

## *The Theatrical Christening of Romania*

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**Abstract:** The present paper focuses on the first theatrical representation of Romania by the actor and playwright Costache Caragiali (1815-1877), examining the portrayal of the female protagonist of the prologue written by the said author on the occasion of the grand opening of Teatrul cel Mare (the future National Theatre) from Bucharest, in 1852. The paper also traces the history of the allegorical representation of the nation in the Romanian theatre from the beginning to the end of World War I, by such authors like Gheorghe Asachi (one of Caragiali's precursors), actor Mihail Pascaly, Frédéric Damé (a writer and journalist of French origin), Ion Luca Caragiale (Costache Caragiali's nephew and one of Romania's greatest writers of all times) and actor and playwright Zaharia Bârsan.

**Keywords:** Romania, theatre, 19th century, Caragiali, allegory, nation, Marianne

### **The Name of the Country: A Bit of History**

The current name of the Romanian state, i.e. "Romania", was adopted first by the 1866 Constitution published in the "Official Gazette – Journal of Romania", no. 142, of 1/13 June 1866, and promulgated by the Ruling Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen on 30 June of the same year. Article 1 of this Constitution stipulated the following: "The Romanian United Principalities represent an indivisible State called Romania." The Romanian United Principalities referred to by the document were, at that time, Wallachia<sup>2</sup> and Moldavia<sup>3</sup>, territories that had a majority Romanian

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<sup>2</sup> Țara Românească, called "Wallachia" by foreigners, included at that time the historical regions of Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia) and Muntenia (Greater Wallachia) (Dobruja joined them later, after the War of Independence of 1877-1878).

population, under Ottoman sovereignty and the collective protection of the greater European powers (England, France, Sardinia, Prussia, the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire), incorporated in 1859 with the – required – name of “United Principalities Moldavia and Wallachia<sup>4</sup>”, an action made possible owing to the Convention of Paris, of 7/19 August 1858, which ended the Crimean War. The representatives of the Romanians in the two Danubian Principalities – another of their names abroad – had requested in Paris that they make a single state, called “Romania”, but the Great Powers dismissed this request; they had accepted, however, their formal union (according to this vision, the Principalities would continue to have different governments and capitals, but also common institutions). “Romania” was the name selected by the members of the Ad hoc Meetings convened in October 1857 both in Moldavia, at Iasi, and in Wallachia, at Bucharest, as provided by a decision made during the Paris Peace Conference (18/30 March 1856), for extraordinary consultations regarding the future form of organization of the Principalities. This was an unprecedented democratic exercise in the history of the two state formations, attended, directly, by the great boyars and the clergy, and, indirectly, by delegates, low-ranked nobles, freelancers and peasants. The double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza<sup>5</sup>, at the beginning of 1859, as ruler of Moldavia and Wallachia, by the legislative assemblies of both Principalities, accelerated the complete fusion of the two states. In 1861, in the wake of the Constantinople Conference, the sultan issued a Firman (a decree) whereby he recognized officially the union of the Principalities, but solely for the duration of Cuza’s rule. In reality, “the Small Union”<sup>6</sup>, its later name, became thereafter an irreversible act. The announcement was made across the country, by the ruler, through a proclamation to the nation in which – and this is extremely significant – there was no mention of

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<sup>3</sup>. Moldavia as part of the United Principalities included its Occidental or Central-Western part (without Bucovina) and a small section of Bessarabia, north of the Danube Mouth. After the War of Independence, a part of Budjak (historical Bessarabia), which had been re-included in Moldavia in 1856, was attached, for the second time, to the Russian Empire (which had occupied it in 1812).

<sup>4</sup>. See note 2.

<sup>5</sup>. Alexandru Ioan Cuza (b. 20 March 1820, Bârlad - d. 15 May 1873, Heidelberg, Germany), politician and ruler of the United Principalities between 1859 and 1866.

<sup>6</sup>. By opposition to the “Great Union” of 1918, by which Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania also became parts of the Kingdom of Romania. (The Kingdom had been proclaimed in 1881, four years after the independence from the Ottoman Empire had been won.)

the Principalities, but there was the unambiguous reference to the “Romanian nationality” and to a “single Romania”, the message ending with “Long live Romania!”.<sup>7</sup>

