

The Hospital of Love - Movement and Utterance in Marionette Study

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Abstract: *The marionette or string puppet was for years mistakenly considered a mere imitation of big stage characters or a means of offering educational support to the little ones taking part in such shows. Lately it has proved that, despite its similarity to human movements, it is also valuable in terms of specific language that is both metaphorical and symbolic as well as in harmonious movements and articulated gestures adapted to the physical appearance and the embodied character's inner traits. This statement was best sustained by our choice of Anton Pann's *The Hospital of Love* which not only stirs imagination but is also a good example for students' handling and speech techniques. The rich universe of both *The Hospital of Love* and *Worldly Songs* gives the various marionettes with clearly cut facial features and well defined characters, such as the young lady with visible dark circles under her eyes, the young housemaid, the old drunkard etc., the opportunity to perform in a small setting in which the focus falls on the variety of costume colors.*

Key-words: *string-puppets; marionettes study; movement and speech techniques; Worldly Songs; Singer of Longing*

1. Introduction

On his real name Antonie Pantaleon (Pandaleon, Pantoleon, Pană) Petroveanu (1797-1854), Anton Pann owes his fame on the one hand to the contribution made in the history of literature, on the other hand to Romanian music: "[...] for writers, he is a writer, folklorist and printer, and for musicians, he appears as a theorist, composer, and pedagogue of Psaltic Chant, but especially as the first collector of "popular" music at a time when the meaning of the term was uncertain and limited"³. We notice that, although his Psaltic work benefits from fairly consistent studies, the profane musical repertoire of the "worldly songs" is quite little researched.

Representative for the Bucharest people from the first half of the 19th century, Anton Pann's personality seems to be at the intersection of the multiple spheres of interests, social categories, and occupations that clashed in the capital of Wallachia at that time: he is a merchant and at the same time, a craftsman that owns a workshop; he writes *ecclesiastical music*, passing from one church to another, but he is also a blue-hearted singer with a profane repertoire to the point of scandal; he is a writer – he invents subjects and means of expression, but he is also a simple editor of manuscripts. "[...] He seems to be summoned to fulfill the junction, possibly also the osmosis of geopolitical, economic, cultural circuits, which in the first decades of the

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³ Nicolae Gheorghiuță. 2009. „Anton Pann și zvonul oriental al cântecelor din străvechiul București” (“Anton Pann and the Oriental Rumor of Ancient Songs Bucharest”) in *Spitalul amorului sau Cântătorul dorului (The Hospital of Love or the Singer of Longing)*. Bucharest: Compania, p. IX.

century overlapped without interfering"⁴.

2. Objectives

The controversial nature and the various occupations of the minstrel – collector of "worldly songs" (considered a "folk bee" by Nicolae Iorga) were appreciated, but sometimes blamed by prominent personalities of Romanian literature. He ends up being described as "[...] a poet for the grocery boys, a singer of lousy jokes, a literary representative of the slums and counters, of the lecterns, in which the merchant sings to God, glancing at the most tender (delicate) of his creatures, of the hidden taverns, where the fancier faces drink old wine in the back rooms, behind withdrawn curtains"⁵.

Especially for those "delightful songs" – a type of creations that he is attracted to and brings them together under the title *Hospital of Love or Singer of Longing* – he will be severely judged. In the opinion of Conu' Iancu, expressed without hesitation, "It is a sad treasure, especially in the poetic part. In this literary trashes pile, of testimonies of an era of imbecility, there are still lost, rare honest copies, a piece of a true poet, and a few still popular Romanians proper, not Greek or Gypsy. [...] And because the spiritual individual felt good about what dirt/trash he was picking up, he had to find a convenient label for that, the collection is entitled *The Hospital of Love*"⁶. It is also the fate of the much-hated Manele, a musical genre that has its origins, among others, in old Romanian songs called "de Lume" or "de Lăutari", some of them linking (somehow) their name to that of Anton Pann or originating clearly from his famous collection. *Worldly songs*, the other corpus of texts from which we chose excerpts for our work, were also fashionable songs in the nineteenth century, composed by fiddlers by order on the lyrics of popular poets, such as Costache Conachi written specifically for this purpose. At a time when high level and popular culture mingled, worldly songs (non-religious songs), musical creations with oriental sound, were listened both to the delight of the nobles and the lower classes.

The question arises here as to how we dared to associate the most delicate, the most graceful, the most elaborate of dolls with these "repulsive fashions [...] of trivial eroticism, disgusting sentimentalism, and ridiculous gallantry, which dragged and sullied even many people of spirit and true talent"⁷.

