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The Mask of the Witch: from Ritual to Carnival and Theatre

IOAN POP-CURȘEU, ȘTEFANA POP-CURȘEU*

Abstract: This paper tries to approach a problem of great interest for theatrical anthropology: the mask of the witch, raising some questions concerning its origin and antiquity. In order to propose some possible answers, the paper briefly re-examines Carlo Ginzburg's view on witchcraft in *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (*Storia notturna*), with emphasis on some elements that are still useful, in spite of the criticism this seminal book provoked. Then, some occurrences of witch masks in carnival processions are discussed, with regard to Latin or Germanic cultures. The subsequent question is: are these masks old ones, with a long evolution and permanent changes in form and signification, or – at the opposite – are they recent, appearing in carnivals only after the end of the witch-craze, in the 18th century? The article ends with some examples of witch masks used in theatre (Shakespeare – Ion Sava, Court Ballets): their carnivalesque origins – more recent or more ancient – are underlined.

Keywords: mask, witch, witchcraft, carnival, theatre, folklore.

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A study focused on the mask of the witch through various periods of history is both challenging and risky, because it involves a vast amount of knowledge in religious history, anthropology, folklore and art, and because

* *Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. ioancurseu@yahoo.com, pop_curseu@yahoo.com*

it requires generalization and systematization of fascinating and sometimes incomprehensible phenomena, extended in time and space. We'll try, though, to propose an outline of this extensive study, to trace some maps and to establish some perspective points, that could be useful for future researches regarding the anthropological basis of theatrical practices. On the other hand, our approach intends to throw light on a related topic: the possibility to find folkloric sources for the witches' sabbath stereotype.

Brief Review of Literature. Is Ginzburg Still Useful?

First, let us take into consideration the word *mask* itself. Nowadays, it is present in the great majority of modern European languages (Romanic, Germanic, Slavic) and it means a very fascinating prop present in the theatrical and social practices. But compared to other words of equal cultural importance, the *mask* has low and unclear origins. The word is not Greek, nor Classical Latin, but of "barbarian" origin, and its first appearance is medieval. Jean-Claude Schmitt shows that medieval idioms used several words to designate the "mask," each one of them meaning both the object itself and the "supernatural powers" that were associated to the ritual and the artistic use of masks: *larva*, *persona*, *masca* in medieval Latin, or, in vulgar languages, "faulx visage," "fol visage," "sot visage" in French, or *visor*/ *vizor* in English. The feminine noun *masca* was used for the first time in 643, in *Loi des Lombards*, as a term borrowed from Germanic populations who came into contact with Latin speaking clerks. The modern words borrowed from Latin appeared at the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance: *talemaschier* (14th century) and *masque* (1511) in French, *Maschera* in Italian (in Boccaccio's work), *mask* in English (1534).

But in Southern France and maybe in Italy, the word had a meaning that is capital for our study: "witch." Gervase of Tilbury says at the beginning of the 13th century that the *Lamiae* who devoured children were named, in vulgar idioms, *mascae*. The meaning "witch" for this word is attested in Provençal in 1369.[1] This semantic evolution, also noted by other

[1] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le Corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps. Essais d'anthropologie médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 139-140.

researchers[2] encourages a study, at the crossroads between anthropological phenomena and theatre, in order to underline once again the magical roots of mask and masking, as well as the importance of the witch as a stage figure in some periods of the history of theatre.

So, first of all, before getting to the problem of theatre, we should examine ritual witch masks or masks used in bewitching/ healing/ magical rituals. There are several cultural areas that could interest us, but our focus will be on European documents, even if it is very tempting, for the pleasure of comparison, to refer to remarkable examples from other geo-cultural spaces.[3] In this context, it is mandatory to re-examine Carlo Ginzburg's theories on witchcraft, based on his seminal work *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*.[4] Ginzburg believed in the survival of some ancient fertility cults and extasy religions during Christianism, linked somehow to shamanic practices, found on a vast geographical area, from China to Ireland. In *Storia notturna*, the anthropologist tries to hold together the puzzle, gathering isomorphic phenomena, but without succeeding to offer a historical explanation to the facts he uses and to the similarities he detects (except for the role played by "Scythians" as cultural turning point between the nomadic peoples of the steppes and the ancient inhabitants of Europe). For Ginzburg, some details one can find in the witch trials from 16th-17th centuries are not determined by the stereotypes constructed by the inquisitors, but by the fragmentary resurgence of forgotten religious beliefs and practices. The fly of witches and the orgiastic sabbath are not (only) a construct of theologians, but a religious belief or even a reality that must be interpreted. Carlo Ginzburg relates the sabbath to Diana, the goddess of the Moon, of the hunt and of

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[2] Karl Meuli, *Schweizer Masken. 60 Abbildungen une eine Farbtafel nach Masken der Sammlung Eduard von der Heydt und aus anderem Besitz: mit einer Einleitung über schweizerische Maskenbräuche und Maskenschnitzer* (Zurich: Atlantis Verlag, 1943).
Cesare Poppi "*Persona, larva, masca*: masks, identity and cognition in the cultures of Europe," in *Rupa-Pratirupa: Mind, Man and Mask*, ed. S.C. Malik (New Delhi: IGNCA/Aryan Books International, 2001), 128-154.

[3] One can find precious materials referring to the magical value of the masks in extra-European areas, in N. Ross Crumrine & Marjorie Halpin (ed.), *The Power of Symbols. Masks and Masquerade in the Americas* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983).

[4] English edition: Garlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, Translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

the wilderness, who was still revered after the triumph of Christianism. She was wandering in the woods, followed by a cortege of bizarre creatures, humans and animals, capable of penetrating in the world of the dead and of coming back to earthly life, during an ecstatic state, obtained through various means, including the use of hallucinogenic substances.

The symbolic function of the creatures in Diana's suite had to be emphasized through a visible sign: the mask. Carlo Ginzburg devotes a whole chapter to masked processions and rituals, especially those who are related to ecstatic journeys in the underworld, or to fertility rituals and beliefs. Ginzburg's approach is typological, not historical, even if he mentions some sermons from late Antiquity that criticize the use of the masks by Christians: a sermon by Asterius and one by Caesarius of Arles (who mentions the *cervulus* and *vetula* masks). Like someone who is preoccupied not to forget something, Ginzburg gathers data about masked processions from all the corners of Europe (and not only): the Celto-Germanic cultural area with various animal masks, South-Eastern Europe (known for the goat masks), the Romanian *căluș*ari, the south-Slavic *kresniki*, the Hungarian *regös* and *táltos*, the Greek *karkantzaroi*, the Swiss masks from Lötschental, the *berserker* of the Norsemen, and even Halloween and Caucasian masks. According to Ginzburg, all these data constitute a coherent picture:

> We propose to treat these animal disguises as a ritual equivalent of the animal metamorphosis experienced during the shamanic ecstasy, or alternatively an equivalent of the ecstatic cavalcades astride animals which constitute a variant thereof. If we accept this hypothesis, the majority of the rituals performed both in the West and East during the January calends slot into place in a coherent picture. Child alms-collectors, tables laid for the nocturnal divinities, and animal disguises represented different ways of making contact with the dead – the ambiguous dispensers of prosperity during the crucial period when the old year ends and the new begins.[5]

[5] Garlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 185-186.

