

Blaga Complete Drama Works - the Cathedral of Lights of the Romanian Theater

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Abstract: *In the Romanian collective mind, the monumentality of Lucian Blaga's entire work entered definitively through poetry, philosophy and, perhaps, through his novel. But it is still very far from the place it deserves in what is called the corollary of a historical being from dramatic perspectives. Dan C. Mihăilescu, Doina Modola, Alexandru Paleologu, Mircea Ghițulescu, Ioan T. Morar, Ioan Mariș and many others ask themselves, paraphrasing them rhetorically: what is missing from this theater to be performed on the country stages and to be established? The answer, we suggest, paradoxically, would be in the very wording of the question: His? Blagian theater's? There is nothing missing to it. That is why we propose through this communication a rephrasing of the legitimate question "why isn't Blaga played?", by referring to Mircea Ghițulescu's thought: "why don't we adhere to Blaga's universe?"²*

Key-words: *theatre; directing; dramaturgy; Blaga; directing method*

1. Introduction. Too many reasons against and one shy question

Two were the questions that formed the basis of this study: *Why isn't Blaga played?* and *Why don't we adhere to Blaga's universe?* A strong challenge in trying to answer such a dilemma. What could we start with? If this year, on May 6, we mark the 60th anniversary of Lucian Blaga's passing into eternity, what would be the correct measure in which at least one of the author's ten plays should be performed in theaters throughout the country? Once a season? Once every 10 years? Are the quantity or the high number of productions value criteria? Expressions such as: *Blaga is too philosophical, too poetic; he approaches a mythology that is not specific to us; the public does not like it; the text is too long, boring; staging a Blaga play is very expensive, we can't afford it* etc. are, unfortunately, justifications that abound in the managerial artistic world, at least in the last 10 years.

At one point, in a doctoral study, we dealt with a humble observation of the staging of Blaga's plays, from his lifetime³ to the present day, for which we do not return.

But what is Blaga's universe? Why would it be difficult for us to adhere to such a universe?

In these times, when discussions about the construction of a cathedral for the salvation of a nation are carried on in bright tones, with arguments or only with feelings and beliefs about its necessity, would it be appropriate to propose that the work of a playwright receive the connotation of a cathedral for the entire national dramaturgy? Could Blaga integrate the entire dramatic writing of all the authors in our country?

Maybe only the *Cathedral of Lights* element can bring the justifying nuance of our revelatory metaphor.

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² Ghițulescu, Mircea. 2008. *Istoria literaturii române - Dramaturgia*, Ediția a II-a. București: Ed. Tracus Arte, p. 13.

³ Pleșa Cosmin. 2018. *Metafora Nimicului în Teatrul lui Lucian Blaga*, Teză de doctorat. Iași: UNAGE.

2. Objectives

We started from the hypothesis that Lucian Blaga's dramaturgy, the 10 plays published between 1921 and 1945, represent a metaphor of certain philosophical concepts specific to the Romanian people, elevated to universal rank.

Through this paper we aim to identify the main philosophical themes of each play and, by presenting them, to raise the attention and interest of theater lovers and its practitioners (actors, directors, students, chroniclers) on the semantic and stylistic richness of Lucian Blaga's theater, with the hope that more and more Romanians will appreciate Blaga's theater and will want to see these plays on many stages.

3. Methodology. Philosophy is the key

The key through which we will decrypt this analysis of Lucian Blaga's dramatic work is of a philosophical nature. The Great Anonymous is the central axis, without which the existence of Art as a unique way of subjective knowledge, with deep reverberations in the collective mind, could not be justified; Art, in fact, becomes the supra-consciousness of a nation with a unique stylistic matrix of a Mioritic space, a place of the sacred and the profane, in which eternity mirrors the Myth.

The form of metaphorical expression of the artist Lucian Blaga represents the quintessence through which the author highlights his philosophical concepts, on which we could say that he fights for and wants to defend them through his poetry, his theater and his literature.

