

## *Theatre as a Form of Greatness*

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**Abstract:** In her attempt of proving the theatricality of the theatre, Maria Vodă Căpușan cultivates a solidly assimilated bibliography, as well as last minute analytical instruments. Her essays have a predominantly theoretical nature, referring less to a certain play or performance, and more to the theatrical phenomena, with its fundamental dimensions and conceptualizations. The author believes that the mythical scripts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century drama conserve their modelling and integrative functions regardless of the denying passion of different literary, avant-garde or simply modernist movements. Within her books, Maria Vodă Căpușan offers theoretical syntheses worthy of interest from the perspective of new methodological and epistemological approaches applied with a critical discernment and inconspicuous erudition.

**Keywords:** theatricality, theatre, myth, mask, mirroring.

In her debut volume, *Teatru și mit [Theatre and Myth]* (1976), Maria Vodă Căpușan explores the connection between the modern theatre phenomena and the area of the myth, proving the modalities and perspectives through which the characters in the plays are structures within the context of the reference to “exemplary heroes”, or highlighting the characteristics and status of the “ludic reality” in the drama script etc. Theatre is perceived as both a literary genre with specific and complex determinations, and especially as an art with a syncretic, synthetic and totalizing aspect. A very important element is the fact that the modern representations of the myths are configured from the angle of some “geological structures”, consisting of several layers, levels

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and representations and having, as such, the deceiving aspect of a palimpsest: "The text in itself meets several levels overlaying into a geological structure, the so-called 'memory' of every modern act of mythical inspiration, updating, with or without approval, in a loyal manner or by contrast, the numerous prior adaptations of the myth"<sup>2</sup>.

Maria Vodă Căpușan highlights with viable arguments the connection between anachronism and theatrical temporality ("Far from being an invention of the 20th century, anachronism still claims nowadays a special part in the contemporary literature and especially theatre, and with good reason, for the moderns cultivate it deliberately [...], fully exploiting its paradox nature in terms of time, fully using its potential of aggression"<sup>3</sup>). The temporal ambiguity is amplified to a great extent by the interferences and overlapping between the mythical and historical times which disrupts the diachronic relief of the universe ("This mythical time proves to be, at the same time, reversible and irreversible, diachronic and synchronic, localized in a past, but repeatable, overcoming the temporal becoming through its very essence, which differentiates it from the daily length"<sup>4</sup>). In her theoretical endeavour, the author proves the forms and expressions which translate the theatrical representations in the field of the theatre, capitalizing a bibliography assimilated with maximum rigour, as well as actual and functional conceptual-analytical instruments. The essays in this book have, apart from their predominantly theoretical nature, a dimension of contemporaneity, as even though the author refers to a smaller extent to a

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Teatru și mit* (Dacia: Cluj-Napoca, 1976), 39: "Textul însuși întrunește mai multe nivele ce se suprapun, într-o structură geologică, acea 'memorie' a oricărei piese moderne de inspirație mitică, reactualizând, cu sau fără voie, fidel sau prin contrast, numeroasele adaptări anterioare ale mitului" (translated by me).

<sup>3</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Teatru și mit*, 67: "Anacronismul, departe de a fi o născocire a secolului al XX-lea, își revendică totuși astăzi un statut aparte în literatura și, mai ales, în teatrul contemporan, și pe drept cuvânt, căci modernii îl cultivă deliberat [...], exploatănd din plin caracterul său de paradox în termeni de timp, utilizând integral potențialul său de agresivitate." (translated by me).

<sup>4</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Teatru și mit*, 92: "Acest timp mitic se revelează a fi, în același timp, reversibil și ireversibil, diacronic și sincron, situat într-un trecut, dar repetabil, depășind devenirea temporală prin însăși esența sa, ce-l diferențiază de durată cotidiană" (translated by me).

certain play or performance, she explores the theatrical phenomena in its entirety, exposing its fundamental dimensions and conceptualizations. Maria Vodă Căpușan proves with viable arguments the fact that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century drama, the mythical scripts conserve their modelling and integrative echoes, even in the context of the denying attitudes of different literary, avant-garde or modernist movements.

In her book *Dramatis personae* (1980), Maria Vodă Căpușan interprets the dialectical relationship between author-actor-public from the perspective of semiotic and structuralist methodologies: “on stage, people and worlds exceed themselves toward the sign, representing by their mere existence that which they are not in the eternal and ephemeral miracle of the dramatic performance”<sup>5</sup>. The performance is transfigured and through the will of significance, an authentic conjunction between the fictional convention and reference system is performed. Moreover, she also highlights at this point the ambiguity and polysemy of the dramatic script, amplified and nuanced by a sum of modern compositional techniques and strategies. Such a technique is the “theatre within the theatre”, through which the text returns in a self-reflective manner to its own conception, assuming new reference points of the writing, in a metafictional endeavour marked by rationality and a lucid perception of its own esthetical structures and functionalities. Therefore, theatre receives through the reflexive nature he encompasses and expresses, ontological dimensions, so that the character-actor is transferred from the stage to the space of the referent (*theatrum mundi*). As a matter of fact, the play which is configured along its representation is an idea one can trace back to Calderon de la Barca, but which also had its golden age in the existentialist theatre, from the perspective of a new and dynamic approach of the human.