The ideas of Carlo Ginzburg about shamanism surviving through masked rituals are seducing, but criticisable[6] and only partially useful for our approach. The great problem of Ginzburg's inventory is that the author doesn't analyse the similarities and the differences between the masks he mentions, nor the historical context of their appearance and use, or their circulation through time and space, or their magical functions. The reader is unsatisfied, because the description is scarce and the information sometimes unclear. What kind of magic is performed through these masks? Are they used for divination? For healing rituals? For apotropaic purposes? Are they used as a means of achieving the transformation into an animal with the purpose to absorb its vital force? Are they making possible the descent to the realm of the dead in order to bring back a promise of prosperity and fertility?

But should we, only because of this methodological imprecision, reject Ginzburg's book as a whole? We don't think so: on the contrary, *Storia notturna* should be regarded as an exhortation to develop Ginzburg's intuitions and to search for some clear evidences (if any) in favour of his hypotheses. First of all, one should note that the geographical distribution of the masked processions is not uniform in Europe. There is a concentration (not exclusive) in the isolated regions of the Alps, the Pyreneans, the Carpathians and the Balkans, as well as in other mountainous areas of the old continent. Ginzburg himself defines this phenomenon as it follows: "Along the entire Alpine arc seasonal ceremonies celebrated by groups of masked men have continued to this day."[7] This brings us back to the studies Hugh Trevor-Roper devoted to religious history and to his attempt to explain witchcraft and witch-trials based on a so-called "mountainous" hypothesis:

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[6] Willem de Blécourt, "The Return of the Sabbat: Mental Archaeologies, Conjectural Histories or Political Mythologies?" in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 128: "These far-reaching conclusions are based on an analysis that is vaguely structural, profoundly phenomenological, only morphological in name and hardly historical: it is selective instead of serial and devoid of contexts."
See another critical approach of Ginzburg's theories: Alessandro Testa, "Ritual Zoomorphism in Medieval and Modern European Folklore: Some Sceptical Remarks on a Possible Connection with a Hypothetical Eurasian Shamanism," *Religio* XXV, no. 1 (2017), 21: "more methodological prudence should be used when comparing different cultural phenomena on the basis of purely formal resemblances."

[7] Garlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 193.

> The mountain origin of the witch-craze is by now well established. […] This prevalence of witchcraft, and of illusions that can be interpreted as witchcraft, in mountainous areas doubtless has a physical explanation. Rural poverty, as Michelet observed, naturally drives men to invoke the spirits of revenge. The thin air of the mountains breeds hallucinations, and the exaggerated phenomena of nature – the electric storms, the avalanches, the cracking and calving of the mountain ice – easily lead men to believe in demonic activity. […] In the Middle Ages the men of the mountains differed from the men of the plains in social organization, and therefore they also differed in those customs and patterns of belief which grow out of social organization and, in the course of centuries, consecrate it. Theirs, we may almost say, were different civilizations. […] The mountains, then, are the home not only of sorcery and witchcraft, but also of primitive religious forms and resistance to new orthodoxies.[8]

We won't examine here if there are some geographical coincidences between witchcraft trials and masked processions (both seem to be somehow linked to the mountains and to some specific mountainous regions), but an extensive and comprehensive study in this respect should be taken into consideration in the near future. Our goal is more modest. In the first place, we would like to underline the magical value of the masked processions (that passed from ritual to theatre). Secondly, we would like to propose a partial repertory and some brief analyses of the mask of the witch *per se*, as it appears in some ritual parades, in Latin or Germanic cultural areas, or in some modern theatrical performances. It is obvious that carnival and the *carnivalesque* are the perfect symbolic junction between ritual and theatre, the turning and spinning point of ideas, images and significations.

Witch Masks in Carnivals and in Carnivalesque Practices

As we stated at the very beginning of this paper, the difficulties of the research are innumerable. The sources and documentation are unequally distributed through time and space and there is some sort of *taboo* regarding witches and magic in popular cultures and folklore. In fact, a witch is not often

[8] Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth Centuries," *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century. Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001 [first edition 1967]), 94-99.

designated as such, but through periphrases and metaphors that are used as protecting strategies. In a carnivalesque procession, in a masked ritual or – sometimes – on a stage, the witch will be individualized as *old lady*, *fair lady*, *healer*, *grandma*, because people believe that, by avoiding the magical figure's real name, they avoid the possibility of a supernatural aggression against them. This caution is a source of real difficulties for our approach, but we'll try though to discuss some examples, originating from the great cultural and linguistic areas of Europe.

The carnival and the carnivalesque, as we said, were the main frame in which the survival, the evolution and even the birth of new masks were possible. In Europe, one can find various cultural patterns. The use of masks was – and it still is sometimes – frequent mostly around the winter solstice, or – in Christian terms – between Christmas and Epiphany (25th of December - 6th of January). But masks were – and somewhere still are – used at the end of winter, during the Carnival, before Ash Wednesday, at the beginning of the difficult period of forty days of fasting before Easter. As Georges Dumézil pointed out in his seminal book, *Le Problème des centaures* (1929), "nos mascarades modernes, comme les mascarades des peuples moins avancés, marquent, ou ont marqué, des *coupures du temps*, des *changements d'année*."[9] But Dumézil requires circumspection, by showing that the Indo-European calendars were not coherent in the partition of the year, in the conception of the seasons, or in the vision of the structure of time. Anyhow, one can retain Dumézil's idea about masquerades marking the *coupures du temps*, the transitions, the changes: moments when a magical action is required in order to master the transformations of nature, the metamorphosis of the Sun, the caprices of weather. In this kind of magical practices, masks play a fundamental, symbolical, role.

Carnival Witch Masks in Romance Cultural Regions

The masked traditions are vivid in Romance regions, as they echo maybe the Saturnalia, or other pagan rites linked to the calends. In Sicily, for example, the mask of the witch was used in carnivals. One mask dating back to the 18th century, and conserved nowadays at the Ethnographic Museum in Palermo, shows a clear brown face with a large rictus, a big nose and lots

[9] Georges Dumézil, *Le Problème des Centaures* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929), 4.

of coloured stains and lines. It is both tragical and comic, but its gaiety seems somehow a sadistic one.[10] This kind of mask was a tool that served the splitting of the personality and the performing of magic rituals.

