

## **The pioneers of the Romanian dramatic texts**

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**Abstract:** *It is important to mention since the very beginning that the dramatic text is in fact a form of written dialogue meant to illustrate an action. Within the written works, one must make the difference between the theatrical and dramatic language. If the theatrical language (typical with theatre performance) is the result of a build-up of sub-systems - decor, music, dance, lights - which create communication at a level of representation by merging together, the dramatic language can function as a literary text. The central axis in a theatrical performance is represented, from the very beginning to this day, by the dramatic text: "Without a dramatic text there is no theatrical performance; there can be created a performance without lights, sounds, music, decor, movements etc., but the nature of this performance would not be dramatic anymore, but choreographic." (Haja, 1998, 89 )*

**Key-words:** *dramatic text; writing; dramatic form; dialogue.*

In order to analyze the beginnings of the Romanian drama, we must understand first the antagonistic characteristics that formed the basis of the emergence of national dramatic text. The first Romanian text of theatrical nature appeared relatively late if we take into account the European space that has already formed a rich repertoire in what we may call today dramatic writing. It is important to mention that the first attempts of texts in dialogue, as well as the process of developing the notable works referred to the contemporary era. Even though in the beginning the texts were rather sporadic, of no remarkable value, they managed to create an important pillar of support for the future drama that allows us today to speak about a vast repertoire of Romanian dramatic texts. Without an original drama, the translation and arrangement of the foreign texts have established the criteria and principles the first playwrights based on:

There is imposed the general determination that the beginnings of the original drama do not represent a homogenous creation. Opposite tendencies describe differently our dramatic production in its origins: on the one hand, plays well-intentioned that did not offer a social critic, plays that enter in the general movement of affirmation of national values (Facca, Bălăcescu, Millo etc.), on the other hand, plays the content of which detaches from the local realities (Winterhalder, Glădescu) or creates space for hostile attitudes towards the elements of progress (*Voiajul din Podul Mogoșoaie*): (\*\*Istoria teatrului în România, 1965, 247).

The comic-satirical and heroic genres were the first forms of Romanian dramatic writing, approaching subjects adapted to the era. The first dramatic texts were simultaneously oscillating from cosmopolitan influences to influences regarding particular historical periods. Predominantly, comedy meant to mock socio-political events, but also the human typologies. We can assert that this was the basis on which the original drama developed, but also the literature prior to revolution.

The first dramatic text discovered and certified as written work in Romanian, recorded around the year 1780 is *Occisio Gregorii in Moldavia Vodae tragedice expressa*. It is important to research properly the historical and socio-political framework that allowed the appearance of this dramatic text, especially as it was written outside the Romanian

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Principalities, being dated as written in the Austro-Hungarian Transylvania. The place where it was written is not known precisely, various assumptions being made regarding the matter (Wien, Blaj, and Oradea are the cities that have disputed the ownership of this text). Moreover, there are various opinions regarding the identity of the author as well (Mihăilă, 2013, 233-234), and there is information concerning the name of Bishop Samuil Vulcan and writer Ioan Budai Deleanu as being the authors, but also the assumption of a collective author. There must be mentioned that the structure of this play has started numerous controversies among the theorists. Starting with the name of the play, one can notice an inconsistency within its content: „Translated with maximum philological accuracy, the title could only mean *The murder of Grigore, the leader of Moldavia, tragically illustrated*, the word „tragically” being not responsible for sending the reader to tragedy as a dramatic genre, but rather to the tragic component of the subject itself” (Mihăilă, 2013, 235).

Announced as being a literary work with tragic content (*tragedice expressa*), the text takes in its structure *burlesque* elements, being essentially a representation meant for popular entertainment, „(...)crudely comical at times, as the more or less unwritten rules of the carnival were asking for.” (Mihăilă, 2013, 234). It is well known that the play was written on the occasion of a carnival (named in the popular language Fărșang, a term derived from the German *Fasching*). Thus, a group of Romanian students intended to present a theatrical performance in Blaj, Transylvania, the only city where young Romanian students were accepted. The text was presented as a burlesque farce with strong grotesque hints that were mostly connected to the popular theatre.

