the text, the actor, but also to the public. In his writings, Camil Petrescu has been able to present veritable typologies that generate the necessary creativity on the stage, typologies that have left as much freedom as finding authenticity in speech, gesture, reaction. Considering the stage authority necessary in the theater, Petrescu bet on representation, on the direction of the interior.

Through *Strong Souls*, Camil Petrescu sought to impose what he called the "theater of knowledge", a theater designed to put a barrier on the verbal games used by his contemporaries, but which were essentially ridiculous in relation to the post-war times. People return home after the death struggle to see truths on the scene, a sense that sometimes tortured them greatly. This theater wanted to be the theater of great questions with difficult answers. Sometimes a theater that invites to sincere searches, to the truth. Camil Petrescu easily observes the difference between the reality of the soul and the verbal reality between a truth and a revealed truth. His theater could not just keep up with the technique. The dramatic experience and the science of the theater technique were opposite.

Camil Petrescu's theater was away from the need for a careful, thorough investigation of all our means of thinking, organizing expression and even feeling. Drama was part of consciousness when it revealed the truth. Inner life gained an unknown role in these contexts. In this way, the dramatic technique is thus brought into line with drama, with the theater of knowledge, and the scenic representation would adapt to this type of theater through the inner direction. Opposing the current direction, Camil Petrescu created this kind of direction to make the text easier to understand and to illustrate the content in its fullness.

1.4. Camil Petrescu in the Post-war Period

After World War II, Camil Petrescu could be told that he had already become a devoted playwright. With *The Strong Souls*, *The Game of the Wicked Fairies*, *Mitica Popescu*, *Mioara*, *The Venetian Act* and *Danton* already published, it was imposed on the public consciousness, despite its radicalism, which has been the subject of many polemics over the years. However, after the Communists came to power, it would seem that Camil Petrescu's attitude changes easily, and the intellectual who once said that "I have seen ideas!" and who created characters unable to adapt to the outside reality, adapts himself easily with the demands of the communist regime and agrees to write propaganda literature. The intellectual spirit of the past has only rarely practiced it, forgetting its belief, leaving itself with socialist realism. Thus, in his post-war theater plays, Bălcescu, or Caragiale in his time, was dominating brutal, incomprehensible satire at the address of the bourgeois landlords.

However, there can be no clear delineation between Camil Petrescu's plays after the Second World War and the later ones, because the writer had already convinced the audience that he was not the author to publish in chronological order, without taking into account the entire universe earlier created. Thus, for the novel *Ivory Tower*, Petrescu again appeals to the characters Șerban Saru-Sinești, Maria Sinești, Gelu Ruscanu, whom the audience has previously met in *The Games of the Wicked Fairies*. Still, the issue of *Danton's* play is also found in the novel *A Man Among Men*, this time being approached from a realist-socialist perspective. Not forgetting the origins of his creation, Camil Petrescu blends his writings and creates a circle of evolution.

Regarding Camil Petrescu's theater, he has always written about imposing a series of theoretizations accompanied by critical comments requiring a certain way of reading. Although we cannot fit into the avant-garde current, Camil Petrescu managed to change through his interventions the concept of literature, the concept of theater. He destroyed to rebuild the foundations, without departing from tradition. *Not novelty is important in the theater of Camil Petrescu, but the degree of lucidity that it offers.*

Reusing some of the experiences of his predecessors, the writer is looking to make his point of view, putting a great deal of value on neat writing. Camil Petrescu, refusing everything that came from others, sought to reform the literature, wishing to fully control the act of creation and the relationship established between the author and the reader, respectively the spectator. Only in this sense can we consider Camil Petrescu a total theater writer. Not being an expansionist but rather autarchic, his theatrical manifestations can decipher a secret intention to be responsible for producing everything in terms of literature, not to depend on anyone, not even in philosophy. However, if the writings written during communism are read separately from the earlier ones, the independence of the spirit disappears, and the intellectual capacities are used for other purposes than literary.

His work becomes at a moment even aberrant, losing in nothingness even before it reaches a finality, and the reader chooses only with a sense of frustration. In spite of these appreciations, Bălcescu's play enjoyed unanimous appreciation (due to its proximity to the Communist leadership, probably), even though the tendentious character is visible here, due

to the number of pages and intrigue schematized. Bălcescu looks different from Camil Petrescu's other heroes, perhaps through his ethics, fighting for a just world destined for the people. Balcescu represents the sacrifice that was not marked by immediate satisfactions, in favor of which the results would come late.

In a specific way, Bălcescu resembles Danton, ardently believing that things have their way, but only if it is shown to them. Finally, in *Caragiale in His Day*, Camil Petrescu fails to write by referring to the expectations of his superiors and manages to illustrate immense historical misconceptions, portraying Titu Maiorescu as a despicable politician, for example. We cannot say with certainty to what extent Camil Petrescu was affected by the period of communism, but one can notice an obvious change of his literary voice. Whether or not the need to act in accordance with the wishes of officials has greatly diminished its overly acclaimed abilities, whether it is the desire to put in front of the public an undiscovered self.

There is much to be said about the differences between camilprestic thinking before communism and the spirit flattered by the coming of power of the new party. With the remarks, Camil Petrescu's work cannot be disputed, just as his contributions to the Romanian theater cannot be omitted. Noting the many proposed and dramatic changes in drama writing and its representation on stage, Camil Petrescu proved to be a good creator of the universes, a good reader of consciousness, a great psychologist of the times. His work, even if still blamed today, is different from the Romanian literature of his age through lucidity, conscious spirit, spirit.

Camil Petrescu's merit is that he was the first Romanian dramatic author who wanted to look at a philosophical angle, with expansion, theatrical art. Asking himself about the essence of the theater, Camil Petrescu was left with the answer that did not allow him to define exactly this concept, but he could give it a form, in the manner of: "A theatrical production is an organized exhibition, the subject of which is incidentally reproduced in front of a particular crowd gathered." His contribution does not stop here, but, as I mentioned in the ideas already presented.

Camil Petrescu succeeded in distinguishing two historical tendencies in dramatic representation: "From the probable origin of the theater, as far as it is known, two ways of being historical are perpetuated. One is the representation of a text, the other is the free theatrical exercise of the actor man, as long as the physical and intellectual means allow him, first of all the emphasis on intellectual growth, his substantive attention was directed to the beauties of the text actor recites". In this regard, the theatrical performance cannot be dramatic, and the dramatic can only be linked to human destiny. In this respect, Camil Petrescu clearly delimits the act and the action, rejecting the opinion that "a drama is authentic if it has a lot and life-action. The theater is an act. The action is something else. The act is in the translated consciousness, the automatic action. " (Aristotel. 2001, 67)

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