In various regions of Spain, the figure of the witch, or her traditional accessories are not unknown in carnivalesque masquerades, as one can see in Julio Caro Baroja's seminal book on carnival. For example, in the Basque region, in Oyarzun, the period of carnival begins the 2nd of February giving the possibility to use masks to a community eager to do so. These are grotesque masks, made of a sheep's hairy skin, that suggest the head of a beast ("un morro de animal"[11]). The wearers of these masks hold in their hands a grotesque stick or an animal skin, but also what is called in Basque language "sorguin-goaiziak" ("tijeras de bruja," *witch scissors*), used to frighten people. Julio Caro Baroja mentions that people of Oyarzun regarded these masks as being linked to witchcraft, or possessing magical powers: "Por lo expuesto tenemos derecho a subrayar el carácter en cierto modo hechiceril que le daba la mayoría de la gente en aquel pueblo al artefacto que llevan los enmascarados para espantar. Este carácter se ve también en Labourd."[12] It is worth noting here that the famous witch hunter Pierre de Lancre developed a severe repression against the witches in Labourd at the beginning of the 17th century. The story of this repression is presented and analysed, among others, by Baroja himself, in *Las brujas y su mundo* (*The World of the Witches*).[13]

These are not the only witch-like figures in the Basque masquerades. In the French part of the Basque country, in Soule for example, the carnival is split in a "red" masquerade and a "black" one. Amongst the characters of the black masquerade, there are some *caldereros*, boilermakers. The popular imagination considers, all along the region and far beyond it, that these poor craftsmen are sorcerers, capable of divination and of the worst forms of *maleficium*.[14] We won't insist here on the masks of devils and demonic

[10] See the reproduction of this mask: Jean-Michel Sallmann, *Les Sorcières, fiancées de Satan* (Paris: Gallimard Découvertes, 1998), 88.

[11] Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval (análisis histórico-cultural)* (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1984 [1965]), 198.

[12] Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 198: "Due to the above, we have the right to underline the somewhat witch-like character that most people in that town gave to the artifact that the masked men raised to scare people away. This character is also seen in Labourd."

[13] Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[14] Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 196.

figures, frequent in carnival rituals, although frequently associated with the witches' behaviour, as they do not concern our topic but marginally. Baroja mentions very often these sorts of masks.[15]

At another extremity of Europe, the witches are amongst the most well-known figures of Romanian traditional culture. During the winter processions, they accompany sometimes the devils, covered by their hideous or comical masks, in larger groups usually called "the ugly people." We must underline here, as suggested before, that the witch is rarely named as such, due to ancestral fears and taboos. In exchange, the old woman (*baba*), is a frequent apparition (masked most of the time), with her *old man (moș)*, or alone. This old cunning woman is regarded by popular wit (proverbs, legends, *historiolas*) as more intelligent than the devil himself. She is thought to have characteristics and behaviours of a witch. She makes and breaks the marriages, she is the best midwife, she can heal – or harm – using herbs, because she is the depositary of an ancient knowledge. Her mask concentrates in itself some traits of grotesque femininity: big hooked nose, hair made of hemp, or even more macabre traits: mouth without teeth, wide empty eyes and a haired, diabolical face. She has always a big kerchief on her head, knotted under her chin.

Fig. 1.-2. Masks from Dărmănești, Bacău in *Măști, Masks, Masques* (Bucharest: Muzeul Țăranului Român, 2002), 143, 152.

[15] Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 175, 199, 211, 218, 228, 233, 234, 245, 265, 268.

It is very interesting to notice that the mask of the old woman in Central and Eastern Europe winter folk traditions often overlaps with the mask of the gypsy woman, known as a charm maker.[16] And, as we'll see later, when discussing the witch as a theatrical mask/character, in Romanian 19th century dramatic literature, fertility charms and love philtres are frequently associated with the old women/witches' actions (sometimes of Roma origin).

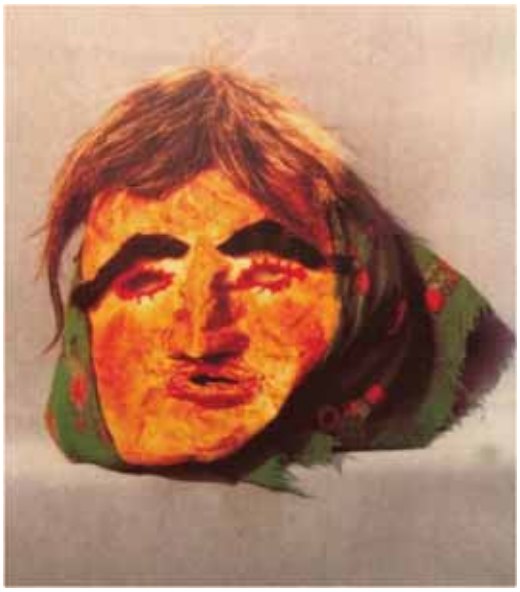

Fig. 3. Old woman mask, Vintileasca, Vrancea in Oana Petrică ed., *Măști populare din România* (Bucharest, 2001), 39.

Fig. 4. Old gipsy woman mask, Săbăoani, Neamț, in Oana Petrică ed., *Măști populare din România* (Bucharest, 2001), 42.

Carnival Witch Masks in Germanic Regions

The old woman and the old man are also frequent in Western Germanic carnival masquerades, as Baroja points out, relating them to the death of the past year.[17] And indeed, Jörg Kraus specifies in his study "Der Weg der Hexe in

[16] Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "The Gypsy-Witch: Social-Cultural Representations, Fascination and Fears," *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor / Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*, New Series, no. 1-2 (2014), 23-45.
[17] Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval*, 224, 245, 270, 281.

die Fasnacht," that although the image and face of the witch are very present in the art of the Renaissance, the popular culture shows much more interest for the mask of the old woman (*die Alte Weib*).[18] The custom to put on old women's masks and clothes seems to be very ancient: the author is quoting a text of Saint Pirmin (753 AD), who forbade Christians to go around masked as deers or old women, nor to be travestied.[19] Actually, if we go back in time, we can agree, with Rudwin J. Maximilian, who discusses Frazer's theories, in a book that is still readable and quotable, even if frazerism is nowadays hardly acceptable in scientific anthropological researches.[20] Rudwin J. Maximilian states that the mask of the old woman has taken upon itself different personifications of Death or Winter, who had to be expulsed ritually from the community at the beginning of the New Year, in order to purify the rural or urban communities from all evil:

> The effigy of Death is also known as Old Woman, and that of Winter as Mrs. Winter or Ugly Woman, or Winter's Grandmother, i.e. Old Woman or Witch. In its simplest form the effigy of Death, Winter or Carnival was carried or carted out of the village, or thrown over the boundary of the next village. But it was also thrown into the water, beheaded, hanged, burned, not uncommonly, in the Lenten fires, or buried, often under straw or drung. These ceremonies of burning, burying, or drowning the spirit of vegetation may have been in themselves fertility charms.[21]

In the Flemish and Dutch cultural regions, the interest for these figures is also very present, as we can see it through the history of witch hunting and in folk traditions, extensively studied by Willem de Blécourt.[22]

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[18] Jörg Kraus, "Der Weg der Hexe in die Fasnacht," in *Wilde Masken. Ein anderer Blick auf die Fasnacht*, ed. Gottfried Korff (Tübingen: Tübingen Vereinigung für Volkskunde e. V., 1989), 57-76.

[19] Jörg Kraus, "Der Weg der Hexe in die Fasnacht," 61.

