

AN EVIL LETTER, AND THE DESTINIES OF THE FORGOTTEN PASSACAGLIA. THE TWILIGHT OF THE THIRD SYMPHONY “OVID” BY SIGISMUND TODUȚĂ¹

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SUMMARY. The author does not intend to write a booklet about the Symphony No. 3 “Ovid” (1957) by Sigismund Toduță, but rather to complete the missing pieces of its history. Still in 2004, the manuscript of the symphony’s finale was still missing. With its discovery in 2013, research confirmed its uniqueness and originality. Now, in 2022, at the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Toduță Foundation, we reveal those derogatory remarks that led to the ‘amputated’ publication of the Passacaglia followed by the symphony’s fade into oblivion. All began with a young university assistant from Bucharest who addressed a letter to the only Romanian citizen with a PhD in music (Rome, 1933), the nationally and internationally recognized composer, awarded by George Enescu himself. How did this 28 years old juvenile dare to write to the 51 years old master in such a defamatory tone? If it was part of a political task, whom did it serve? Who had anything to gain by removing from the Romanian musical heritage this remarkable work, composed on the two-millennium anniversary of Ovid’s birth - the adored but banished poet? Would it be fair to respect the composer’s wish and forget this troublesome Passacaglia? Wouldn’t it be a mistake against the creation itself, which once born, deserves publicity? With these questions this paper reconstructs the events, still leaving in the twilight the truth behind the faces of Ovid.

Keywords: originality, paraphrase, pastiche, restorations, rehabilitations, re-editing

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Argument

Originality – an end, at any cost?

In our opinion, originality is due to several stylistic elements which allow us to recognize and distinguish one composer from another.

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (DEX) defines originality [Cf. Fr. *originalité*] as a feature of being original, authentic, a way of being, style or particular manner.³ A highly regarded literary and historical critic and essayist, Garabet Ibrăileanu⁴, in the article *The Originality of Form*, draws attention to the mistake of absolutizing a form (1894):

“When we speak about form, we must not imagine that we are dealing with something that exists in itself, that there would be any significant difference between form and substance, because then we would make a big mistake, we would fall into metaphysics. The difference between form and substance is more of a logical difference, meant to make our analysis easier in matters of aesthetics.”⁵

1. Is originality evident and immutable?

Probably not. We often find ourselves wondering on the identity of the composer when hearing a musical work for the first time: see Schumann, *Carnival* op. 9 no.12, *Chopin*⁶, Debussy – *Iberia (Images for orchestra)* which leads us rather to Ravel’s style. Bruckner had several variants of his symphonies, often revised at the suggestion of his friends. He recommended the performance of his last unfinished symphony with the chorale *Te Deum*. Nowadays some conductors prefer to perform the symphony without this part. Mahler changed the sequence of the second and third movements of the Sixth Symphony twice with the three hammer blows. So today the symphony’s both versions work successfully (for example, Ivan Fischer prefers the first version, while Sir Simon Rattle the second). According to

³ The dictionary also adds: “strangeness, bizarreness, extravagance, novelty, eccentricity, fantasy, terribleness, specificity, sui generis, inimitable, personal, characteristic, distinctive, one’s own, special”. <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/originalitate>.

⁴ Garabet Ibrăileanu (b. May 23, 1871, Târgu Frumos – d. March 12, 1936, Bucharest) was a Romanian literary critic and historian, essayist, pedagogue, literary editor and novelist. He is one of the most influential personalities in Romanian literature of the first decades of the twentieth century, a theorist, promoter of scientific literary criticism. He published under the pseudonym Cezar Vraja. https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garabet_Ibr%C4%83ileanu
<https://www.archeus.ro/lingvistica/CautareDex?query=pasti%C8%99%C4%83&lang=ro>

⁵ https://ws-export.wmcloud.org/?format=pdf&lang=ro&page=Originalitatea_formei

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3f3-rgkbh4>

Eero Tarasti's terminology⁷, I noticed that Puccini uses signal motifs, called "pre-signs" to become act-signs and post-signs to prepare for the impact of his major themes.⁸

Unfinished works

Schubert's Unfinished Symphony (composed in 1823 and noted either as the 7th or 8th) continues to make specialists wonder. From then on, it is performed with the two complete parts and with the same boundless impact on the public.

Enescu left many works unfinished, including the last two symphonies. The problem is how much has been intervened in the text imagined by the author.