Perhaps, first of all, we set out to bring the puppet out of the shadow of certain prejudices. One of them is related to its tragic character, generated by the image of man carried by destiny, love, fear, clinging to threads that can break at any time, which is dragged through life and then abandoned, hanged on a nail by (The great) puppeteer. That this animated figure is associated with melancholy type of people and that the very position of the manipulator, who leans meditatively on the human model he handles it completely different from that of the puppeteer, who triumphantly raises his gaze, art, the way he expresses himself above the whole world. It is also said about the marionette that it always wants to be protected, it has hesitant movements, like a child who is just learning to walk, flight attempts resulted in failure. That raises its eyes filled with hope to the one who animates (manipulates) her, but that it remains

⁴ Paul Cornea, 2009. „Un Anacreon în papuci” ("An Anacreon in Slippers") in *Spitalul amorului sau Cântătorul dorului (The Hospital of Love or the Singer of Longing)*. Bucharest: Compania, p. VIII.

⁵ N. Iorga, 2009. „Icoane vechi: Anton Pann” ("Old Icons: Anton Pann") in the *Spitalul amorului sau Cântătorul dorului (The Hospital of Love or the of Longing)*. Bucharest: Compania, p. V.

⁶ I.L. Caragiale, 2009. „Spitalul amorului. O prefață” ("The Hospital of Love. A preface") in *Spitalul amorului sau Cântătorul dorului (The Hospital of Love or the Singer of Longing)*. Bucharest: Compania, p. IV.

⁷ Ibid.

captive by nature, that its hands always tend to fall to the ground, in a gesture of discouragement.

Trying not necessarily to overturn, but mostly to enrich (modify) these patterns, we tried either to accentuate the contrasting features or to exaggerate others close to paroxysm. We spiced the character of the marionette with optimistic, comic accents, or on the contrary, lamenting and hysterical accents. With the hesitant movements, we also intertwined the speed of reaction and the extreme manifestations, even violent ones, and the decisive gestures.



Fig. 1. *Georgiana Zmău*

As the renegade poet had declared in his collection⁸.

From the point of view of the handling technique, the preconception is related to the fact that as reckless as it is to handle slowly a puppet, it is just as risky to move a marionette quickly. And yet, it is enough to think of that kind of theater that gained fame thanks to the solo evolutions of variety (entertainment) puppeteers, so popular in the nineteenth century, which amused the curious people with parades of puppets on strings, depicting, in parody key, stars of the opera, theater or circus scene. We still find them today in the market squares of the great touristic cities of the world, singing and dancing, imitating personalities (Charlie Chaplin, Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson etc.), exponents of some categories of performers (pianist, guitarist), depicting scenes from the Elizabethan era (like the skeleton coming out of the coffin) or simply

⁸ "Dear Sirs, I consider that it was not without courtesy (politeness) when I titled this edition *The Hospital of Love* for going through it content you will notice nothing but wailing (sorrow) of wounded hearts, sighs of pierced with pain chest, cries (sobbing) of terrible pains, sighs, and all kind of mourning (pain, grief, sorrow, ache, hurt) because of love: just as in a hospital where there are many soldiers beaten and wounded by all kinds of weapons, that show their wounds and tell their pains, asking for help from the doctors". Anton Pann, 2009. *Spitalul amorului sau Cântătorul dorului (The Hospital of Love or the Singer of Longing)*. Bucharest: Compania, p. 14.

doing pranks to the amusement of passers-by. Henryk Jurkowski considered them rather technical demonstrations, comparing the art of these soloists with that of conjurers, who seek the effect through their handling skills⁹.

Another preconception says that, while the puppet highlights the conventional (traditional, regular), the marionette is destined to create the illusion. This is because, even from an artistic point of view, the marionette is a whole representation, while the puppet is a partial, symbolic and metaphorical representation (often time a fragment of a character or a composite image). We considered that the public identifies easier with the marionette, able to reproduce the movements of the human being, whose proportions it closely mimic. But we did not lose sight of the fact that not being able to metamorphose, the marionette fixes its hero in his essentialized physical and mental state. Facing the risk of external imitation of human behavior, aspect in which the marionette is not able to overcome its "clumsiness", "imperfections", we speculated that the poetry of the "actors" on strings lies in the ability to leave behind (abandon) reality, to bring to light the truth of inner feelings, through gestures and movements *similar* to each of us, but full of a *different* meaning. Speaking of this "double of the handler-actor", who is also a "double of the man", Annie Gilles believes that when looked at closely, the "realistic" marionette remains a sham (simulacrum) and, ultimately, a rude replacement. The naturalistic effects betray a technical virtuosity received favorably by the spectator. But, in opposition to the actor, a person playing people, the marionette is unnaturalistic as a sign, insofar as it is inert as an object"¹⁰.

On the other hand, in a classic text for puppet lovers and researchers (and not only), Edward Gordon Craig proposes the "replacement" of the actor with the marionette, precisely because the grace comes from the stylization of the movement, not from the realism that limits the sight and prevents the transfiguration and the spiritual elevation.