[20] Rudwin J. Maximilian, *The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy* (New York, London, Paris, Leipzig: G. E. Stechert & Co, 1920).

[21] Rudwin J. Maximilian, *The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy*, 16-17.

[22] Willem de Blécourt, "The Flying Witch: Its Resonance in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 11, no. 1 (2016): 73-93, doi:10.1353/mrw.2016.0010, "*I Would Have Eaten You Too*: Werewolf Legends in the Flanders, Dutch and German Area," *Folklore* 118, no. 1 (2007): 23-43, "Bedding the Nightmare: Somatic Experience and Narrative Meaning in Dutch and Flemish Legend Texts," *Folklore* 114, issue 2 (2003): 227-245.

We have actually one of the oldest representations of witches' masks in carnivals in Bosch's paintings and in Peter Bruegel's famous canvas *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*. But if for Hieronymus Bosch the documentary value is uncertain as the fictional component of the visual elaboration plays an essential part, one can notice that Bruegel treats his characters in a very realistic way, even when aiming at an allegorical meaning of the ensemble, as in the quoted painting. Bruegel is a very fine observer of the social reality of his time and, in this respect, the two masked characters who are accompanying the leader of the Carnival's procession, seem to have been given a special attention since they are in the foreground.

Fig. 5. Detail of Pieter Bruegel The Elder, *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*, 1556, oil on panel.

The first one is wearing an old woman's mask with prominent chin and long nose, its head and body covered with a long cap (probably a bedcover) tightened around the neck with a white cloth. The person wearing this costume must be a man in disguise, a usual custom in carnivals, because we can see his legs up to his knees. He is holding a specific jar, used by farmers to separate butter from milk, which is not a superfluous detail, as we know that witches were often accused to steal milk from other people's cows in rural areas. The second mask is more like an apprentice witch (probably worn by a child). This small character wears a large red hat, pierced by a spoon, and carries on his shoulder a broom stick with two lighted candles attached to the broom. Its white shirt almost touches the floor and the bag hanging at his waist seems heavy. One can find the same kind of bag worn by another character masked as an old woman, which appears in an engraving after Pieter Bruegel's *Feast of Fools* (see fig. 6). This kind of bag was probably used to carry money and small objects. A fact of great significance is that this evident reference to an existing carnival mask disappears in Bruegel the Younger's replica of his father's painting, where the appearance of the first "old woman" is rather common, while the second one is completely neutralised. Her face became a white, neutral mask, as if the painter had wished to make us forget about the original character. The choice is probably due to the increase of the persecutions against witches in the Low Countries.

The old woman is often seen in folklore as the devil's instrument or as being cleverer than the devil itself (fig. 8). But, although in these paintings there is no evident association of the old women/ witches with the masks of devils, there are lots of hints to the Evil side represented by the Carnival in its opposition to Lent. As we have already discussed it in another study,[23] Bruegel depicted here, on the side of the tavern, all the sins one had to stay away of, the capital sins that were obsessing the mediaeval Christian. They became visible and got a face thanks to the masks of the Carnival: the ugly faces of pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth.

[23] Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, *Pour une théâtralité picturale: Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012).

Fig. 6. Detail of *The Feast of Fools*, engraving by Grave van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel, 1559.

Fig. 7. Detail of Pieter Bruegel The Younger, *The Combat of Carnival and Lent*, beginning of the 17th century, oil on wood.

Taking a look more specifically to the folkloric cultures of German speaking populations, one could observe that the witches are even more present in carnival masquerades than in Latin cultural areas. Maybe this is linked not only to these pagan rituals connected to the "burning" of the Old, Ugly Winter but also to the intensity of the witch hunts in the German world: we have here a possible connection that should be explored in future researches. Let's take as an illustrative example the region of Tyrol. It is there that, at least symbolically, the great prosecution against witches found its starting point, by a strange tangle of events. Following the issuing of the papal "Witch Bull" of 1484, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, the Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer arrived in the summer of 1485 in the Alpine valleys of Tyrol in order to fight against heresy and to eradicate the diabolical sect of witches. His preaches had a clear result: fifty women and two men were denounced. Finally, seven women were imprisoned, when the authorities of the city of

Innsbruck asked Kramer to leave Tyrol. First, he resisted, but, threatened by the imprisoned women's husbands, he took the good decision… Unfortunately, two years later, in collaboration with Joseph Sprenger, he published the famous *Malleus Maleficarum*, responsible for the death of thousands of supposed witches. The county of Tyrol, though, stayed immune to the witch-craze during the coming decades. Maybe this relative tolerance contributed to the transformation (or the survival?) of the witches as carnivalesque figures.

Fig. 8. Detail of Pieter Bruegel's *The Dutch Proverbs* ("The woman who is able to tie even the devil to a pillow" – often associated with Dulle Griet), oil on canvas, 1559.

Jörg Kraus states that, for the carnival, the oldest surviving mask of a witch comes from Tyrol (old witch mother *larva*) and that it dates back to the 18th century. In the provinces of Tyrol and Salzburg, the carnival comprises a symbolic confrontation between the beautiful and the ugly Perchten, who impersonate the dual nature of an old feminine divinity called "Frau Perchta," who was, according to Henri Rey-Flaud and other scholars, the leader of the Wild Hunt. The "Schiachen Perchten," ugly Perchten, are a group whose members arise among the audience an aesthetic disapproval, doubled by an ethical one. This group includes characters whose behaviour is both repellent

and bad, from a moral point of view: two witches with broomsticks, the devils and the fools. The role of witches and fools is to use a large variety of tricks, meant to animate the entire procession. The people who cross the witches' paths will be swept away with the brooms, or be caught and brought before the King Herod for a parody of judgement, very witty and amusing. The "Schiachen Perchten" often frighten the girls in the audience.[24]

A related carnivalesque custom can be found in the Lower Inn Valley, in the same province of Tyrol. A group of masked men, called BerschtIn goes from farm to farm, enter the houses with "devilish noise" and "perform crazy dances." They are lead by "an energetic witch-like figure" with "a big broom:" with it, she pretends to sweep the whole house from top to bottom". Their action is thought to have a positive consequence: the BerschtIn "drive out the wicked spirits who have settled in farm and fields during the long winter nights."[25] Sometimes, these figures are called PerschtIn, a name that is even closer to that of the Perchten and clarifies the origin and morphology of these witchy figures of carnivalesque processions.

Carlo Ginzburg was very interested in the goddess Perchta, who was, according to the system he tried to build, a multi-form female divinity revered by ecstatic women (perceived as witches by the communities they belonged to). The name of the deity varied, according to time and place: Diana, Holda, Abundia, Madonna Oriente, Bensozia, Herodias, Perchta.[26] Ginzburg noted, on the traces of several researches done by Karl Meuli or Dönner (*Tiroler Fastnacht*) that the passage of the Perchten from farm to farm was regarded by rural communities as a promise of fertility and abundance:

> Up until the last century in a number of localities in Austria and Bavaria, groups of "beautiful" and "ugly" Perchtas confronted each other during carnival; later, only the "beautiful" remained. Their name preserves the trace of an ancient cult: Perchta (whom canonist and inquisitors identified with Diana and Herodias) was one of the names of the nocturnal divinity,

[24] Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe: A Descriptive Survey* (Memorial University of Newfoundland, A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, April 1973), 54-72.