Transcriptions / adaptations

We also owe to Schubert famous transcripts: *The Trout* Piano Quintet (1819) p. IV⁹, which is the first transcription of a lied - *Die Forelle* (D550) (from D flat major to D major), or the string quartet *Death and the Girl* (1824). -26) – `Der Tod und das Mädchen` (D351). This last work will be modified after its audition, but without being heard by the author.

Even Toduță will use paraphrase and transcription on at least three occasions - *Concerto no. 3 for string orchestra "in stile antico"* (1974), *Old engravings*¹⁰ for string orchestra (1974) and *Sinfonietta "in antico stile"* (1977), motivated first by the appreciation of the works in question, and secondly by the multitude of activities and tasks that decimated his creative time. This fact would justify the epithet "antique" which he attributed to the said works: precious in value and "antique" or "old" to him.¹¹

⁷ Tarasti, Eero, *Semiotics of Classical Music: How Mozart, Brahms and Wagner talk to us*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2012, p.26.

⁸ See *La Boème*, "Mi chiamano Mimi" aria - act 1,3, or *Turandot*: "Nessun dorma" aria - act 2 and 3.

⁹ Schubert never listened to it. In *Guide de la musique symphonique*. Sous la direction de François-René Tranchefort: Fayard, 1986. p. 804 and 807.

¹⁰ *Stampe vechi* in Romanian.

¹¹ Only the first part of *Concerto no.3* represents the new element of the classification, while the theme of the second part, *Aria*, is a different orchestration of the second part belonging to an earlier work - *Divertimento* for string orchestra (1951) and the "Old engravings" is the renaming of the third part of the Concerto mentioned above – that of the Danza. *Sinfonietta "in antico stile"*, in her turn, is the orchestral version of a two-decade piece, *Sonatina* for piano (1950). See: Ecaterina Banciu, Toduță's "Antiques", paper presented at Sigismund Toduță's Symposium 2008) and published at *STUDIA UBB MUSICA*, LVI, 2, 2011 (p. 189-198) <https://rt.ubbcluj.ro/st-musica/studia-musica-2-2011.pdf>

Variations/ Paraphrases

Paraphrase means exposition, explanation in a personal (and more developed) formulation of the content of a text, of an oral communication, etc., respectively an instrumental musical piece of virtuosity that constitutes of a free processing of a known theme. From the Fr. *paraphrase*.

Liszt excelled in paraphrasing many popular aria: Mozart - *Don Giovanni* - *Réminiscences de Don Juan* (1841); Donizetti - *Réminiscences de Lucia de Lammermoor* (1835-36); Bellini - *Réminiscences de Norma* (1841); Verdi - *Rigoletto* – Paraphrase de concert (1859).

He also paraphrased famous themes inspired by literature, such as *Faust* by Nikolaus Lenau (1802- 1850) *Épisodes pour le Faust de Lenau* – (1858) the first one orchestral and followed by 6 variations for piano: *Méphisto-Valse* – 5 (1860, 1880, 1883, 1885 – *Bagatelle sans tonalité*), the 6 with the *Méphisto-Polka* variant (1883). Or he transcribed his own piano works into symphonic poems: the Second Rhapsody for piano (1851), Mazeppa (1851-54) – the fourth from the 12 *Études d'exécution transcendante* (1851).

2. Does the original have to be intangible, as in painting or sculpture?

In fact, restorations are also made in painting, seeing Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, or in sculpture - Michelangelo's *Pieta*.

Question: Should we stick to originality at all costs, even if it is ruined / fragmentary or shall we make a compromise to admire it fully?

What missing the subject in plastic arts and music

La Sagrada Família - even though left unfinished by Gaudí (1882-1926), hopefully on the centenary of his death it will be finished (and will enter the patrimony). A part of the half-finished building was set on fire and destroyed along with its sketches in the Civil War. The initial neo-Gothic and neo-Catalan plan was continued by Gaudí himself in modernist style, especially the Gate of Suffering. In 1950 many architects (in 1950, including Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius) even signed protests for the cessation of the construction. The work stopped during the pandemic, but its resumption seeks to respect the original style and thus be finished in 2026.¹²

During the two world wars, many cathedrals' stained glass was broken. Chagall (1887-1985) replaced them without receiving any payment, but in his

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sagrada_Fam%C3%ADlia.

own style. The discrepancy between Gothic architecture and modern stained glass can create confusion about the cohesion of the ensemble, as in the case of Gaudí, but the question remains the same: would it have been better if these monumental buildings have been left in ruins?