Many times it was assumed that the source of inspiration as a dramatic form would be the sketches of scripts that were the basis of *commedia dell' arte* performances, but here we had a fixed text structure that did not leave too much freedom for improvisations. The play had a dramatic composition limited to three acts preceded by a prologue (Ghițulescu, 2008, 23) (*Praeambulum*) written in verse. It was the only moment related to the idea of tragedy where the tragic fate of the ruler Grigore Ghica was presented. The narrative of the writing is situated in the beginning (first act) at the Royal Court from Iași where, following the plots of the landlords who were opposing the political orientation of the leader, he is sent to be judged by the Ottomans. The second act, the act of treason, places the action in Istanbul only to return to Iași for the third and last act.

It is notable how the story sustained at first by the prologue, loses its tragic accents while the action is carried out. The play strays from the tragic segment also stated in its name and becomes a sequence of comic scenes followed by dramatic moments, and between these scenes there are often inserted dancing interludes, with acrobatic moments. Their purpose is not related to the subject of the drama and the only possible reasoning would be that they were meant to entertain the audience. „(...) the text may be described as a continuous mixture of dramatic scenes with comic moments and genuine folkloric interludes. (...) Even though we lack concrete evidence regarding its stage representation, the play was obviously created with the idea of a popular performance in mind.” (Mihăilă, 2013, 238).

The language is diverse, as we can see a dialogue structured on many languages: Hungarian, Gypsy, German, and Latin (Ghițulescu, 2008, 23-24). There is not a consequent approach in writing, meaning that the scenes in verse randomly alternate with those in prose, without using a coherent algorithm. The stage directions put in brackets are all written in Latin, while the Romanian used in text has powerful influences from Ardeal. It is remarkable in this matter that it is for the first time when in a written work can be found authentic elements of folkloric language, a characteristic believed to belong to the later vaudeville, *Sărbătoarea câmpenească*, written by Ion Heliade Rădulescu. The characters are treated with superficiality from a compositional perspective, without having strong personal traits. Their

role is only figurative. Their purpose in the inconsequent sequence of scenes is to boost the comic moments that often become trivial.

There is no way to determine exactly which dramatic genre this first attempt of dramatic writing in the Romanian space belongs to. Publishing the history and literary theory magazine, Ileana Mihăilă, the author of „*Occisio Gregorii Vodae...*” *Between manuscript and literary processing*, suggests that the source of inspiration for the dramatic text has its origins in the old street theatrical performances from Italy that came along with the carnivals from the cities, named *Mascherata* (<https://dizionario-online.net/mascherato.html>), a term that was taken in Romanian as *Mascaradă*.

Therefore, she discovers several similarities between *Mascherata* and the Transylvanian text. Following the Italian texts from Renaissance, the Romanian play was conceived on the same occasion, celebration with a *carnavalesque* thematic. The theatrical representation presumed that there were masks, flashy costumes, meant to shock the audience. Between scenes there are choreographic moments, of pantomime, dances, all of these executed in a burlesque manner. Furthermore, the text necessarily has in its structure love scenes, performed in a funny manner, a trait that can be also identified in the Romanian text (Mihăilă, 2013, 236).

This form of theatrical representation has reached Transylvania through the influence of the Croatian culture, loyal to the Italian Renaissance influences. More specific, we must mention the fact that Dubrovnik, region that nowadays belongs to Croatia, was at that time under Austro-Hungarian domination, a fact that has determined the Italian trend of dramatic writing to spread and eventually reach Ardeal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even though this play is not a valuable dramatic literary work as an artistic writing, it is important as historical document that certifies a possible beginning of the dramatic writing on the Romanian territory.

The first official Romanian dramatic texts with known authors were recorded in Moldavia, after 1800. We can distinguish the theatrical pamphlets: *Amoriul* and *Giudecata fimeilor*, both of them written in 1806. The author of these literary works is the landlord Costache Conachi, that distinguishes himself also by writing another work named *Comedia banului Constandin Cantace-l zic Căbujan și cavaler Cucoșu* (Ghițulescu, 2008, 24) where he has as co-authors Neculai Dimachi and Dimitrachi Beldiman. Regarding this work, we can state that it is not a representative dramatic text. This writing is only a pamphlet masqueraded as comedy on the basis of a shallow script that uses as technique the caricaturing of the four characters (*obraze* in the Moldavian language of the first decade of 18<sup>th</sup> century). The undated text consists of two acts named *faceri*, and the two acts are divided into four scenes named *perdele*.