Because, in the end, the contrast between its possibilities confirm, once again, the marionette as a mirror of the human being. The contrast technique gives, in this case, subtlety to the staging proposal: the trivial "commented" by tenderness contradicts the identification. In fact, opposite to Caragiale reasoning (who, he himself, has modulated his opinion over time, considering the work of recovering through texts and music of a cultural era, as being important), we believe that the very title *Love Hospital* is a wonderful irony of a spirit endowed with a sharp observation of times and phenomena (whether musical or expressed as such).

Directors like David Esrig, who worked a lot at the Athanor Academy based on biomechanics, consider Craig as an example of what it means to decompose and recompose movement. The marionette is the Meyerholdian actor, whose movements are decomposed (broken down) and recomposed on stage into a new reality, one that is not improvised but rises to the level of other arts, with advanced techniques, such as music, painting. Moreover, David Esrig also differentiates stylization from essentialization, the latter being an advanced stylization, which goes beyond the craft, taking the essential elements from an action, or movement. The apparent fragmentation is, therefore, an asset of the marionette, a touchstone, however, for the artists who approach this marionette. Students who work hard end up giving a vital energy flow to the puppet – as in those 24 frames per second of a movie (or up to forty-eight, in reality), which give the illusion of continuity.

⁹ Henryk Jurkowski, 2000. *Métamorphoses - La marionette au XXe siècle*. Charleville-Mézières: Institut International de la Marionnette, p. 113.

¹⁰ Next to Oana Leahu, 2008. *Poezie la fire lungi (Long-Winded Poetry)*. Târgu-Mureș: Editura Universității de Artă Teatrală, p. 71.



Fig. 2. Sabina Alexandru

In Anton Pann's House in Bucharest, there are some machines that produce moving figurines, devices specific to the era, called zoetrope and praxinoscope, which proves that the animation was considered by the museum curators as having an intimate connection with the schematic-naive character, amusement fair like after all, of the texts, collected or written by Anton Pann, as well as of the characters they describe. Zoetrope is a crank cylinder, metaphorically named by Ioana Pelehatăi in an article from "scene9" "A kind of .gif, in the sense that it creates the illusion of movement" when operated¹¹.

3. Material and Methods – Verse, speech, song. Movement

The great master of "word" – spoken, sung –, "Storyteller of word, Caliph over syllables", as Ion Pillat said, or "You keep riding / Over the great noun", as Nichita Stănescu wrote¹², Anton (Antonache) Pann work is a good opportunity for students to practice their mastery in understanding and concretely interpreting a text in verse, with words from the old language, with a vintage scent, moreover, to embody, through marionettes, some credible characters using this poetic utterance.

The fragmentary character of the puppet's movement is well accompanied by the utterance in verse, the needs of the genre requiring "short, clear lines" (Pepino, 2007), either taking the verse as a line or having a greater unity of meaning, which includes several verses. A gesture or an action can be done both on a verse or a word and on a few verses (lines)- or silently. In the case of the utterance pause, the puppeteer feels the need, from the beginning of

¹¹ Ioana Pelehatăi, 2019. „Spitalul amorului sau acasă la Anton Pann” (“*Love Hospital* or at Anton Pann's Home”), *scene9*, January 24. <https://www.scena9.ro/article/casa-memoriala-anton-pann-bucuresti>

¹² Nichita Stănescu, 1972. “Temenea la Anton Pann”, *scena9* (*scene9*), 28.04.2021. <https://www.scena9.ro/article/casa-memoriala-anton-pann-bucuresti>

his formation, to improvise - either to use interjections or to introduce fragments of text to support the situation. In both cases, the need to use these interventions has to be verified and eliminated if it is a "manner", a way to solve "easier" a non-verbal situation that is not sufficiently clear expressed on stage. It is also necessary to keep the rhythm, which is given, basically, by the rhythmic structure of the text, even if the text is not present throughout the moment. Another difficulty in the case of these improvisations is to keep the voice of the character, both in the interventions with text and in the case of interjections, laughter, crying, or singing.

Walking is essential and the most difficult to master in the art of animating marionettes. Beyond the nuances of the head movement on breathing (inhalation and then exhalation on the vocal emission), the illusion that the puppet speaks is given primarily by the synchronization of the steps with the utterance. Through accents and intensities, the voice counteracts the puppet's slowness, thus contributing subtly, but substantially, to the illusion creation, in fact, of a dynamic that otherwise could not be created.

The poetry from Anton Pann's collections is the basis of the songs and was sung, which is why musical quotes could not be missing from the universe of students' exercises, in the interpretation of the *Trei Parale (Three Coins)* Group (consisting of young people attracted by the old music, specific to the Carpathian space, by the traditional Romanian ones but also by those of other minorities living here – Jews, Gypsies), in popular varieties (Floarea Calotă), as well as from Pink Martini *band's repertoire*. The musical fragments were either sung, uttered, or served as partners in dramatic dialogue, the share of lyrics spoken or sung being given by the specifics of the moment.