[25] Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 36-39.

[26] Garlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 6-7, 91, 258, 262-263.

> harbinger of prosperity, to whom the ecstatic women paid homage. In the Tyrol the belief that the passing by of the Perchta procures abundance endured for a long time. In Rumania, as we have seen, Irodeasa and Doamna Zânelor still live in the ceremonies of the *călușari*.[27]

But the masquerades related to Perchta were not the only carnivalesque rituals where witches appeared in Tyrol and other Austrian regions. The "Huttlerlauf" of Thaur, in the region of Hall, Tyrol, is centered around masks called Huttler. They wear costumes made of rags, remnants of various materials and bits of wood. They are usually accompanied by some witches and the crops are thought to depend on the visit of this composite procession.[28] The Bockreiter, or goat-rider of Absam, had a beardless face mask and his head and shoulders were covered by a big, red neckerchief. He rode on a horse made of a stick, whose head was adorned with large horns and a red tongue, and whose tail was long and hairy. A witch, even more grotesque than the Bockreiter, drove the horse by its horns and agitated her broomstick. She wore an ugly costume and a terrifying face mask.[29]

While approaching the witch's carnivalesque masks, it is necessary to take into consideration the historical evolutions. Not each type of mask is still in use; sometimes, the contemporary rituals are far from the ancient practices and beliefs. With regards to the survival of the witch figure and its capacity to adapt itself, we may take a look at the contemporary carnival in the town of Imst (Tyrol), called the "Schemenlauf."[30] Karl Meuli showed that the word "scimo, scemo," in Old High German, and "scheme" in Middle High German, meant phantom, or spirit of the dead people. The Schemenlauf is, therefore, "the running of the spirits," a period of disorder and violence, with many different masks dancing in the streets of Imst. The witches are a very important group in this Tyrolian carnival: their numbers go from 6 or 8 up to 32. They wear a traditional dress, the dirndl, a white apron and a red skirt, but the element that individualizes them is the face mask. Susan Jackson gives a description of a witch mask, based on a record from 1938, realized by Dönner in his book on the Tyrolian carnival:

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[27] Garlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 193.

[28] Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 131-134.

[29] Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 138-139.

[30] Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 95-117.

> Her full mask, consisting of several parts, is covered with warts on the cheeks, neck, and forehead. There are bristles on her pointed chin and she has a crooked nose. [...] Her repulsive mouth, ringed with boar teeth, is movable, enabling her not only to drink and smoke but also to snap at people. The half masks over nose and chin are almost constantly in motion.[31]

The group of witches is under the direct supervision and control of a superior figure, the witch-mother. In the procession, there is a witches' cauldron and each one of them carries a broom, used to scare or to amuse the audience. One should not try to take the broom away from a witch. The offended witch and all her sisters will answer badly, by a punishment that is not always just theatrical. But, usually, the most important activity of the witches of Imst is to dance, on a special music, played by a band whose role is to accompany them during the whole procession.

In neighbouring Switzerland, witch masks are at least as interesting and as numerous as in Austria. The carnival of the valley of Lötschental, in the canton Valais, was extensively studied by scholars, in books and articles. The main mask of this carnival, called the "Tschäggättä" or "Roitschäggättä," may be linked to witchcraft and magical practices. The mask provokes fear and astonishment. Carved in wood, it has a big, hooked nose, large, strange eyes, and a mouth with sharp, rare teeth. The hair is made of sheep wool or animal fur. The behaviour is savage and violent, and this determined many punitive measures taken by the authorities. The Tschäggättä scare women and children and they make an awful noise wherever they pass. They have a large cowbell attached to a belt, and a wooden stick, sometimes decorated. The costume is made of fur (domestic animals, such as goat or sheep, are used for this purpose). From a morphological and a functional point of view, the Tschäggättä can be assimilated with a witch, a spirit or a demon. The similarities with the Schemenlauf are quite remarkable, maybe tracing an idea of alpine continuity.

[31] Susan Jackson, *Some Masking Customs of German-Speaking Central Europe*, 114-115.

The witches are not only present in the Valais carnival masquerades. In the March region of the canton Schwyz, on the shores of Walenstadt lake, or in central and Eastern Switzerland, the witches play an important role, as they bring – in a carnival parade – fear and amusement at the same time. In the March region, the witches, with their hideous masks, similar to those of the Tschäggättä, announce the opening of the carnival, on the eve of the 6th of January. Werner Röllin states that the witches' masks in the March region are recent and influenced by the circulation of the carnivalesque ideas and types, although he gives some examples dating back to the 19th century.[32] Röllin gives even a chronological list of the witch masks types in the March region.[33] In Staretschwil (Aargau), the "Polteri," mannequin representing winter and the past year, is hanged and then burnt on the public market (square), while a group of witches, adorned with typical masks and holding their brooms, are dancing happily around the stake. What an irony to think that, in 16th-17th centuries, under more sinister circumstances, in many regions of Switzerland, there were the witches that stood on the stake, while many communities watched them burn and rejoiced at this barbarian spectacle! In Einsiedeln (Schwyz), the old hunchback witch is present amongst various masks, with outfits specific of the 19th century.[34] In Wollerau (Schwyz), in 1939, a local carver invented a type of wooden mask, very popular since then, as the

[32] Werner Röllin, "Zu Diffusion einer Maske ('Märchler Rölli')," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde/ Archives suisses des traditions populaires* 76, Heft 1-2 (1980): 124 ("24.Febr. 1892: Hexen, Rölli, Dominos und andere Vermummte zeigten sich in solcher Anzahl…," "3.Febr. 1883: Nur Hexen zum Gaudium der Jugend auf Lachens Strassen.").

[33] Werner Röllin, "Zu Diffusion einer Maske ('Märchler Rölli')," 130:
1955 Amaliahexen in Galgenen,
1959 Stockberghexen in Siebnen (angeblich als Wiederaufnahme und Ersatz einer in der Obermarch im 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert existenten Tannchrieshexe),
1961 Waldhexen in Siebnen,
1965/66 Dürrbachhexen in Schübelbach,
1975 Moorhexen in Tuggen,
1977/78 Schipflochhexe in Altendorf.

[34] Werner Röllin, "Entstehung und Formen der heutigen Schwyzer Maskenlandschaft," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde / Archives suisses des traditions populaires* 74, Heft 3-4 (1978): 158-159.