Or in the case of Mozart's *Requiem* (finished by Joseph Eybler and Franz Xaver Süssmayr in 1791), Puccini's *Turandot* (finished by Franco Alfano, premiered in 1926 - 2 years after the composer's death), or Bartók's *Viola Concerto* (with the posthumous premiere by Serly Tibor¹³ on 1945-49) – was it preferable for them to remain unfinished, lying in an archive drawer? Probably not, especially since each of the three mentioned composers had at least one disciple who knew their teacher's style and was in the right place at the right time for this noble mission.

3. Demystifications in the modern age, the Pastiche – Achilles tendon

The Pastiche is a literary, musical, or plastic work, usually devoid of originality and value, in which the author takes over the themes or means of expression of a great creator, imitation, copy – from the Fr. pastiche.

The 20th century has brought to literature and music serious cases of plagiarism, mostly proven false or insecure, triggered by opportunists with poor training in the field. See Shakespeare, such an attempt became the screenplay for the film *Anonimus*.

A similar case has been registered in 1909 in Romanian literature. A false accusation by an obscure chronicle writer, named Caion, accused the great writer and playwright I. L. Caragiale, one of the favorite humorous authors of high school students, of plagiarism. I had read all his sketches and comedies breathlessly, but it seems that the drama "The Scourge" brought him the infamous accusation, which later turned out legally to be a forgery. The slanderer had invented the name of a Hungarian author and his drama, both of which later proved non-existent and then shamelessly moved the accusation to a short story by Tolstoy. The acquittal of the detractor, although convicted, on the grounds of his youth, disgusted Caragiale, who decided to leave the country for good.

¹³ Bartók's letter, written shortly before his death to William Primrose, the client of the Viola Concerto, points out that the work only needed the author's orchestration, which he considered "to some extent mechanical, repetitive work." If nothing happens, I'll finish in five or six weeks, which means I'll be able to send you a copy of the score by the second half of October..." <https://koncertkalauz.hu/versenymuvek/bartok-bela-bracsaverseny/>. Joseph Eybler and Franz Xaver Süssmayr.

Nowadays, postmodernism, musical meaning and narrative character greatly broaden the analytical and interpretive horizon, constrained by interwar musicology. Likewise, intertextuality suggests that a certain text always refers to another, not being an “autonomous” unit: ¹⁴ “One can never read the same text over and over again, each reading generates a new text”. ¹⁵

In *Postmodernism and the Critique of Musical Analysis*, Julian Horton opposes some opinions about the orientations and fears of musicologists:

Karol Berger: “Something wonderful happened to musicology in the last fifteen years or so. The field opened up both thematically and methodologically to such an extent that no one knows what musicology is any more.” This expansion that Berger noticed has arisen from two primary impulses: a belated attempt to absorb the various discourses of postmodernity that have dominated the humanities at least since the 1960s, especially French post-structuralism; and a widespread critical dissatisfaction with the traditional means of post-war musical analysis, as claims Julian Horton. ¹⁶

Probably, the classic neo-modal style of Sigismund Toduță also fell victim to such a controversy. In fact, his predilection for Passacaglia was well known among his contemporaries.

4. Arguments in the rehabilitation of the third Ovid Symphony

Thematically, the symphony is dominated by an ascending / descending chromatic tetrachord, fixed as a motto (memento) at the beginning of the first movement. The composer does not confirm the use of a rigid Olivier Messiaen type system (mode 2 in transposition 3). Researching the master’s work laboratory, in his personal library we found Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Moreover, in the musical motto hides encrypted the word “effigy” - the relief image of the poet, a black effigy on the red spine of the French edition. ¹⁷

The compositional style is easy to recognize:

- predilection for the neoclassical / neo-baroque / neo-renaissance current - with a perfect mastery of the counterpoint.

¹⁴ Term invented by Julia Kristeva (1941), lieder in semiotics, Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst, feminist, novelist.

¹⁵ Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*, published by Routledge, London 2008, p. 176, https://www.routledge.com/Cultural-Theory-The-Key-Concepts/Edgar-Sedgwick/p/book/9780415399395?gclid=EAlaIqobChMlu9bcplKp-QIVIs13Ch2dSA5xEAYASAAEgKA6vD_BwE.

¹⁶ Julian Horton: *Postmodernism and the Critique of Musical Analysis*, Jurnal Article, The Musical Quarterly, vol. 85, No.2, Oxford University Press, p. 342 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3600916>.

¹⁷ Ecaterina Banciu, *History of a forgotten Passacaglia*, p.5.