When studying the dramatic character, the author underlines its ambiguity generated by the semiotic representations it can assume to the extent that the mask can contribute to the attenuation or even abolition of the actor’s existential status, expressing an emblematic image of the “performance’s theatricality”. The operational concepts which sustain the demonstrations and

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Dramatis personae* (Dacia: Cluj-Napoca, 1980), 73: “pe scenă, oameni și lumi se depășesc pe sine spre semn, închipuind, prin chiar ființa lor, ceea ce nu sunt, în eternul și efemerul miracol al reprezentației dramatice” (translated by me).

interpretations from *Dramatis personae* are “the world as a theatre”, “the mask”, but also the “crisis of the specular forms” experienced by the current drama literature. We are, to a certain extent, such as previously underlined on numerous occasions, in a paradoxical situation in which the performance is in search of itself, finding some rejuvenating forms and formulas in the different dramatic structures which confer it aesthetic legitimacy. This book also exploits the methodological resources of the new theories of communication, which values the sematic valences of the non-verbal language. For example, Maria Vodă Căpușan notices the interventions of the author, which have the purpose of characterizing the character in *O scrisoare pierdută* [*A Lost Letter*] by I.L. Caragiale, underlying the function of the elements of non-verbal and auditory non-verbal behaviour. Maria Vodă Căpușan refers to the electoral moment: “The incapacity of the speaker to maintain not only the logic flux, but the actual flux of the words’ utterance, through diction and respiration. He continuously interrupts his speech, suspending his phrases; the parenthetical indications of the drama author [...] mention at all times the fact that the speaker is overwhelmed with a real or simulated emotion, cleans his swelter, drinks a glass of water, is on the verge of bursting into tears and so and so forth”<sup>6</sup>. The interdependency relation between these modalities of communication is interpreted in a fine manner by the author: “Caragiale’s plays of elocution are therefore configured specifically as a bilateral communication, where the reaction of the receiver is always felt as present, modulating as a consequence the communicated message, in its form and event, in its substance, orienting it in a crescendo of incoherency and in an involution of intelligibility which at times go as far as the extreme point of interruption”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Dramatis personae*, 91: “incapacitatea oratorului de a menține nu numai fluxul logic, ci chiar fluxul rostirii cuvintelor, prin dicțiune și respirație. El se întrerupe mereu lăsând frazele suspendate în aer; indicațiile parentetice ale dramaturgului [...] menționează mereu că vorbitorul, năpădit de o emoție reală sau simulată, își șterge nădușeala, bea un pahar cu apă, e pe punctul să izbucnească în lacrimi și așa mai departe” (translated by me).

<sup>7</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Dramatis personae*, 127: “Piesa de oratorie caragialiană se configurează astfel specific ca o comunicare bilaterală, unde reacția receptorului se face mereu resimțită ca prezentă, modulând în consecință mesajul comunicat, în forma și chiar substanța sa, orientându-l într-un crescendo al incoerenței și într-o involuție a inteligibilității, duse uneori până la punctul extrem al întreruperii” (translated by me).

In her book *Despre Caragiale* [*About Caragiale*] (1982), Maria Vodă Căpușan highlights the existence of an “axiological crisis” in the works of I.L. Caragiale, performing a live, dynamic and modern reading in which the suggestions of semiotics, those of textual analysis and of the aesthetics of reception are perfectly assimilated and applied in a balanced manner, with a methodological expressivity and epistemic relevance. The fundamental structural domains of his works are analysed: the comical universe (*Magnum mophtologicum*) and the tragic universe (*Absurda adâncime – The absurd depth*), fields which do not totally oppose, but, on the contrary, are characterized by multiple overlapping and through mutual networking. The trifle is perceived as an emblematic sign of this world, but also as a myth, the author revealing the dimensions of a space of derision, the “trifle space”, which generates, in many ways, an existence led as a carnival and a “parade of masks”. The trifle is revealing for the world of Caragiale, revealing the “void which creeps everywhere”, “a reality heading towards perdition and relies as compensation on masks to hide its nothingness”. At the same time, Maria Vodă Căpușan signals the “mad parade of masks, their sterile race, lacking of sense” in which “the external face adhered up to replacement with that which it hides”. Caragiale’s characters therefore cross a drastic identity crisis, transferring their existential qualities to the “trifle man” who lives in a condition of total bovarism, under the empire of the text, of the quote excerpted from the publications of the epoch, and who becomes a gnoseological slogan and a modality of manipulation of the others. The quote “becomes the landmark of the trifle universe, falsified in its nature, presented by Caragiale as the sign of a distinct ‘reality’, a mask in itself of a substance which does not actually exist and can survive only through showing some precarious appearances meant to hide the ontological void... It is an impure game of convenience and exposure. Here, the ‘textual realism’ lives the demystification of its own delusion”<sup>8</sup>. Caragiale’s tragic universe is analysed through the perspective of