The story written in verse on six pages illustrates an episode (Ghițulescu, 2008, 24) in the life of Cavalerul Cucoș whose traits are similar to Molière's *The Miser*, and starts a minor conflict without any finality. It is noteworthy the fact that „without being theatre, this comedy was performed” (B.A.R.P.R, 149,157), without a dramatic value, it is written in naive verse, in a Moldavian dialect relative to the typical way of expressing things in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nicolae Dimachi's name is also related to another dramatic text, important for the pioneering period of the Romanian dramatic writing. Found in the archives of a landlord's house from Bârlad by Șerban Cioculescu (who nominates N.Dimachi as the author), the play *Sfatul familii* is a morality play that has a more complex structure, consisting of five acts (*seri*). Each act is divided in panels named *sfaturi*. It can be noticed that this time, the action captures a dramatic tension as the story goes on. It is a play with a powerful moral message. This text was never performed because of the characters that clearly had a real correspondence.

This period of time, corresponding the romantic era in Europe, has reverberated as a cultural influence in the Romanian space late, and this is the reason why these naive attempts

of the Romanian landlords are appreciated, because they were educated, ([http://adevarul.ro/cultura/istorie/serial-boieri-mari-episodul-6-alecubeldiman-omul-ne-a-adus-adevarul-1\\_58a822785ab6550cb8954dbb/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/cultura/istorie/serial-boieri-mari-episodul-6-alecubeldiman-omul-ne-a-adus-adevarul-1_58a822785ab6550cb8954dbb/index.html)) and desired to ignite the need of Romanian dramatic texts that did not exist up until then.

The next literary work that deserves to be mentioned is *Serdarul din Orhei*, a satirical writing discovered by V. Alexsandri and not recovered in its entirety. It is believed that it was written around 1811 and the play is structured in acts named *arătări*, while the scenes kept the same name as the ones found in the text from 1788, *Occisio Gregorii in Moldavia Vodae tragedice express*, namely *perdele*. The text was keeping the typical atmosphere of its time, with dialogues in verse and some expressions in Greek as well. Moreover, this fragment shows exclamatory excerpts of the author that take the place of the *aparté*. The subject of the play, whose protagonist is the merchant Vasilachi, wants to be a critic addressed to the corrupted phanariot system that was encouraging the wish for getting out of ruck. Thus, it creates a suggestive panel of the Romanian society in those times. As an observation, we can mention that, if in *Istoria teatrului în România*, written by the Romanian Academy, there is no author for this play, the critic Mircea Ghițulescu has researched the preromantic era of Romanian drama and states: „In the same romantic area of lost and found manuscripts we can find *Serdarul din Orhei*, attributed to Alecu Beldiman and discovered by Vasile Alecsandri, in the back of a drawer” (Ghițulescu, 2008, 24).

The year 1821 records another literary work of dramatic character that was meant to be published in 1872 in the periodical *Columna lui Traian* by Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu. The text initially discovered by the poet C.D. Aricescu had the name of *Comodia ce s-au lepădat la Visterie care s-a urmat între cei jos arătați având nădejdi, unii de la Hangerliu a veni domn și alții de la Mihai Vodă Șuțu frică fiindu-le de Calimah*. Built as a farce, it was partially censored by Hașdeu, because of its brutality in language. Its structure consisted of three distinct acts named *fapte* and nine panels named *perdele*. The narrative of action illustrated an historical moment regarding the murder of ruler Alexandru Șuțu. It was a virulent pamphlet whose stage performance was not well-known because of its message more or less disturbing in terms of language. Hașdeu appreciates it nevertheless as being a value of dramatic writing, superior to other contemporary texts. One can ascertain that this literary work, written in prose, is not so important in terms of dramatic action, but in terms of rigorous structure of characters' attitudes.

*Comodia vremi*, written in verse by Clucerul Costache Facca, is a comic text edited in 1833. We can observe a change in the manner in which the play's parts were named. Thus, instead of *arătări* or *fapte*, there is added the notion of *staging act*, while the idea of *perdea* disappears as well, being replaced by *cort*. Facca's style is very similar to Anton Pann's *Povestea vorbei*, whose work strongly influenced him. We can notice how during this comedy with a rather elusive intrigue, written in a simple and relaxed manner, we can find characters inspired by Moliere's works. Hence, the servant Stan and maid Măriuca attempt to imitate the servants from *Scapin the Schemer*. Within this play, we can notice the powerful influence of French drama, an influence that reached us late: „**Elenca**: Listen to me, ma chere Luxandra, I would like to walk on a bridge,/Then go with the chariot to madame Marșand/ I want a new hat, made of velvet,/Because it suits me well with my sable cloth.” (\*\*\*) Primii noștri dramaturgi, 1960, 489-490). We can notice how the author uses a comic language obtained by deliberately using wrong expressions and French words, written almost phonetically. Moreover, this type of writing has a comic nature as simple reading as well.