This feature can also be one of the culture of the interwar period, which is under the sign of a rich cultural diversity, fueled by the effervescence of European culture, on the one hand and the historical context of the Great Union of 1918 - a crucial event in the Romanians' becoming as nation and country or, as Blaga beautifully says, the re-discovery of their historical being. That is why the Romanian folk creations should breathe the same thrill, regardless of the historical province from which the creator would come; here, the philosopher and writer Lucian Blaga will have a definitive contribution to the realization of a stylistic matrix of Romanian culture in its national specificity aligned to the European context, making it comparable to other cultures with a more advanced tradition.

We propose here a brief analysis of Lucian Blaga's plays, which represent an element of a unitary whole of Blaga's thinking system, with a philosophy strongly impregnated with revelatory metaphors defining the Romanian spirit, as a staging of a philosophical concept.

The presentation of the plays through the author's vision of each theme developed, of the characters, as well as their relationship with the myths they illustrate, are the arguments on which our revelatory metaphor is based, that we believe that Lucian Blaga's dramatic works contain the monumentality of a Cathedral of Lights of our Romanian theater.

3.1. *Zamolxe (1921)*

Zamolxe, or *Pagan Mystery*, is the debut piece, written in 1921, the year in which Blaga also published his volume of poems *The Prophet's Steps*, but also the famous article *Revolt of our non-Latin background*, which outlines Blaga's search for the Dacian myth and his concern with the theory of unity between history and prehistory. This is fundamentally the spectacularism of Lucian Blaga's theater: the mythology and history that intertwine, being permanently in a continuous interweaving or mirroring state.

This could also explain Blaga's conceptual and visional connection between philosophy, poetry and theater.

Thematically speaking, the play is built around the conflict, apparently of a religious nature, between Zamolxe and the Magus, or the faith of the first and the second's dogma, theme which will take up enough space in the following plays, but also in the philosophical or dogmatic endeavors of the author.

But Blaga, in his creative imagination, gives birth to Zamolxe's own myth, a cult of the earth, a primordial element of Creation, represented by seasons, forest, nature. We can say that the central idea is represented by the actual living in nature and by the unique way in which the Creator can identify with the actual living in the middle of His creation.

The play could also be considered as a **founding myth of the Romanian people** in Blaga's view, through the common elements with the ancient Dacian faith.

The time of the play is a mythical one, a fact that can be found in other plays in Blaga's dramaturgy. Hence a special way in which the author positions all his subjects: somewhere in time.

The space in which the play takes place is clearly marked, which increases the aura of mystery of the places well-known as the cradle of our ancient civilization: "in the mountains of Dacia".

The "mountain" is the threshold between the worlds: "in here", it the world of reality, and "beyond" is under the sign of "a potentiated life, lived in eternal youth"⁴.

By the descending of Zamolxe among his people, his destiny becomes a tragic one, but this is the only way to ensure a people's salvation.

3.2. *The Disturbance of Waters (1923)*

The author's project of configuring a matrix of Romanian spirituality is successfully continued in this play.

The main character, the Priest, lives in the same spirit of the earth, in the middle of nature, has a mystical way of life. Here the author develops the myth of an Earth-Jesus, who will have approximately the same fate as Zamolxe's.

The Disturbance of Waters is not just a historical play, although it benefits from the appropriate anthropological background - the Lutheran Reform in sixteenth-century Transylvania, as it is not just a religious play, by the overt confrontation between Orthodox dogma and Protestant teaching.

The Priest lives his illusion of the natural of being at an age of fullness. He feels, however, that he will once have to start walking on the path to light, but he hesitates and always takes refuge in his inner loneliness. This hesitation leads inevitable to his fall, which is the main theme of this play – **the fall and the rise from it**.

Out of doubt, the Priest eventually leaves for the desert, becoming himself a "herald" of faith, not dogma. This is how the magic is established, and the Priest, through metamorphosis, takes the place of the Old Man, his place being left free for his own son.

This is the continuous cycle of the mythical Mioritic space: a continuous flow.