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<sup>8</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Despre Caragiale* (Dacia: Cluj-Napoca, 1982), 42: “devine eșantion al universului moftologic, trucat în esența sa, pe care îl înfățișează Caragiale, semn al unei ‘realități’ aparte, ea însăși mască a unei substanțe ce nu există de fapt și ființează doar prin afișarea unor aparențe precare menite să ascundă vidul ontologic... E un joc impur, al conivenței și demascării. Aici, ‘realismul textual’ își trăiește demistificarea propriilor iluzii” (translated by me).

several modalities of writings (investigation, madness discourse and mythical discourse). The play *Năpasta* [*The Tribulation*] is evaluated consequently as an “ontological interrogation” from the perspective of theatricality perceived as a system of signs. The lucid and experienced Reading of the drama text leads the author towards the exploration of some privileged fields: theatre as existence and theatre within theatre. The play’s performance is perceived beyond the sematic horizon of its text, as the word is processed within the perimeter of the theatre performance in a decanting manner, undergoing multiple refinements and reflections to such an extent that, as Irina Petraș points out, “the world as a theatre represented on stage and the theatre in the street, vulgarized in the most noble sense, through tricks perpetually re-discovered by drama authors, highlights the ineffable interference of the real with the imaginary”.

*Pragmatica teatrului* [*The Pragmatics of Theatre*] (1987) is a modern approach of the literary text from the viewpoint of pragmatics and communicational semantics, while *Camil Petrescu – Realia* (1988) forwards interesting points of view on the author of *Jocului ielelor* [*The Round of the Banshees*]. Laurențiu Ulici notices, apart from the complex and heterogeneous aspect of Maria Vodă Căpușan’s books, also the temptations of the paraphrase and of the divagation: “This centripetal orientation of the summary of a book towards the central theme (the character and his relations, the theatre’s reception, the performance, the theatre’s pragmatics) includes an array of divagations, links, centrifugal intertextualities and, even more, literary texts of the author (stories with a meaning, poetic fragments), all requesting jointly the distributive attention of the reader, as greater as the jump from one idea to another within the same thematic sequence is very fast [...]. The reader can find in correct and convincing paraphrases, written with a scholarly delicacy of resuming basically everything which was theorized in matters of theatre at a global scale from our Camil Petrescu to present times”<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Laurențiu Ulici, *Literatura română contemporană* (Eminescu: Bucharest, 1995), 296: “Această adunare centripetă a sumarului unei cărți spre tema centrală (personajul și relațiile lui, receptarea teatrului, spectacolul, pragmatica teatrului) include o sumedenie de divagații, trimiteri, intertextualități centrifugale, ba, uneori, și texte literare ale autoarei (povestiri cu tâlc, pasaje poetice), toate la un loc solicitând cititorului o atenție distributivă, cu atât mai

In *Marin Sorescu sau Despre tânjirea spre cerc* [*Marin Sorescu, or On Yearning for the Circle*] (1993), the author suggests some defining comments which encompass the syncretic spirit of Sorescu's works in true colours, with no interpretative dissonance: "Sorescu's poem in poetry, theatre or prose oscillates perpetually between the quintessential lyrical element and the essential epical element, that of locating in time some facts, or some spiritual and humanly felt events [...]. Sorescu is translated and translatable in almost all the languages of the planet... A great composer of images, he is still distinguished as a myth creator"<sup>10</sup>. Within her books, Maria Vodă Căpușan offers theoretical syntheses worthy of interest from the perspective of some legitimate methodological and epistemological approaches, applied with a critical discernment and inconspicuous erudition.

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mare cu cât trecerea de la o idee la alta, înlăuntrul aceleiași secvențe tematice, este foarte rapidă [...]. Cititorul poate găsi în parafraze corecte și convingătoare, de erudit cu finețe a rezumării, cam tot ce s-a teoretizat în materie de teatru pe plan mondial de la Camil Petrescu al nostru încoace" (translated by me).

<sup>10</sup> Maria Vodă Căpușan, *Marin Sorescu sau Despre tânjirea spre cerc* (Scrisul Românesc: Craiova, 1993), 87: "Poemul sorescian în poezie, teatru sau proză oscilează perpetuu între liricul prin excelență și epicul esențial, cel al spunerii în timp a unor întâmplări de fapte sau de suflet și simțământ omenesc [...]. Sorescu este tradus și traductibil în mai toate limbile pământului... Mare creator de imagini, el se impune totuși în primul rând drept creator de mituri" (translated by me).