- elaborate orchestration in symphonies after post-romantic, Mahler-like models.
- modal-chromatic language in dramatic orchestral tutti, with lyrical interludes, which seem to be aulodias from other times, impregnated with the popular melody and ornate filigree, and the monumental finale - a grand variational edifice, the passacaglia concludes the sublime but tragically scary Ovid symphony.

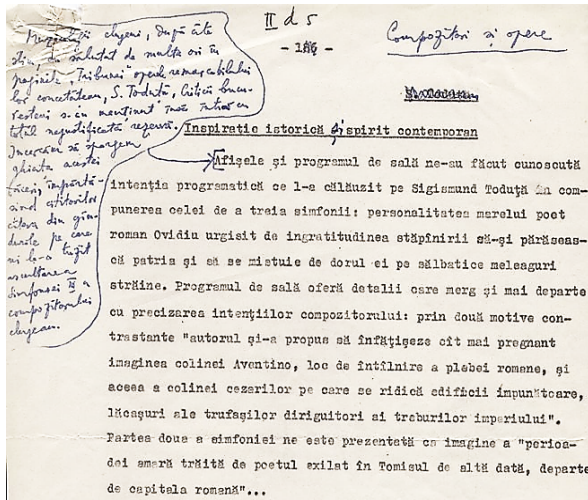
About the Letter

The letter is dated January 29, 1957, contains 4 typed pages and in the end is signed in manuscript, George Bălan. The author notes in the left-hand corner the manuscript and the intention to publish it. We don't know the details; it could have been just a threatening warning.

Image 1

"Composers and works"

"The musicologists from Cluj, as far as we know, have often greeted in the pages of the 'Tribune' the works of their remarkable fellow citizen, S. Toduță. However, the Bucharest critics maintained a completely unjustified reserve. We try to break the ice of this silence by sharing with the readers some of the thoughts that the listening to the Symphony III of the Cluj-based composer aroused in us."¹⁸



At the beginning of the letter there is a caustic passage about the first movement of the symphony:

"I confess that although I was warned about all this, I did not feel in Toduță's music almost anything from Roman antiquity and from the tribulations of the great poet's exile. Perhaps only except for a few inflections and chords that evoked the Roman world not directly but through some

¹⁸ handwritten text.

vague reminiscences of Khachaturian, also the singer of the Roman world in `Spartacus`, or Respighi who linked his name to the glorification of Rome. It seems that the author did not achieve his goal.” The letter continues chaotically in this style throughout the four pages.

The measure invoked, a signal motif with the character of a military cadence is present and typical for all war symphonies. At Elgar, for example, we find it at the end of the *Cello Concerto*. Composed under the impression of the bombing of London in 1918, the story of this concert resembles that of the “Ovid” Symphony. The 1919 premiere was so badly received due to the conductor’s inadequate training that: “Elgar said that if it hadn’t been for Salmond’s diligent work in preparing the piece, [Felix Salmond being the soloist cello player] he would have withdrawn it from the concert entirely.”¹⁹

The words of the letter mask the intention of defamation by some rather ironic and sneering appreciations: “The contemporary climate, which Toduță’s music breathes all the time, saves the composer from **epigonic pastiche** when for one reason or another, more or less excusable, he reproduces formulas used by his predecessors.”

The expected effects of a slanderous maneuver

- harms the fame of a great man by discrediting his competence.
- questions the discernment in lucidly judging the original contribution.
- indexes, in our case, a monumental work dedicated to a memorable event, the anniversary of two millennia since the birth of Ovid. The symphony will have a similar fate to the poet: once adored, he is discredited, and will be exiled for life, without ever knowing the reason.

Reasons for detraction

Knowing the era, the answers are outlined, painful and embarrassing:

1. Toduță had reached too high in the hierarchy of composers; he had been awarded by Enescu, though not born in Bucharest, with a PhD gained at the *Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra* in Rome (1936-38) on the topic of Renaissance polyphony, while attending parallel courses of composition with Ildebrando Pizzetti (himself initiated in Gregorian chant and medieval polyphonic writing).

3. A method of humiliating the “intellectuals” with harsh criticism was in vogue.

¹⁹ [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cello_Concerto_\(Elgar\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cello_Concerto_(Elgar)).

4. The dictatorship was in control by maintaining terror, the denunciation worked, it was risky to respond to challenges of any kind.

Toduță did not want and could not answer in the manner of Brahms when he in turn was accused that the end of his first symphony resembles the ninth by Beethoven. In another era, Brahms could be unwavering in his criticism, and Mahler was often fined for his musical quotes in the symphonies.

