

## *Foreword*

### *Anniversary of Romanian Theatre. Brief Retrospect.*

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**Abstract:** The paper presents the history of Romanian theatre, beginning with the creation of the first Romanian itinerant theatre company, at the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the present. It is intended as a foreword and a chronological framework to this special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica*.

**Keywords:** history, Romanian, theatre, union, centenary

The year 2018 is the centenary of the union of Transylvania, Banat, as well as of Bessarabia and North Bukovina with the Kingdom of Romania. The "Great Union" at the end of the First World War, as known in Romanian historiography, crowned the Romanians' movements of national and cultural emancipation from the ward of the Habsburg Monarchy (followed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire), of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, movements initiated in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and intensified in the 19<sup>th</sup>. Given the celebration of the centenary of the Great Union, we intend to dedicate an issue of the journal *Studia Dramatica* to Romanian theatre, which we seek to revisit not only festively, but also critically.

The history of Romanian theatre is slightly longer than one century: the first Romanian itinerant theatre company was created by several Transylvanian students, from Blaj, at the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the century of the first attempts to create dramatic texts in Romanian. The first theatre shows in Romanian, in Moldavia and Wallachia, were performed in 1816, respectively

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1819. (We mean the first theatre shows in the modern sense of the word – and not the theatrical performances typical to traditional cultures or the medieval forms of entertainment, which continued to be present in the aforementioned period). In the fourth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, professional Romanian theatre was established, by the foundation of the first theatrical education institutions in Romanian, at Bucharest and Iasi – the capitals of the two principalities Wallachia and Moldavia, which, by the union of 1859 (“Small Union”), were the nucleus of the modern Romanian state. The first national Romanian theatres appeared in the same places; this phenomenon foreshadowed, to some extent, the proclamation of Romania’s independence (the name “Romania” was officially adopted by the United Principalities by the Constitution of 1866). The declaration of independence occurred in 1877, at the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war, during which the Romanians fought on Russia’s side, obtaining the release from Ottoman suzerainty. Romanian theatre had seen some significant developments since the beginning of the century, owing to playwrights Vasile Alecsandri and Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu and to some actors such as Costache Caragiali, Matei Millo, Teodor Teodorini, Mihail Pascaly, Eufrosina Popescu or Fanny Tardini. In Iasi, which hosted a strong Jewish community, in 1876, so around the war, Abraham Goldfaden founded the world’s first professional theatre in Yiddish. Immediately after the country’s independence was won, the reorganization of the Romanian theatrical system was approached, according to the model offered by French Comedy, a model that has remained roughly functional to the present day in the state-subsidized theatres (repertory theatres with an established company) and it continues to dominate the Romanian theatrical stage. Dramaturgy was strengthened in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of the great playwright (and prose writer) Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912), a tutelary personality of Romanian theatre, the author of a number of comedies and of a drama that became a standard in Romanian culture. Perhaps not accidentally, they premiered under the ruling of Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, in a period favourable for Romania, when the country was wholly ascending, an aspect marked by the proclamation of the Kingdom, in 1881.

The same period saw the appearance of the great Romanian actors (Aristizza Romanescu, Grigore Manolescu, then Constantin Nottara, Aglae Pruteanu, Agatha Bârsescu, etc.). With Paul Gusty, stage director at the Bucharest National Theatre, the theatrical staging entered a new visionary and creative stage and became an indispensable element of the performance. The Romanian theatre’s links with the Western European theatre (first and

foremost with the French one, but also with the Italian, German, Austrian or English ones) increased. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time with the European theatrical movement, the idea of free theatre also materialized in the Kingdom of Romania by the foundation, in 1909, of the Davila Company – the first private theatre company in modern Romania.