"Wollerauer Hexen." This model spread to Wiler, where a new local type of "Hexe" was born.[35]

We have been giving above some examples of witch masks used in (alpine) carnivals of various cultural regions of Europe. There is an important question that emerges here: what is the origin of the witch masks in carnivals? While trying to find an answer, we may follow at least two paths of interpretation, but they both require much methodological caution. First, there is the possibility of cultural survivals and transformation of ancient figures and images which can be taken into account, be it related to fertility rituals, as those described by Ginzburg, or not. The witch-like figure of the Swiss Tschäggättä, the Berschtln, Perschtln or Perchten of Austria and Germany, with their direct connection to the Wild Hunt, suggest that the witches in carnival processions come from the night of the times and that they embody ancient magical beliefs and fears. The typical marks of these archaic masks, as well as the functional similarities one can observe constitute an argument in favour of the survivalist interpretation. On the other hand, a close attention paid to chronology is mandatory. It could be rewarding to observe, for each case we discussed, the first mention of the apparition of a certain type of witch mask. As we noticed in two cases, a Sicilian and a Tyrolian one, there are witch masks dating back to the 18th century. For the previous centuries, it is very difficult to gather details on witch masks used in carnivals: information is, at best, scarce, if not nonextant. A hypothesis to be taken into consideration is that this kind of mask might be a creation of the 18th century, when the witch hunts calmed down and witchcraft was regarded as a delusion and a source of amusement, not as a real threat for the good functioning of society. This hypothesis could be underpinned by lots of historical details: for some witch figures and masks, anthropologists found information of the precise year they appeared in carnival processions. A similar hypothesis is given as tenable by Werner Röllin, who worked on the chronology of apparition of diverse types of witch masks in Swiss carnivals:

[35] Werner Röllin, "Entstehung und Formen der heutigen Schwyzer Maskenlandschaft," 155-156, 164 (a photographic image of the Wollerauer Hexe).

> Ganz jung sind die eigentlichen Hexenlarven. Keine geht in ihrem Ursprung vor das 19. Jahrhundert zurück. Die spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Hexenprozesse waren eine so schauerliche und heisse Angelegenheit, dass niemand gewagt hätte, Hexen und Hexenverbrennungen an der Fasnacht zu verulken. Hexenlarven sind daher erst im späten 18. Jahrhundert denkbar, wurden doch auch im Lande Schwyz nach 1753/54 Frauen als Hexen gefoltert, bis sie sich selbst entleibten. Der heutige "Hexenrummel" ist auch im Lande Schwyz als das Produkt des 20. Jahrhunderts zu betrachten.[36]

Furthermore, some contemporary witch masks are obviously inspired by film and television, by cartoons or publicity. It is obvious, in this respect, that even if witches replaced older figures, ancient pagan goddesses they once served and followed, they are marvellously adapted to contemporary life and to the new forms of carnival…

Witch Masks in Theatre

In fact, the carnival, a popular feast in continuous movement and transformation, with its permanent shows and its spectators, serves as a passage to the universe of theatre. It is in the course of the long historical evolution of the carnival that the ritual dimension of the mask gradually became a spectacular, aesthetic one, but without completely losing its ritual, sacred roots. In the following lines, we'll focus on the presence and use of witch masks in theatre, taking into consideration some examples that can be related to the carnivalesque *larvae*, "schemen" and other weird figures.

In the first place it is of importance to take into consideration the fact that the passage from ritual to theatre through carnival depends on the status of the witch, who gradually becomes a literary character, a presence which does not only embody the fears or hidden desires of a community, but a presence

[36] Werner Röllin, "Entstehung und Formen der heutigen Schwyzer Maskenlandschaft," 181. Werner Röllin mentions though a historical record of the 18th century about the masks of the witches, in connection with those of the devils, 180: "Thomas Fassbind bezeugt die Existenz von Allgemeinformen einzelner Maskengattungen wie Teufel, Hexe im 18. Jahrhundert. Diese waren aber noch wenig differenziert."

playing a part in a story, interfering with other characters' existence. A certain mental distance is needed in order to operate the transfer from society to the stage. The German term *Verfremdung* could be useful here with its Brechtian connotations, because this mental theatrical distance paradoxically allows the author and the spectator to move away from the "real" witches but also to make a close-up on their appearance and behaviour, creating thus different types, going from the treacherous beauty of young witches to the monstrous or weird ugliness of old ones.

We don't know exactly when this transfer to the stage was operated, but it seems that it is during the Renaissance that the medieval archaic old woman or midwife was enriched with the qualities of rediscovered figures of Antiquity: Circe, Hecate, Medea.[37] At the same time, the old witch would be the instrument of the evil/devil in rural areas and stories, whereas the urban and more cultured circles would prefer wizards, magicians and alchemists.

This could be the reason why we can find cunning old women/ witches in short stories, legends, miracles and fabliaux at the end of the Middle Age and at the beginning of the Renaissance. Hans Sachs' carnival play, *Der Teufel mit dem alten Weib*, dating back to 1545, is one of the few texts written to be performed, but it still proves the interest for the old woman (having the characteristics of the witch) as a farcical character, with a high probability for its interpreter to have been wearing a mask similar to those seen in Bruegel the Elder's already mentioned painting. If we talk about the high-culture of the Renaissance, the privilege goes to the masculine withholders of magic powers, growing in importance because of their association with the development of science and universal knowledge. The Germanic Faustian figure became more and more complex during the 16th century, when the witch hunt grew considerably and a large number of demonological texts, such as *Malleus Maleficarum* or Jean Bodin's *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, formatted the minds of the social and religious groups. Of course, when talking about masks, it is less a dramatic or tragic character such as Dr. Faustus who would be associated with a mask, than the false alchemist, Bartolomeo, in Giordano Bruno's *Il Candelaio* (published in 1582) or, later, Subtle in Ben Jonson's *Alchemist*, or the magician in Pierre Corneille's *L'Illusion comique*.

[37] See Charles Zika, "Images of Circe and Discourses of Witchcraft, 1480-1580," *Zeitenblicke*, no. 1 (2002), 1-38, http://www.zeitenblicke.historicum.net/2002/01/zika/zika.html

It is only with W. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in 1606, that witches really came into playwrights' attention. But here too, as a few years later in *The Tempest*, they are rather savage spirit-like presences than characters with a consistent reality, in opposition to Prospero, the civilised intellectual magician. The witches in *Macbeth* have stirred up much interest because they were no more those incarnations of evil other characters talked about, evoked or invoked, as it was the case with the witch Sycorax, Caliban's mother. They had no individual names, but they were present, and were seen and heard. So, when it comes to the staging of the play, one has to show these witches. We don't know exactly how they appeared on the Elizabethan stage, but as women were not allowed to play, male actors must have worn masks.[38]

The Romanian stage director Ion Sava (1900-1947) conceived in 1945 *Macbeth with masks*, considered to be one of the most revolutionary performances of the Romanian stage directing. Born in Moldavia, Sava was well acquainted with traditional Romanian masks of old women and old men, of devils, animals and spirits, widespread in the region. His personal artistic talent overlapped this rich cultural heritage. At the same time, his penchant for the grotesque and the carnival world, as well as the strong influence E. G. Craig's works had exerted on his visionary theatre, led him to assert that theatre could not exist in the absence of masks. The reason he gave was that on stage one has to confront the manifestation of the supernatural, of fantasy, legends and myths, through the apparition of imaginary beings, who are beyond humanity, beings who populate our dreams, our desires and phantasms.