This trend of imitation can be found again four years later in Ion Heliade Rădulescu's pastoral *Sărbătoarea câmpenească*. We can notice how this literary work without a laudable artistic value, was through its message a way in which the rule of Alexandru Ghica was praised: „What a wonderful day for me and my country. Rejoice! (*turning around to see the*

*peasants*): Children, long may he live!/ **The peasants**: Long may he live!” (Ghițulescu, 2008, 26). This dramatic text is important as an historical document because the annotations of this writing show the political reasoning (Ghițulescu, 2008, 26) masked through action and characters that sustain the approached subject.

Regarding the French influences we can also include the passing creations of well-known names in the intellectuals' circle of the 19th century. We can remind here Mihail Kogălniceanu, politician and future prime minister of Romania, who in his youth showed interest towards dramatic writing by creating the play *Două femei împotriva unui bărbat*. By referring to the comic frame of the dramatic texts meant for entertainment in France, Kogălniceanu writes a comedy in one act. Regarding this dramatic text, the only one written by the politician, Mircea Ghițulescu states: „For a 23 years old young man, the text was certainly promising. It was too little though for us to determine if Romania has lost through Kogălniceanu a great playwright or has won a prime minister.” (Ghițulescu, 2008, 27).

One of the really successful plays, *O bună educațiune*, was written by Costache Bălăcescu in 1845. By respecting the same French influences -the trend of French-Bălăcescu, inspired by Moliere, writes a play in three acts, with strong satirical accents, which highlighted the vices of the bourgeois era of those times. The author resorts to the introduction of some French expressions in the dialogue of his characters, that intentionally, in order to mock the strong desire of rich people to imitate the inclinations of those times. *Apertes* are being used in order to transmit as bluntly as possible the message of disapproval of the author regarding the whims of the characters: „**Briganovici**: You should send your girl to school! She should learn how to act like a noble and turn your house upside down according to the French patterns.” Bălăcescu creates comic also from the relation assumed by the dialogue of generations between the desire for modernity and conservatism. The technique of dialogues proves to be superior to that used by Costache Facca. In this text, the characters have clearer attitudes and they are also described by the sequence of dialogues. Compared to the previous comic writings that meant to narrate some facts from the past, Bălăcescu's dialogue illustrates a relation between actions that take place in present. In this manner, the succession of scenes is more dynamic and maintains the comic of situation, language and character. It is also important to mention that the author, in order to satisfy audience's taste, who wanted easy solutions for the conflicts encountered, had the inspiration to offer his play a happy ending.

On the same note, with an attempt of dramatic writing, we can find Costache Negruzzi. He writes in 1849 *Doi țărani și cinci cârlani*, a satirical comedy that has a main theme of debate jealousy. He is also known for a single act play, named *Muza de la Burdujăn*, written two years later, in 1851. Thus, we can notice an evolution in his approach towards dramatic writing. The character of this play heavily influenced by Alecsandri's style, achieved complex dimensions and we discover a technique of unwitting humor by adding in the dialogue Greek, Italian, and German expressions:

**Stănică** (reading): „Now, I'm a merchant, and even though I am sluziaris I am also bacalis. I have heard that you are rather witty, tricky and rich and since I like you cabazlichia, che ta grosachia, I have taken my horses and I am coming to tell you that if you wish to be my woman, I will take you with me to Galați and put in your lap all the roe you can find, and olives, all the marinated fish and licomi and all the boxes with halva and turkish delight licumia, because I am to bacalico tu dulu sas. Sluzearis Lacherdopulos” (\*\*\*) Primii noștri dramaturgi, 1960, 489).

The comic of language is obtained by reading this letter which presents frequent grammar mistakes while in the Romanian text there were added Greek words. Another technique used by the author is represented by the comic of name. In our case, through the

name of Lacherdopulos, the author highlights his naivety and stupidity. The Greek ending is added to the male noun “lache” which designs a stupid and incapable person.

The Romanian dramatic language has an immutable nature, which means that it has the valences of a literary work that can become the ulterior motive of a stage representation. The beginnings of the Romanian dramatic texts were strongly related to the beginnings of the universal dramatic texts, these pioneers being some of the originators of the dramatic texts in the Romanian drama.

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\*\*\* *Primii noștri dramaturgi*, 1960. București: Ed. de Stat: Pentru literatură și artă, pp. 489-490.