A significant aspect is that, in the debut of the inaugural performance, a programmatic play, written specifically for this event by Ion Luca Caragiale, was put on stage. The company manager, Alexandru Davila, a complete theatre professional (like Caragiale, in fact), i.e. actor, director and playwright, enforced such a discipline of the play and of the staging that his shows became and continued to be for a long time the supreme reference in the assessment of a new theatrical production. He launched and encouraged a number of new acting talents who would reach their full potential in the inter-war period (Marioara Voiculescu, Lucia Sturdza and Tony Bulandra, etc.). The coattail of the Davila Company encouraged, before the First World War, the appearance of two other private companies (led by the aforementioned ones, i.e. Marioara Voiculescu, respectively the Bulandra spouses, who also became associates at some point).

### **Between World War I and World War II**

During the First World War, when Romania fought on the side of the Triple Entente, the capital and a large part of the country territory were occupied by the German army. Most of those active in the sector of theatre took refuge in Moldavia, at Iasi, where the Royal Family has also withdrawn, together with the government, the army and almost the entire country administration. When the fortunes of war changed, the Romanians took back their positions and once again began the attack at the west, for the release of Transylvania and Banat – territories where the population was mostly Romanian – from under the domination of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1918, i.e. one hundred years ago, the Romanians there, as well as those from Bessarabia and North Bukovina, expressed their desire to unite with the “motherland”, which, at the end of the war, led to the creation of Greater Romania. On 15 October 1922, in the Transylvanian locality Alba-Iulia, chosen for the occurrence of this event owing to historical and symbolic considerations, the coronation of King Ferdinand and of Queen Mary as sovereigns of united Romania took place. Before that, the King and Queen had engaged in an official tour across Transylvania, during which, in Sibiu,

they woke up, in their sleeping room, with the two debut volumes of the young writer and philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895-1961), born not far from this town. Their author was already considered Transylvania's most precious "gift", after the Union, to the motherland. The Queen held the books and later awarded a prize to the writer. With Lucian Blaga, the Transylvanian culture took an unexpected qualitative leap after the Great Union. The creator of the "most original and ample philosophical system in Romanian culture"<sup>2</sup>, poet and prose writer, Blaga was also a bright playwright, perhaps the most daring and inventive one in the inter-war period – a period not at all deprived of valuable plays written by authors such as Camil Petrescu (Blaga's most important "competitor", himself a philosopher and excellent prose writer and theatre theorist), George Ciprian (dramatic author successfully put on stage also in Berlin, Prague, Bern, and Paris), Mihail Sebastian, G.M. Zamfirescu, Victor Ion Popa, Al. Kirițescu, Tudor Mușatescu, Adrian Maniu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, and so on and so forth. In the same period, in Cluj, Cernăuți and Chișinău, meaning the most important urban hubs of the provinces that had recently joined the Kingdom of Romania, new national theatres were founded. (Unfortunately, two of them, i.e. in Cernăuți and Chișinău, and the National Theatre of Craiova, were closed down in 1935, perhaps also because of the great world economic crisis, which had also had an impact on Romania).

In the inter-war, in Cluj, an Academy of Music and Dramatic Art was also founded. Under the Habsburg rule and later under the Austro-Hungarian one, the Transylvanian and Banat Romanians had been prohibited from founding a professional local theatrical movement or to erect a national theatre. In the aforementioned provinces, until the Great Union, there had been only Romanian theatre companies made from amateurs. Starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, professional actors from the neighboring Romania took a chance, however, and engaged in a number of tours in the said territories, facing the authorities' complaints. Such an actor was Zaharia Bârsan, born in Transylvania, but trained at the Bucharest Music and Declamation Conservatory, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was appointed in the management of the Cluj National Theatre

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2. Marta Petreu, *Filosofii paralele [Parallel Philosophies]*, second edition, revised (Iasi: Editura Polirom, 2013), 28. See also Marta Petreu, Ioan Muntean, Mircea Flonta, *Romania, philosophy in*, in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2004): <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/romania-philosophy-in/v-1> (accessed on February 20, 2018).