5. The Passacaglia theme from Bach to Toduță

Toduță's Passacaglia – Part III (*Allegro moderato*)²⁰ – is built from 26 variations on ostinato (28 in the piano manuscript)²¹, the motto-theme stated on the first page of the orchestral score is amplified to the size of a passacaglia theme²². Vasile Herman considers that the whole ending “is affiliated to the ciaccona principle”, a fact confirmed by “the freeways of building the cycle.”

Bach: Passacaglia in C minor has 20 variations var. 20 – Thema Fugatum (1706-17):

- anacrusis theme; sinuous profile.
- folded upward tetrachord; 8 measures
- two sections of 4 measures: question-answer
- climax in the first section, second part successions of falls, final note - abyss.
- exposition of the theme - in the pedal; comes from c b as g

Brahms: Passacaglia in E minor has 30 variations in Symphony No. 4 p. IV (1884-85)

- crisis theme, ascending profile.
- climax in the second section, followed by a cadence collapse.
- theme of 8 measures, E minor, choral theme taken from Bach: Cantata BWV 150 „Nach dir, Herr”
- var. 12-15 bring lyricism in the homonymous major (E major).

Webern: Passacaglia op. 1 in D minor has 24 variations (1908)

- crisis theme (8 notes not repeated), with a profile like Brahms' theme.

²⁰ This part does not appear in the score printed by Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1975 (!).

²¹ The piano reduction was completed on February 7, 1957, with the duration of the performance noted by the composer on the manuscript: 12 minutes and 30 seconds.

²² Vasile Herman considers that the whole ending “is affiliated with the ciaccone principle”, a fact confirmed by the “free ways of building the cycle” (*Forme variaționale în muzica românească contemporană - Variational Forms in Contemporary Romanian Music*), in „Lucrări de muzicologie” (Musicology Papers), vol. 22, MediaMusica Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 34).

- the number of variations is close to 30, as in Brahms.
- the difference consists in the binary meter of Webern's theme.

Toduță: Passacaglia in D has 26 variations - Symphony III p. III
Allegro moderato (1957)

- crisis theme with an ascending profile (Protasis)
- doubled, will appear later descending (Apodosis), with sounds permuted according to Bach's model.
- consists of two identical sections:
 - the *motto* of the Symphony, the original descending tetrachord appears transposed, inverted, and doubled: D- E flat - F- G flat - G# - A - B - C.
 - the 14th variation of the *Marcia funebre di Passacaglia*, may be a reference to the second part of the *Chamber Symphony - Adagio (Funeral)*, the last motif from the end of Enescu's opus.

On May 7, the date of Brahms' birth, in 1957, 60 years from his commemoration, S. Toduță finished this symphony in the spirit of his predecessor. "A Bach of our time" - writes Ioana Ștefănescu in her monograph dedicated to Brahms. After hearing the Symphony with the Passacaglia finale, Cornel Țăranu exclaimed: "We have our Brahms!"

Image 2



**Sigismund Toduță's composition class²³ (about 1957-1958).
Turn left to right: Emil Simon, Cornel Țăranu (at the piano), the
Master, Péter Vermesy, Dan Voiculescu, Csiky Boldizsár,
Dieter Acker.**

²³ Sigismund Toduță Foundation, *Sigismund Toduță - revelations, documents, testimonies* (Fundăția Sigismund Toduță, *Sigismund Toduță – destăinuiri, documente, mărturii*), Casa cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 96.

I would add: and we are proud of that. It is up to us, to his descendants, to fulfil this dream by reuniting the shattered symphony.

In lieu of a closing argument

The conclusions argue the originality and value of the symphony, the May 2020 project, „S. Toduță, a 3D effigy” had set out to fully interpret the symphony, but the pandemic stopped it. The symphony has a post-romantic orchestration, requiring 90 musicians and pre-financing. Thus, the reunited concert will hopefully be scheduled soon. The presentation of this lecture coincides with the 30th anniversary of the founding of the “Sigismund Toduță” Foundation, at the initiative of his faithful disciples. Its goal consists of maintaining the activity and promoting the memory of the Master by archiving and editing his complete work as well as annual events: recitals, conferences and international competitions and concerts. The conference meeting justifies the cohesion of the (composers, musicologists, performers, choreographers), gathered from 10 countries to present their musical creed on the anniversary of the honored Master.

Translated from Romanian by Roxana-Paula Huza

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