Despite the critics and the lack of understanding he had to confront himself to during an unfavourable historical moment, when theatre was dominated by a naturalistic approach, Ion Sava decided to use almost 100 masks with the help of the sculptor Ion Tureatcă (1906-2000) and of the surrealist painter Jules Perahim (1914-2008), in charge with the settings. The fact that Ion Sava paid a special attention to the witches, and explained their essential part in the Shakespearian play is extremely interesting. In one of his articles, published in October 1945 he highlights "the richness of the magic frame"

[38] François Laroque, "Mythe, magie et représentation du mal," in *Le Mal et ses masques*, ed. Gisèle Venet (Lyon: ENS Editions, 1998), 32-49.

inspired by Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, frame that gives, together with the black magic formulas in the text, a "fantastic, strange and supernatural value" to the play.[39] From the director's point of view, these "old women whose faces have nothing human, are the weird personification of the Antic Hecate," but multiplied. And Sava was not wrong since we know that Hecate was represented in Antiquity with three faces or three bodies. She was worshipped at the cross-roads and was associated "with the chthonian realm and the ghosts of the dead," as a patron goddess of witchcraft.[40]

Fig. 9. Witch masks conceived by Ion Sava (objects and drawing) for his *Macbeth*, 1946.

And as Sava wanted a larger number of witches than those specified by Shakespeare, some witches would not have been embodied by actors but would have been reduced to their mask, for technical and stage design reasons:

[39] Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului* [*The Theatricality of Theatre*] (Bucharest: Ed. Eminescu, 1981), 304.

[40] *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 671-673.

> The witches and the ghosts in Macbeth, due to the fact that the text needs them, have to float through the stage, and then disappear, evaporate in the airs [...] an actor would not be able to solve this kind of demand better than a mask that gently unloosens, and, pulled by a string, can disappear in the stage attic, taking its costume of veil along with it.[41]

As we can see in the drawings done by Sava himself, and from the masks that have been used for the performance and still kept at the Theatre Museum of the National Theatre in Bucharest, the appearance of these weird sisters balanced between the long crooked-nose-face (resembling to a nightbird with its beak and big round eyes – the barn owl: *striga/strix aluco*[42]) and the flat face, where the absence of the nose and the same big wide opened eyes oriented the spectator more in the direction of the spirits of the dead and even of an incarnation of Death itself.

Ion Sava called them "old-women-witches" (*babe vrăjitoare*) with an expression combining the two hypostasis we have already encountered in Carnival masks, showing indirectly not only the persistence of beliefs and magical practices in Romanian rural areas, but also how much Sava was indebted to the 19th century images of the witch, although he recycled them through an Avant-guard artistic filter. It would be important to open a small parenthesis and specify here that the Avant-guard experiments led by Marcel Ianco (who was a Romanian himself[43]) with his Dada masks, or the expressionist representations of human faces, like those inspired by E. Munch's *Scream*, are likely to have had a certain influence upon Ion Sava's theatrical vision of the witches.

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[41] Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului*, 305.

[42] In folkloric literature the witch can take the appearance of a bird, for example in south Moldavia, Tecuci, as one may see in Artur Gorovei, *Credinți și superstiții ale poporului român* (Bucharest: Editura Grai și suflet – Cultura Națională, 1995), 260, 287.

[43] See a note made by Hugo Ball in his diary in the 24th of May 1916: Hugo Ball, *Dada à Zurich. Le mot et l'image (1916-1917)*, trad. Sabine Wolf (Dijon: Les presses de réel, 2006), 38-39; and Ștefana Pop-Curșeu "Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu și fascinația dadaistă pentru reciclarea măștilor," *Studii și cercetări științifice. Seria Filologie*, no. 40 (2018), 41-52.

Fig. 10. Eduard Munch, *The Scream*, detail of lithograph, 1895. CC BY 4 The Munch Museum; blog.britishmuseum.org.

Coming back to the mask of witches in the 17th century and later on, it is quite clear that Shakespeare (there where his texts have not been censored as they were in France for example) left a very interesting legacy from this point of view too. A legacy that still has to be closely investigated and that still represents a challenge for theatre stage directors.

As for other occurrences, there are documents where witch costumes are signalled very probably with masks, in Court Ballets. In England, at the Royal Court, a ballet that implies the presence of witches is Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queenes* (1609), where eleven witches were impersonated by male dancers and they appeared "all differently attir'd; some, with rats on their heads; some on theyr shoulders; others with ointment-pots at theyr girdles; All with spindells, timbrells, rates, or other venieficall instruments, making a confused noyse, with strange gestures." At a certain moment they danced armed with brooms, in the circular dance of witches' sabbath.[44] The

[44] See Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque. Dance, Costume, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 187-199, quoting B. Jonson (II, 96-9) (II, 29-36).

leading Dame of these witches incarnated the image of Discordia,[45] inspired from the ancient Gorgon, and she appeared "her frock tuck'd, hare hayre knotted, and folded with viper; in her hand, a Torch made of a dead-Man's arme, lighted; girded with a snake, to whome they all did reverence."

Barbara Ravelhofer, in her study of *The Early Stuart Masque*, also talks about the *Shrovetide Masque*, in 1633, where a male dancer called Mr. Boye "played a witch in a sky-blue taffeta gown, for which role he had been provided with an artificial hump."[46] This sort of ballets and masquerades is representative for the noble theatrical amusement that would have a real expansion in France, especially at the Court of Louis XIV.[47] In France, the figures of the witches and magicians appear in several court ballets: *Ballet du Château de Bicêtre* (1632), *Ballet de la nuit* (1653), *Ballet des noces de Pélée et Thétis* (1654). Among the sumptuous outfits, documents attest the use of witch and wizards costumes, with bat wings and small diabolic faces on the belly, knees, elbows and shoulders, adapting thus in a baroque way a specific characteristic of the late medieval devils' masques and costumes from the Mystery Plays.

Indeed, we have here all the composing elements of styled witch portraits, that were to be revisited during Romanticism in combination with folkloric influences and that the theatrical genre of the Fairy Plays and the Operettas/Musical comedies were to continue to stage with a special effervescence during the 19th century. It is actually in the 20th century, especially in cinematographic productions, that these baroque images of supernatural empowered women would become clichés, in the fantasy genre.

Even in Romania, after 1848, when writers started to write original plays in Romanian, they were inspired by characters coming from the Western theatre and from the local folkloric culture, among which the old cunning witches could not miss. We have thus famous old women characters such as Baba Hârca, in the homoymous operetta by Matei Millo (1814-1897) and Baba

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[45] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia del cavaliere Cesare Ripa Perugino*, Tomo secondo (Perugia: Nella Stamperia di Piergiovanni Constantini, 1765), 227-229.

[46] Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque*, 178.

[47] See the complex study of Marie-Françoise Christout, *Le Ballet de Cour au XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1987).