in 1919, for his special efforts in promoting Romanian theatre in Transylvania before the war. Apart from the national theatres, in the inter-war, in Romania and especially in the capital, at Bucharest, numerous private theatres appeared, some short-lived, others with a longer life. Many of them were led by actresses (Marioara Voiculescu, Maria Ventura, Lucia Sturdza Bulandra, Maria Filotti, Dida Solomon, Tantz Cutava-Barozzi, and so on and so forth), a sign of accelerated emancipation of women in that time. The repertory program of these theatres was quite eclectic, and the staging did not have a style too different from the one of the state subsidized theatres. The great actors and directors of the age were positively active both in one and in the other. Actor Constantin Tănase founded, in 1919, the Cărbuș Company, the first specialized revue theatre in Romania. In the same period, in 1929, the National Radiophonic Theatre was created and it has been extremely active until now.

There were also avant-garde movements, but, despite the fact that Romania was the country of birth and debut of Tristan Tzara and Marcel Iancu, two of the founders of Dadaism, the theatrical avant-garde here was rather "soft". There were attempts to found people's theatres or theatres for workers (this purpose was approached in particular by the directors and playwrights Victor Ion Popa and G.M. Zamfirescu), but their activity did not have a significant echo. (The existence of proletarian theatre, Agit-prop, in inter-war Romania, had not been well-documented.) The connections of Romanian theatre with Western European theatre intensified significantly in this stage. Actors and companies from abroad would visit Romania frequently, which had a strong echo among the professionals of theatre, but also among the regular domestic audience. On the other hand, the Romanians organize considerably fewer tours, of which we note, however, the one of the Teatrul Mic of Bucharest, which, in 1923, presented in Paris M. Sorbul's *Patima roșie* [*Red Passion*], with Elvira Popescu and Alexandru Mihalescu in the leading roles, actors who were later adopted by the French stage.

Undoubtedly, the most important phenomenon characterizing the inter-war Romanian theatre was the theatricalisation movement, promoted by a number of gifted directors, such as Aurel Ion Maican, Ion Sava (the former's disciple and the most audacious "theatricalizer" of the inter-war), Soare Z. Soare (follower of Max Reinhardt), Haig Acterian (friend with Edward Gordon Craig, who prefaced a book for him, and the author of a micro-monograph dedicated to Craig), Victor Ion Popa, George Mihail Zamfirescu, Sandu Eliad, Vasile Enescu, Ion Șahighian and so on, as well as a

number of equally gifted scenographers, such as Traian Cornescu, Victor Feodorov, George Löwendal, Theodor Kiriacoff, M.H. Maxy, etc. The theatricalization of theatre meant the waiving of realism and stage naturalism in favor of suggestion, abstraction, and stylization. The focus shifted from the text to the performance. Stage director Ion Sava was the most decided supporter of the idea that theatre is not literature, it does not serve to the dramatic text, but it is a self-reliant art (an idea also backed up by playwright I.L. Caragiale in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Inter-war "theatrical" theatre was first and foremost a theatre of image, the setting, the stage design, the choreography of the actors' bodies, corporeal plasticity becoming increasingly more important elements of the play. The directors who promoted theatricalization would often build stage metaphors which would involve an intellectual labor from the audience – they had to decipher the meaning of the related metaphors, the stage symbols. Cinematographic-like staging was also a practice, which led to the acceleration of the pace of the dramatic action, of the setting changes, of the acting. (The same Ion Sava, who admired the Italian theatre and film director Anton Giulio Bragaglia, a pioneer of photography and of futuristic filmmaking, was the main supporter of the techniques borrowed from filmmaking to theatre.) The "inter-text", the cultural citation would also be practiced, the stage images being able to refer to known or lesser known works of the plastic arts. Inter-war directors were also frequently theatre theorists. Owing to them and to other critical writings from Camil Petrescu, Lucian Blaga, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Mihail Sebastian, the aestheticians Tudor Vianu and Alice Voinescu, and others, in the inter-war, Romanian theatrical studies saw an unprecedented development.