3.3. *Daria (1925)*

Some chroniclers call the play *Daria* a dramatic but not very successful exercise, which was either under the Freud's influence or was inspired by the author's family experiences.

⁴ Blaga, Lucian. 1943. *Getica*, in *Saeculum* magazine, no. 4, July-August, p. 20.

The conflict of the play is built on the couple Daria - Filip, the fragile wife, prisoner in a much too safe space offered by a rigorous husband.

The resemblance to the force of Ibsen's dramas is striking, by introducing the theme of Saint George and his fight with the dragon, impersonated by the young Loga, who through his lines will rearrange the fallen nature: "We threaten the sky with metaphors and we snatch the secrets from the earth, but the enemy, whom we cannot defeat, is the absurd power with thousands of faces of blood."⁵

The main idea of this play is **death** - the spiritual and emotional death leads to physical disappearance.

3.4. *Ivanca* (1925)

It can be framed as a psychoanalytic drama, through which the author proposes an interpretation of the manifestation of the unconscious within the being, and makes a full analysis: of the superego, the self and the ego.

Part of the critics claim that the play does not have the strength to support *strong and independent characters and plausible images*⁶, but Dan C. Mihăilescu answers to them: *a perfect intuition of the psychological nature*.

The father is the instinctual nucleus, Ivanca is the one who manifests outside the consciousness. Hence the attraction between the two, which will lead to the collapse of the son. Blaga meticulously realizes this scenario by removing the conscience from the equation - the sin, or the guilt. "Ivanca's impulses have in them the organic chirping of the physiological, a *spirit of the flesh* that will exorcise the deed (and the healing of Luca)."⁷

What drew our attention to this play is the fantastic struggle between moral conscience and instinct, a struggle that will eventually bring ruptures in the spiritual life of the being. **Double personality, duplicity** is the main theme of this psycho-drama.

3.5. *Resurrection* (1925)

The idea of this play is found in a letter addressed by Blaga to Tiberiu Brediceanu, in which he explained his intention to write a piece to be set to music, a kind of a "musical libretto"⁸, to cherish the richness of the Romanian folklore.

The main idea of this play is the **ancestral tradition and the consequences of its breaching**.

The play's universe highlights a stylized setting of a Romanian village, with its people and traditions, while all characters are spirits of a world ruled by magic.

Vochița, the central character, will make an atypical journey, from the end to the beginning, possible only through magic. Her refusal to marry all eligible suitors from her village represents the renunciation of living in the eternity of an ancestral space. She gets one last chance: to accept the bearer of the sign of belonging to the cosmic absolute: "the serpent - the miniature rainbow". As advised by her older brother, the girl will choose the Rich, an intruder from the village.

⁵ Blaga, Lucian. 1984. *Teatru I*. București: Ed. Minerva, p. 253.

⁶ Apud George Gană în Dan C. Mihăilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁷ Mariș, Ioan: 1998. *Lucian Blaga - clasicizarea expresionismului românesc*. Sibiu: Editura Imago, p. 135.

⁸ Mariș, Ioan: *op. cit.*, p. 141.

After getting married and leaving the home village for her husband's, Vochița feels estranged and longs for her family and her home. Her coming back home in the Christian Resurrection night is a metaphor of the wanderer son.

It should also be mentioned that this play, originally called *Resurrection*, received the title of *Pantomime*, due to communist censorship.

3.6. *Meșterul Manole (1927)*

The masterpiece, as defined by Blaga's wife, Cornelia Bredeceanu-Blaga, the play *Master Manole* enriches the Arges Monastery balad with historical and Christian elements, and beautifully depicts the idea of the **ultimate sacrifice**.

In *Master Manole*, Blaga builds a church of tragedy, through the way in which the central character, Manole, will be able to get out of the confrontation only crushed and torn by the inner struggle between the desire to build and the need to make a sacrifice.