4. Results and discussions

Our exercise has as theme individual moments of working with the marionette on a short poetry text. Although there was, during the classwork, the intention to make a unitary script (dramatization) or a collage, our presentation stopped, for didactic reasons, at a series of moments. Each "monologue" was to have a beginning and an end, and then the collective unitary evolution of the dramatic course became secondary.



Fig. 3. Gabriela Suci

The moments allude, therefore, to situations detached or intuited from Anton Pann's songs: the exploited maid who can't even sleep because of the parties thrown by her masters, in the spirit of the time, with "sumptuous meals with 50 cutlery, with selected dishes, fine drinks, and expensive coffees and liqueurs"¹³; the cohabitant who drank too much and "wakes up" with the bottle in his hand, outside, in nature, singing his bitterness "I don't want to complain to people", but also the unshared love: "You are a good match for me"; another one has as its only supporting point along his diagonals and fallings, the suitcase with which he was probably thrown out by some angry or just bored wife, or maybe even by the cheated husband.



Fig. 4. Ștefan Marcu



Fig. 5. Cosmin Rotariu

¹³ Steliu Lambru, 2018. „Cântecele de lume” ("Worldly Songs"). *Radio Romania International*, 30.04.2018. [Radio Romania International - Print \(rii.ro\)](http://RadioRomaniaInternational-Print(rii.ro))

A lady who is played a song under the window appears from behind the curtains: "A sighing heart / Longing, full of fire", but the lover leaves, and she has a theatrical suicide attempt, after which she returns, humming alone the song that was originally addressed to her: *Bordeiaș, bordei, bordei* ('Little cottage, cottage, cottage); a flirtatious woman receives love cards from a suitor, but she feels too beautiful to answer (*Leliță Săftiță*). And so, it goes on. It was hard to "resist", for some sensitive hearts, in the atmosphere loaded with a more veiled (camouflaged/ hidden) or declared eroticism, in any case, supported by musicians who mastered with grace the "chitar`muz`armonicească"¹⁴ and "There's plenty of food and booze!", the addition being absurd, like everything in the world of the beginning of the XIX century, when the modernization of the Principalities of Moldova and Muntenia coexisted with Levantinism: "And I need also another carriage / And a motorcycle"... Vehicles worthy to carry in eternity the one who, in *Song 43*, asked: "Partying in poverty / I want my end to be / Surrounded by wine, and love".

5. Conclusions

The preservation and further perpetuation to future generations of an important form of theater, which is puppetry, is the responsibility of art university professors and puppet artists. Craig considered Dance, Pantomime, and Marionette to be the "three essential components of the original Dramatic Art"¹⁵, and their cultivation, a necessity for stopping the theater from declining. The value and traditional techniques seem to become obsolete, when the dense university curriculum, in a short time of study (three years), meets times when life with its problems that need to be overcome seem to come to the fore.

In any traditional artistic discipline, however, only continuity, be it under the "anonymity" of transmission from teacher to student, makes art to survive, to stay alive, thus preserving the place of experimentation and modernity. Therefore, when all the necessary steps go at the same pace, namely learning, intuition, and the means of presentation of "today" (video recordings) – there is a chance that the resulting thing will be fresh and sometimes of greater interest than in the case of a full show: "Truly, exceptional things, when they are naive, are doubly exceptional"¹⁶.

Between preserving the puppet tradition – and the literary tradition, both rediscovered through an integrated study tradition – puppets, speech tradition – the students moved with obvious interest, from the choice of texts to the composition of the movement. The real challenge was the responsible and sustained exercise for marionette to "respond" and the moments to dramatic coherence. An attempt to bring smiles was also the utterance of the old words, which, once assumed, began to sound extremely accurate, pleasant, convincing, and funny: "Please come again / Sun, Moon and Planets!".

¹⁴ "guitar`mus`harmonical"/ invented association of words

¹⁵ English translation, presentation and notes by Mihaela Cernăuți-Gorodețchi: 2021. „Edward Gordon Craig: *Notă despre măști*” (“Edward Gordon Craig: *Note about masks*”). *ACTA IASSYENSIA COMPARATIONIS, 9/2011 MASKS / MASKS / MASQUES Traduceri / Translations / Traductions*: pp. 414 [craig_9.2011.pdf \(literaturacomparata.ro\)](#)

¹⁶ Quoted by Craig in the original; passage taken from Anatole France: 1918. „La Tempête”, *La Vie littéraire (deuxième série)*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy: p. 318. [craig_9.2011.pdf \(literaturacomparata.ro\)](#)

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