After the effervescence of the first decades after the Great Union, Romanian theatre entered a stage of decline, of marked commercialization, toward the end of the 1930s, because of the increasingly more charged political atmosphere. Like in other European countries, the right nationalist movement was more and more visible and aggressive in Romanian politics, but also among a (rather significant) part of the intellectuals. The latter were inclined toward the nationalist right rather than toward the socialist left because of their mistrust in the neighboring Russia, fueled by an unfortunate historical experience and because they did not agree with communist internationalism, nor did they agree with the project of the country's dismemberment and its organization in soviets, considering the efforts and the delay taken for the creation of the unified Romanian state. The liberal-democratic and bourgeois notions began to wear away. The totalitarian and

the collectivistic temptations were increasingly stronger. In 1938, King Carol II repealed the democratic constitution that had been adopted in 1923 and installed the dictatorship. Octavian Goga's nationalist government, installed at the end of 1937, issued the first discriminating, anti-Jewish laws, of a series that also continued under other succeeding governments.

During 1940, after the beginning of the Second World War, Romania suffered a number of significant territorial losses (Bessarabia, reattached to the USSR, North Bukovina and the Hertza Region, also occupied by the USSR, north-eastern Transylvania, assigned to Hungary by the Vienna Award, and Southern Dobruja, lost in favor of Bulgaria), which led to the abdication of King Carol II who assigned his prerogatives to his young son, Michael. However, the real leader of the country was General Ion Antonescu, appointed head of government in the same year. For a while, he allied with the Iron Guard (a fascist paramilitary organization), and, on 13 September 1940, Romania was proclaimed "national legionary state". After a number of disorders caused by them in the countries, assassinations and a pogrom committed by the legionaries in Bucharest, Antonescu suppressed their rise during their attempt to take over the rule from his hands ("the legionary rebellion"), an attempt crushed on 22 and 23 January 1941, which marked the end of the legionary state, but not of the anti-Semite persecutions and violence. Thus, because of the racist legislation enacted during Antonescu's government, which prevented Jews from playing in Romanian theatres, they founded the theatre called Barașeum, which operated in 1941-1945. The institution's entire personnel was Jewish, but the performances (in prose and musical) took place, by the authorities' decision, only in Romanian. We need to note that, however, this was the only Jewish theatre in Europe which survived in the period of the Second World War. In fact, the whole theatrical activity was turned upside down. For example, the staff of the Cluj theatre was moved, during the war, in Timisoara, since the Cluj was on the territory occupied by Hungary. On 22 June 1941, Romania entered the war by siding with the Axis powers, beginning the (counter)attack against the USSR, together with the German troops. The Romanians recovered the territories that had been taken by the Russians, but continued to advance, with their German allies, to Stalingrad and in the Caucasus. As known, the Russians were victors in these battles and, in exchange, began to flow to the West and South-west. They had already entered Northern Moldavia when King Michael I, who had grown sufficiently on account of the difficult circumstances, removed and arrested marshal Antonescu, proclaiming, on 23 August 1944,

Romania's shift of side with the Allies. In consequence, the Germans bombarded Bucharest, one of the affected objectives being the National Theatre, the building of which had been inaugurated in 1852 (initially called Teatrul cel Mare). Nowadays, on Calea Victoriei, one can see only its front, reconstructed and incorporated in a building meant to be a hotel...