The moral law that conflicts with Christian principles is a realm of battle that announces only one loser: Manole. Defeated by his own destiny, fulfilled as an artist but devastated in soul, exalted as a spirit, can he still be a tragic hero, if he accepts the sacrifice of someone else?

3.7. *The Children's Crusade (1930)*

Criticism has competed in issuing points of view, from countless perspectives, religious, philosophical, human etc. What the play must reveal is explained by the writer himself in the letter addressed to Tudor Vianu on May 2nd, 1930...⁹: *The Children's Crusade is not the triumph of Orthodoxy over Catholicism as anyone thought, but a triumph of the child's spirituality beyond the sterile Catholic-Orthodox dialectic.*

Later, Blaga will nuance the statement in the letter to Ion Breazu (conf., M. Curticeanu, Lucian Blaga - *Letters to Ion Breazu*, in "Tribuna", no. 19/1973): *I am glad that you did not see the conflict in the play catholicism-orthodoxy (which is only a framework and which ends with the triumph of the child's spirituality over the confessional waste), but the mother-child conflict.*

But we ask ourselves a question, beyond the reception of the critique concerned with revealing meanings, beyond the explanations of the writer, to which the ordinary reader does not have access, *what is left of this play after a first reading? What is the immediate feeling, the actual post-reception experience?* We believe that the answer given by Cornelia Blaga-Bredeceanu is more than telling: the Wisdom of the Earth. That Wisdom descended from the divine grace, deep through the simplicity of the thought in which it sat, pure through the still ignorance of life because it was planted before the consciousness of its own "I".

The play, as Blaga wanted it, carries a disturbing message: that of the need to return to faith, to the beginning of being, to the gentle sweetness of spiritual purity, to the unknown, misunderstood, but felt self. Perhaps the association between the remark made by Cornelia Blaga-Bredeceanu and Brâncuși's work bearing the same name is not without connotations: *a special sweetness of self-ignorance.*

3.8. *Avram Iancu (1934)*

Through the drama *Avram Iancu*, Lucian Blaga carves in the gallery of the memorable figures of Romanian history and literature a hero of a special tragedy defeated first by people

⁹ Letter from Bern, May 2nd 1930, reproduced in *Manuscriptum*, no. 1/1979, p. 91.

and, through them, by destiny.

The action of the piece is placed in a precisely fixed time and space: *...in Transylvania, in 1848, and later*, but doubled by the coordinates of a sacred space: *Mountain landscape. In the background, the mountains built on top of each other, with lands where shepherds' settlements can be seen*" and of a mythical time: *The sun has not yet set*.

The theme of the play could have remained a historical one, the narrative having sources of inspiration in the historical reality of a Transylvania under the domination of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There are voices that believe that, through the message transmitted to future generations, Romanian nationalism, as a political ideology, transpires from the writings of Lucian Blaga. But the historical reality, in our opinion, is only the background and the pretext for the establishment of a personal Blagian myth: **the historical myth, the Romanianism**, without any trace of nationalism.

Avram Iancu is one of the most tragic heroes built by Lucian Blaga, because he fails both in human order (his immaterialized love with the Hungarian lady Erji), and in divine order - the political reparation of his fellow citizens.

3.9. *Arca lui Noe (1944)*

Noah's Ark is a symbolic representation of the writer's deep conviction that humanity has not lost the Good. It exists as long as Faith exists. God made the world and all that lives in it. And He loves them all. So He will protect His Creation and, whenever He feels that it is in danger, He will save it, but only with its help. Thus, through Noah, the main character, Blaga impersonates the Purity.

It becomes very interesting the writer's approach who, although descending very deep into the dawn of this myth, he humanizes it as if to harmonize the myth with the description of Noah's inner cleanliness, as Ana sees him: *But that's how I was destined to get married – a child with a child. And after I am ripe, let my husband remain a child, more a child than our children*.