Rada, the good witch, who transforms herself in a fairy after she is drowned by the desperate crowd that fears drought and evil spells, in the fairy-play *Sânziana and Pepelea*, by Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890).

In general, literature historians and ethnographers agree with the assertion that the modern image of the old witch with crooked nose comes from a generalisation of a type that has been fixed in the 19th century, especially due to the adaptation of fairy-tales for the stage. *Hansel and Gretel* is such an example, where the witch played an important part, as a theatrical masked character in Humperdinck's operetta, then in the numerous filmic adaptation through the 20th century starting with Méliès, and still evolving in the contemporary productions. But this is another story and a study to come. It is undeniable that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, under the influence of symbolism and expressionism, carnival masks came again into the attention of artists and theatre people, playwrights and stage directors. Great names such as Edward Gordon Craig and Maurice Maeterlinck, Meyerhold and Antonin Artaud preached a coming back, a reloading of all the theatrical legacy and powers of the carnival, its energies, marionettes, costumes and masks.

It is impossible to analyse here the importance of the witch mask in that period and the fascination it exerted, but we would like to quote at least one example, as it is representative for the existing trend: the Flemish playwright Michel de Ghelderode in whose theatre the figure of the witch is a turning point for intrigues. Three of his plays: *La Pie sur le gibet. Farce d'après Breughel l'Ancien* (1935), *Mademoiselle Jaïre* (1934) and *D'un diable qui prêcha merveilles. Mystère pour marionnettes* (1934), as well as other texts inspired by the medieval theatrical atmosphere of Pieter Bruegel's visual universe, revisit and shed a new light upon the witch and her presence on stage. Foolish and scary, medieval and childish, malefic and tender, the witch is an ambiguous character, always manipulating the others, but who is herself a puppet in the hands of the Devil, a prisoner of her own condition. This could be, in short, the portrait of the witch as it has been imagined by the Flemish playwright. Often being the core of the farcical conflict, her presence highlights the deep discrepancy between the manifestation of a human desire and

phantasm and the actual powers of witchcraft, illusory but real at the same time, mirroring the powers of the stage and the powers of a rediscovered theatricality.[48]

In modern and contemporary theatre, the witch has not known the same burst of interest like in cinema, excepting theatre productions for children and puppet theatre,[49] where the witch is the bad character *par excellence*. But in the 1960's, there was a revival of the ritual dimension of theatre. It was less the European classical witch that interested the stage directors, than strange and more exotic figures of oriental goddesses of light and darkness, equivalents of the Furies, of Artemis/Diane or of the dark Hecate.

A last example that we shall give is a performance staged in the 90's by the Romanian director Mihai Măniuţiu (b. 1954). Măniuțiu has always treated in a subtle artistic manner the presence of ritual masks on stage, being fascinated by the expressions of good and evil, of the sacred and the infernal. The exceptional character of this performance is given by the original staging, directing and acting solutions found by Măniuțiu, which reconnect theatre and magic, and embody the phantasm, the weirdness, the forces of the Beyond. From the point of view of the images of witchcraft, the masks conceived for the performance *The Illuminated Week*, after Mihail Săulescu, in 1990, are extremely engaging. Măniuțiu used horned devilish masks, as well as spirits masks, and masked presences of death, which are all from the same realm recreating the ambiguous universe of these weird forces of the evil. The mask, says Mihai Măniuțiu, means "going away in order to come back, taking spiritually a distance from his own being so far as to touch the limit where one has the feeling to lose himself, all this in order to return inside oneself as if in an unknown place, towards an I not yet unveiled."

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[48] Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, "La sorcellerie et la sorcière dans le théâtre de Michel de Ghelderode," in *Pour une théâtralité picturale : Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012), 184-198.

[49] See a beautiful Czech example of a witch as a wooden puppet from around 1900: Piotr Bogatyrev, "Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre," in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press, 2001), 91.

Fig. 11.-12. Mihai Măniuțiu, *The Illuminated Week* (after Mihail Săulescu).

What are the conclusions we can draw at the end of this paper, that gave us the opportunity of a long voyage, both in time and space? Of course, as we suggested in the first lines of the text, our approach was full of dangers, first of all methodological ones: we did our best not to avoid, but to solve them. What we managed to point out was meant to open perspectives and bridges for further researches. A problem that has no definitive answer here (but can we really imagine such an answer?) is: How old is, *really*, the mask of the witch in the carnivalesque processions? The elements of a possible answer that we tried to sketch have a certain solidity, but further studies could, of course, refine the chronological data and bring new documents and evidences into discussion. By investigating even closer the links between carnival and theatre, from the Renaissance to the present, other dimensions of the problems raised here could be illuminated. Another issue that deserves a profound reflection in the future – and we are eager to begin it – is: At what extent the carnivalesque rituals, as the clerics of the past knew them, played a role in the birth of the stereotypes related to witchcraft during the great witch-hunts, especially in the imaginary genesis of the witches' sabbath?

On the other hand, if one places the mask of the witch on an aesthetic ground, where there are less shadows than in the anthropological approach of the problem, it is clear that one faces an essentially theatrical apparition. The

witch, with or without a mask (but especially when she wears one) produces a strong effect on the spectators and manages to materialize their phantasms and fears, but also to seduce them. No one else, among the great cultural characters, manages to reach such an intensity of contradictory affective states!

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Ioan Pop-Curşeu *(b. 4.02.1978, Ocna-Mureş) is Professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. He has defended his first Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Geneva in 2007, and the second at the Babeş-Bolyai University, in 2011. In 2015, he defended his habilitation dissertation at Babeş-Bolyai University and in 2016 he became a member of Academia Europaea, section:* Film, Media and Visual Studies*. His research interests are concerned with film aesthetics, art criticism and image theory, nineteenth-century literature and culture, as well as anthropological aspects of magic and witchcraft. He is the author of several books. The most recent are:* Magie şi vrăjitorie în cultura română. Istorie, literatură, mentalităţi *(2013),* Manual de estetică *(2014). He wrote dozens of articles on various themes, writers and films. He is the director of the* IWACTA *research project.*

Ştefana Pop-Curșeu*, Ph.D. at the University of Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle, in Theatre and Scenic Arts, is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film of Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, where she teaches antique and medieval theatre history and modern theory of theatre. She published many articles in theatre studies, in France and Romania. She translated alone or in collaboration with Ioan Pop-Curşeu a dozen of books from French to Romanian, such as Samuel Beckett,* Sfârșit de partidă*, 2000, L.-F. Céline,* Convorbiri cu Profesorul Y*, 2006, Pascal Vrebos,* Avarul II*, 2010, Gilles Deleuze,* Imaginea-mişcare *and* Imaginea-timp*, 2012, 2013), and is the author of the book:* Pour une théâtralité picturale. Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs *(2012). She wrote in collaboration with Ioan Pop-Curșeu two theatre scripts and directed two performances based on these scripts (*Killed by Friendly Fire*, 2014, and* Every Tzara has his Dada*, 2016). She is also, since 2011, the artistic director of the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca.*