### **During the Communist regime**

After signing the armistice with the governments of the United Nations (12 September 1944), Romania began to lose, piece by piece, its independence. The important decisions were made in Moscow. Moscow enforced, for Bucharest, in 1945, a transition government led by Petru Groza, an allied of the communists. In November 1946, elections were organized, their results being heavily falsified; in the end, the Romanian Workers' Party (resulting from the union of all the left wing Romanian parties with the Romanian Communist Party) was declared winner. The historical, democratic Romanian parties were under siege. Their leaders, as well as numerous party members, would lose their lives in the communist prisons. Terror had merely begun to show its teeth. By the Peace Treaties of Paris (1947), Romania received back Northern Transylvania, but lost Bessarabia, North Bukovina and the Hertza region in favor of the Soviet Union, as well as South Dobruja, assigned to Bulgaria. On 30 December 1947, King Michael I, who had tried to reinstall the democratic regime and who had taken every humanly possible effort to oppose the Soviet occupation and the transformation of Romania in a leftist dictatorship, was forced by the communist authorities to abdicate. Romania was proclaimed a People's Republic. In April 1948, a new constitution was promulgated, moulded on the Soviet Constitution. In the same year, the campaign of forced collectivisation of agriculture began; it would last until 1962. The main means of production, all the large enterprises of the country were nationalised, including private theatres and film theatres or film processing laboratories. The removal of the undesirable intellectuals from the higher education (including the theatrical one) system and from the Romanian Academy began. Practically, 1948 was the year when the extremely brutal mass repression of those labelled enemies of the new regime was unleashed; not even the ill, the elderly, the pregnant women, the children were spared. Many people were investigated and judged in show trials or simply thrown in prisons, without having been trialled; they were incarcerated in extreme conditions which most of them



could not survive. Many of them were tortured or even ideologically “re-educated” (especially in the ominously famous prison of Pitești), deported (across the country or in the USSR), exploited in labour camps, or killed.

Despite the retreat of the Soviet troops from Romania in 1958, the age of terror continued until 1964, with a brief “*intermezzo*”, after Stalin’s death (1953), cut short by the anti-communist revolt of Hungary, in 1956. After the nationalisation and in the middle of the collectivisation campaign, in 1951, the accelerated industrialisation of the country was approached; it led to an important migration of the population from the rural environment to the urban one. In 1952, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, secretary general of the Communist Party ever since 1945, won the fight for power within the Romanian Workers’ Party. Following Petru Groza, he occupied the position of President of the Council of Ministers (in other words, of the government). But, more importantly, Gheorghiu-Dej continued to lead the Romanian Workers’ Party, in the position of secretary general, until 1965, with a very short break, between April 1954 and October 1955. In 1965, he was replaced by Nicolae Ceausescu, who, thus, became the main decision-maker in the country’s management and held dictatorial powers. In the same year, under a new constitution, the name of the People’s Republic of Romania was changed to the Socialist Republic of Romania, and the Romanian Workers’ Party was renamed the Romanian Communist Party.

Theatrically speaking, the Gheorghiu-Dej age brought a number of processes that upset completely the system inherited from the inter-war: the introduction of the drastic censorship of dramatic texts and of stage plays; starting from 1948, the disappearance of private theatres; the establishment of new state theatres (including theatres of the Hungarian, German and Jewish minorities) and of a new national theatre (in Timisoara); the enforcement of the presence of Soviet plays in the repertoires – usually, these were written by minor authors; the enforcement of domestic plays of political propaganda favouring the new regime; the political control of the program of theatres. At the same time, the single method of creation approved by the communist party was socialist realism, imported from the USSR; it had the following characteristics: *ideinost’* (art is supposed to reflect the communist party’s ideology), *partiinnost’* (party-mindedness), *narodnost’* (it should reflect the life of the simple man, of the commoner *recte* of the proletariat), *klassovost’* (be class-oriented, reflect the class fight between the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, i.e. the classes deemed “retrograde”, on the one hand, and the proletariat, seen as the society’s forward-moving class, the force

of good, on the other hand). The character (preferably from the industrial or agricultural environment) was not to be individualised, the vision was expected to be optimistic-triumphalist, adding to the construction of the “new world”, reflecting the communists’ struggle for emancipation, etc.