The play is, as Blaga confessed, "as a game of nuances, made with simple, primary means, but at the same time with supreme refinement, both as imagination and as expression".¹⁰

The play inspires the gentle spirit of purity and faith springing from a good intention of the writer, from a thought of his that the **Good is the intrinsic component of the human being**, which is never lost, but only wanders with man forced by some contexts, circumstances, temptations to which Evil subjects him.

3.10. *Anton Pann (1945)*

Apparently, what is to be outlined in the piece will be under the incidence of well-located coordinates. Only apparently, because the "intersection of two kingdoms" already induces the idea of the boundary between what is and what could be, between visible and obvious, on the one hand, and unseen, unconscious, on the other.

From the point of view of the historical context in which the action of the story takes place, we are talking about a Romania located on the border between East and West, when the contact with Western Europe had just been resumed. The fact does not seem to have much relevance, but going back to Blaga's conception of Romanian style, stylistic matrix and apriorism, the idea that follows is that, regardless of historical circumstances - external influences on Romanians -, the style remains the same precisely because it is generated by the

¹⁰ Blaga, Lucian. 1967. „*Arca lui Noe*”, fragment of a journal in *Gazeta literară*, July 6th.

collective unconscious in the stylistic matrix of the mioritic space; its characteristics obviously cannot be found anywhere else, because they form a stylistic field - in the case of Romanians this is “dynamic Byzantinism, contaminated by Renaissance and Baroque elements”.

The philosopher establishes two fundamental landmarks for the Romanian stylistic field: Dimitrie Cantemir, whose erudition made Blaga say that *he is a kind of Leibnitz of ours, of a truly amazing multilateralism in his scientific, literary, artistic, political activity*, and Constantin Brâncoveanu, “*prince of gold*”, *lord of the Christian idea*.

Basically, this will become the ideational substratum of the play: **shaping the Romanian stylistic specificity** through a character inspired by reality, but whose biography is artistically transfigured, keeping only the artistic vocation of the poet, the verse handler and his quality as a church singer.

4. Results

The ideas we identified in the 10 plays of Lucian Blaga constitute a wide array of fundamental philosophical concepts: birth, death, love, betrayal, fall, duplicity, innocence, sacrifice, tradition, conflict. Above all, 3 overarching myths detach themselves: the founding myth of a nation, the formation of a unitary stylistic matrix, and the Good which prevails in any human being. We believe that these results, although not obvious as a first reading of Blaga’s plays, support the hypothesis that Blaga’s theatre is of universal meaning and value and it deserves a higher recognition among both theatre professionals and public at large.

5. Conclusions

In the Romanian cultural landscape, and not only, Lucian Blaga remains a reference and complex personality, with an impressive work, which goes far beyond his biography, including the poet of the *great passage*, the playwright of ideas and, last but not least, the philosopher and essayist.

What we set out to do was a brief review of Lucian Blaga’s dramatic work, drawn out of the desire to illuminate as clearly as possible the intention of our study, like a cutout of the entire dramatic creation of the Master. Our intention is to provoke the desire of student actors or directors to read and study Blaga’s dramatic texts through a key of philosophical reading, as their artistic sense is in fact so fruitful that with each reading and interpretation threshold new meanings, special meanings or alternative reasoning to those already presented could be discovered.

That this is the case, and we have no doubt about it, is demonstrated by the many critical steps taken so far, the diversity of which has not yet exhausted either the perspectives or the methods of approach.

Aware of the depth and grandeur of the work he left behind and given that most philosophical theories geared to the problem of human knowledge consider that the truth value of an opinion is directly determined by the source of knowledge, it is easy to see that the author’s idealism proposed as the primary source reason and innate ideas. In conclusion, this central idea that an entire dramatic work was conceived like a philosophical system, but with dramatic accents, created the feeling, inspired by Petru Creția’s *Cathedral of Lights*, that we are witnessing a true cathedral of the Romanian theater.

For our courage to generalize and name the theater of Lucian Blaga *The Cathedral of Lights of the Romanian theater*, we ask for leniency and we leave the reader with the joy of reuniting, first, with the dramatic texts of the author and later, why not, with his complete works.

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