Starting with 1955, Stanislavski’s system was introduced in the Romanian theatrical education, as a mandatory method of actor’s training; however, this Stanislavski was sifted through the theses of socialist realism; his writings (their translation in Romanian began in 1950) reached the readers in an incomplete, censored version. As a reaction to the unprecedentedly aggressive intrusion of the political in the Romanian theatre’s organisational and creative problems, a group of young directors started, toward the end of the seventh decade, the process of its re-theatricalisation, taking advantage of the brief cultural-ideological thaw following the disruption triggered by the report through which Khrushchev condemned, in 1956, the crimes of Stalinism. The polemics approached in the press by the young insurgents with the defenders of dogmatism in art ended with the Report of the V. I. Popa Circle of Young Directors, presented at the Counsel of the Theatre Professionals, of January 1957. The manifesto-articles signed by the directors Liviu Ciulei and Radu Stanca, which were published in *Revista Teatrul* in June and September 1956, should also be noted: *Teatralizarea picturii de teatru* [*The Theatricalisation of Painting in Theatre*], respectively “*Reteatralizarea*” teatrului [*The “Retheatricalisation” of Theatre*]. The proponents of re-theatricalisation restored the connection with the inter-war stage approach and practice, but, most of all, they sought to refute socialist realism, by using aesthetic arguments, while promoting, in exchange, the aesthetics of suggestion and stylisation. The greatest Romanian theatre productions of the communist era (signed by directors such as Liviu Ciulei, Vlad Mugar, Radu Penciulescu, Lucian Giurchescu, Crin Teodorescu, Aureliu Manea, Lucian Pintilie, David Esrig, György Harag, Andrei Șerban, Cătălina Buzoianu, etc.) were, one way or another, under the sign of the re-theatricalisation of theatre, owing a lot to this second wave of the movement that had started in the inter-war and which had extensions until the end of Ceausescu’s dictatorship (and even afterwards). The tutelary presence of “theatrical” theatre, which dominated the domestic stage until 1989, was, indisputably, that of the director who – given the lack of the freedom of speech and, thus, the absence of a viable dramaturgy of the present – often had the trying task of bringing to the present-day plays included in the classic repertory or where the action is placed in other ages and in other geographical contexts. Thus, a style of the

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“oblique”, allusive, Aesopian, subversive stage discourse was developed; this style characterised also a part of the post-war Romanian dramaturgy that remained politically non-aligned (owing to playwrights such as Iosif Naghiu, Ion Băieșu, Dumitru Solomon, Teodor Mazilu, Marin Sorescu, etc.) The theatrical education, limited to the related universities (called “institutes”) of Bucharest and Târgu-Mureș, saw, starting from the 1960s, additional to Stanislavski’s method, which was the foundation of the training of actors, the arrival, in more or less covert ways, of the working method of Jerzy Grotowski, Lee Strasberg, Michael Chekhov, and Viola Spolin. The connections with the Western theatre (and with the Occident in general), which had been ruthlessly amputated after 1947, started to be resumed from the middle of the 1950s, but under the careful eye of the authorities and lacking the effervescence of the inter-war. Romanian tours abroad were the authorities’ opportunity to offer to the West a pretend image of the country’s reality. The beginning was with the Bucharest National Theatre, in 1956, and its triumphal tour at the Nations’ Theatre in Paris, with *O scrisoare pierdută* [*A Lost Letter*] by I.L. Caragiale, directed by Sică Alexandrescu, and *Ultima oră* [*Last Hour*] by Mihail Sebastian, directed by Moni Ghelerter. Other tours abroad followed, with plays directed by Lucian Giurchescu, Liviu Ciulei, David Esrig, Cătălina Buzoianu, etc. Surprisingly, Romania was visited by a fairly significant number of companies from abroad during communism. Some of the most valuable Russian companies, of course, came here, such as the company of the Bolshoi Theatre, of the Maly Theatre, of the Vahtangov Theatre or of the Maxim Gorky Theatre, led by Tovstonogov. From France, those that toured were: Marcel Marceau (1953, 1967), Théâtre Atélier (1956), Vieux Colombier (1959, 1966), Théâtre National Populaire, led by Jean Vilar (1961), Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne (1963, 1971), Comédie-Française (1964, 1975), Théâtre Odéon, with Jean Louis Barrault (1965), and so on and so forth. From East Germany: Berliner Ensemble, with *The Mother* by Berthold Brecht, based on Maxim Gorky’s novel (with Helene Weigel herself in the leading part) and with *Life of Galileo* (1959, 1976), Deutches Theatre (1967), Municipal Theatre of Karl Marx Stadt (1978), National Theatre of Weimar (1969, 1973, 1976), and from West Germany: Kammerspiele of Munich (1971), Stadttheatre of Köln, theatre of Bochum (1980), Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer (1980), etc. From Austria: the Vienna Burgtheatre (1969). From Italy: Piccolo Teatro of Milano (1960), with *Harlequin Servant of two Masters*, based on Goldoni, directed by Giorgio Strehler, Teatro Stabile of Genoa (1965, 1970), Teatro Stabile of Catania (1968), etc. From England:

Royal Shakespeare Company, with *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Peter Brook and *The Comedy of Errors*, put on stage of Clifford Williams (1964, 1972), English Stage Company of the Royal Court Theatre (1968), Royal Exchange Company of Manchester (1979), London Actors Partnership (1986) and the actor Ian McKellen, with an excellent recital (1982). Furthermore, a number of Polish, Hungarian, Czech, etc. theatre toured here. This means that Romania was not fully isolated in communism, from a theatrical point of view. The information on the evolutions of Occidental dramatic art also circulated on various ways, but its more daring and radical aspects could not always be applied. Romanian theatre studies no longer experienced the spectacular development they had in the inter-war. But theatrical historiography was enriched with Ioan Massoff's *Teatrul românesc* [*Romanian Theatre*], a massive, eight-volume work published by the author in 1961-1981 and covering the history of Romanian theatre from the beginning to 1950. Although censorship and self-censorship did leave their mark on the work, it continues to be the most important and fullest synthesis in the sector for the mentioned period.

In his first years of leadership, Nicolae Ceausescu was seen as a reformist, and this opinion was strengthened by the denunciation of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, a move that attracted the Occident's goodwill and rekindled hope across the country. In fact, Ceausescu had focused constantly on the increase of his powers, by cumulating various positions and responsibilities and by encouraging the cult of his personality. In 1974, he was proclaimed the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, a position occupied by him until the fall of the communist regime after the people's revolt of 1989. Unlike his predecessor, who was a Stalinist, Ceausescu revived nationalism, to megalomaniac extents, thus distancing himself from Moscow. During Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorship, the repression was somewhat gentler than in the Gheorghiu-Dej age, but it did not cease. It took some of the most insidious forms: those who caused disruptions were no longer incarcerated for political offences, but for (imaginary or staged) civil or criminal transgressions, or they were forcedly admitted in psychiatric hospitals. Deaths were "accidental". In the more "fortunate" situations, problematic individuals were "merely" intimidated and placed under constant surveillance. Sometimes, they were put under house arrest. Censorship grew equally insidious; it was applied by a larger number of authorities and at a larger number of levels, which meant that responsibility was distributed among more establishments. In the case of

stage plays, censorship operated at the level of the theatrical institution, but also of party and state bodies, which delegated the members of the play viewing commissions (before and after the premiere).

In July 1971, after a visit to North Korea, deeply impressed by what he had seen there, Ceausescu gave a speech in Mangalia, on the shore of the Black Sea, a speech called "Measures proposed for the improvement of the political-ideological activity of Marxist-Leninist education of the party members, of all the workers". The seventeen "theses" of this speech dictated an even deeper subjection of art to the requirements of party directives. The effects were soon visible. In 1972, after only three performances (23, 26, and 28 September), N.V. Gogol's *Government Inspector*, directed by Lucian Pintilie, put on stage at the Bucharest Bulandra Theatre, was suspended. It was not the first play prohibited by the communist regime and it would not be the last one to be subject to this treatment, but, exceptionally, the decision was announced by a release from the Council of Culture and Socialist Education (the ministry of culture), which was broadcast on radio and on television, and then published in the *Scântea* newspaper, the official platform of the Romanian Communist Party (issue of 30 September 1972). Following this scandal, the whole management of the theatre, including director Liviu Ciulei, was removed, and Lucian Pintilie was forbidden to put plays on stage in Romania. After the halting of the *Government Inspector*, theatre professionals could no longer kid themselves with regard to the condition of art and of the artist under Ceausescu's regime. A real exodus of the great Romanian theatre creators started: one by one, some directors (Lucian Pintilie, Vlad Mugur, Andrei Şerban, Lucian Giurchescu, Radu Penciulescu, Liviu Ciulei) went into exile and settled in the West. This was an authentic catastrophe for the Romanian theatre – the second of this extent, after the early disappearance, for various reasons, of several valuable inter-war directors during or around World War II and the installation of communism. Exiled directors would return in the country after 1989; some of them managed to stir things again with their productions (Andrei Şerban and Vlad Mugur, first of all), but the wrong that had been done could no longer be undone. On 20 December 1973, the new building of the Bucharest National Theatre was inaugurated, an event also attended by the Ceausescu spouses. This was the first and last time that the dictator visited this building, an aspect symptomatic of his relationship with theatre.

### **After the fall of the communist regime**

Following the events of 1989 and the fall of communism, Romanian theatre, like the whole society, began a lengthy and strenuous stage of restoration. In 1991, the new democratic Constitution of the country, still in force nowadays, was adopted. In theatre, the recently acquired freedom of expression prompted the massive return of the things that had been repressed in the collective subconscious: nudity, sexuality, violence, strong and vulgar language, all prohibited during communism, squeezed their quick way on the stage, stirring the audience's or the critics' intense reactions of approval or disapproval. In the absence of dramatic texts drawing directly upon the Romanian experience of totalitarianism, the denunciation and exorcising of the traumas caused by it were possible, however, immediately after the end of the communist dictatorship, by the directors' use of the texts written by the classics of world dramaturgy (based on the pattern offered by the years prior to 1989) or of texts drawing on the experience of the right-wing totalitarian regimes.

Small private theatre companies, independent initiatives re-emerged with great efforts. Some theatre productions began being hosted in unconventional spaces because of the precarious resources rather than owing to the theatre professionals' need to experiment. The higher education theatre schools of Cluj and Iasi were re-established and some new ones appeared. The actor's training methods were diversified. The connections with the Western theatre were resumed by the organisation of great tours of the national theatres abroad (at the beginning of the 1990s), by the founding of mixed theatre companies (which, however, did not have a long life), by the individual efforts of artists who were awarded creative residences or workshops abroad and by the participation to the international theatre festivals or the organisation of such festivals in the country (in Sibiu, Craiova, Cluj, Bucharest). After the beginning of the new millennium, a new generation of playwrights and directors, much readier to collaborate and interested in the present and in Romanian reality, began its self-assertion. Another increasingly clearer tendency in the last years is the one that challenges the director's supremacy. Young theatre professionals engage more and more often in collective creation. Stage scripts and plays are a team effort. Of course, there are also negative aspects: the chronic underfunding of the theatrical system, especially of its independent component, the audience's preference for casual entertainment, the competition of television

and internet, the diminishing of the space dedicated to dramatic reviews in generalist publications, the extremely precarious condition of the Bucharest and Iasi museums of Romanian theatre, etc. The reasons of pessimism are as many as those of optimism. In *Studia Dramatica*, we sought to avoid the extremes and to approach soundly both the assessment of the past and the assessment of the present. The reader will weigh the success of our attempt.

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