According to the historian A. D. Xenopol, in the 20 March 1862 meeting, the Legislative Assembly (the joint assembly of the legislating bodies of the two Principalities, in other words, their first single parliament) rejected Mihail Kogălniceanu<sup>8</sup>'s suggestion, “that, among other measures meant to strengthen the union – such as the unification of the colours and of the flag, the fusion of the gazettes, the removal of the borders – the title of United Principalities should also be replaced with *Romania*”<sup>9</sup>. The proposal was too daring for that moment. Nevertheless, in the opening of the first meeting of the assembly of the United Principalities, of 24 January 1862 (anniversary the reminded the double election of Cuza three years before), the ruler Alexandru Ioan I had begun his speech with the words: “A new life now opens for *Romania*”. Xenopol did not miss this and, in a note to *Domnia lui Cuza-Vodă*, he mentions: “This name (*Romania, our note*) had been given a number of times before to the United Principalities, even in the internal official acts. Foreigners used it equally. As an interesting fact, we quote an 1862 letter of Victor Hugo to one of his acquaintances in Bucharest, which, at the address, includes the name *Roumanie*. See *La Voix de la Roumanie*, 3 January 1862.”<sup>10</sup> We can provide another example: the alternating use of the names “United Principalities” and “Romania” in *Statutul dezvoltător al Convenției din 7/19 August 1858 [The Expanding Charter of the Convention of 7/19 August 1858]*, promulgated by Alexandru Ioan I in May 1864 and published in the “Official Gazette – Journal of the Romanian United Principalities” (no. 146 of 3/15 July 1864), by which the ruler amended substantially the *Convenția pentru organizarea definitivă a Principatelor Dunărene ale Moldovei și Valahiei din 7/19 august 1858 (Convention for the final organization of the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia of 7/19 August 1858)* (the fundamental legal and political act of the country between 1858 and 1866). For this purpose, the opening

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7. The proclamation was published in the “Official Gazette of Wallachia”, on 11, respectively 12 December 1861, being also printed on leaflet at the Printing Office of Adolf Berman of Iasi (dated 1 December 1861). The text, translated in French, also appeared in the magazine *Archives Diplomatiques. Recueil de diplomatie et d'histoire*, VI, tome II, April, May, June (1866): 209.

8. Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817-1891), Romanian politician, historian, writer.

9. A.D. Xenopol, *Domnia lui Cuza-Vodă [Cuza Voda's Rule]*, vol. I (Iasi: Publishing Printing Office “Dacia” P. Iliescu & D. Grossu, 1903), 235.

10. *Ibid.*, 236 (see also footnote no. 44).

sentence is memorable: "The Convention made in Paris, on 7/19 August 1858, between the Sovereign Charter and between the Power warranting the autonomy of the United Principalities, is and remains the fundamental law of Romania." The invocation of "Romania" in a sentence meant to put to sleep the Great Powers' suspicions regarding the legislator's true intentions was, in fact, a first and important departure from the spirit and letter of the aforementioned Convention, in a series of other departures. The founders of modern Romania did not leave untested any loophole in the international relations of the Principalities, nor did they ignore any resource, in their keen desire of independence and union.



**Fig. 1:** "Romania Breaking off Her Chains on the Field of Liberty" (1848)  
by Constantin Daniel Rosenthal

Unofficially, the name "Romania", with regard to both of the Romanian countries, Moldavia and Wallachia, and even to Habsburg Transylvania, had circulated in the Principalities (and not only there) since the first half of the

19<sup>th</sup> century, and then, starting from the 5 and 6 decades, it was used more and more frequently. Before that, the word would sometimes be used with regard to/ instead of Țara Românească (the oldest sources attesting this meaning are those of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>11</sup>). In fact, as shown by historian Ioan Aurel Pop, “the name of Țara Românească (Romanian Country) is absolutely identical with the one of Romania. Just as for anyone the name of *Germany* is synonymous with *Deutschland* (which, translated literally in Romanian, means ‘the German Country’ or ‘the Country of the Germans’), so the name of Țara Rumânească/ *Românească* can only be a synonymous of the name *Rumânia/ Romania*. If *England* (translated literally as ‘the Country of the Angles’) is a perfect synonymous of the name of England, if *Scotland* is the ‘Land of the Scots’ and *Magyarország* (‘Hungarian Country’) is the official name of Hungary, we cannot see why and how we could claim that there is any essential difference between the name ‘Țara Românească’ and the one of Romania”<sup>12</sup> and also according to him: “Obviously, *Romania* is a modernized form of the name Țara Rumânească, which appears in non-Romanian sources as *Wallachia*. (...) Owing to this synonymy, in the age of national emancipation, when every nation was supposed to have a national state to unify and protect all of its members, Romanians had had for a long time a name readied for their country. They did not choose the name *Dacia* (although it had been proposed), because this name (...), albeit very old, had long disappeared from the public consciousness, but they preferred the name *Rumânia* or *România*. This was not invented by Dimitrie Philipide<sup>13</sup>, nor by the Forty-Eighters<sup>14</sup>, nor

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<sup>11</sup>. See Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, “Despre numele României” [“About the Name of Romania”], in *România literară*, XLI, no. 41, October 16 (2009): 13; as well as the reception speech of historian Ioan-Aurel Pop at the Romanian Academy, of 29 May 2013, titled *Istoria și semnificația numelor de român/valah și România/Valahia* [History and Significance of the Names of Romanian/Wallachian and Romania/Wallachia], accessed February 18, 2018: [http://www.acad.ro/com2013/pag\\_com13\\_0529.htm](http://www.acad.ro/com2013/pag_com13_0529.htm). (Ioan Aurel-Pop also names an even older source, of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, i.e. “the letter of Auxentius of Durostorum, probably dated back to 383, kept in the annotations of Maximinus on the Council of Aquileia (of 381)”, which mentions the phrase “*in solo Romaniae*”, used with regard to the Danubian space, but the historian believes it is “an isolated testimony, because later almost all the sources named Wallachia these lands inhabited by Romanians, while the name given by Romanians to their country remained in the dark”, 13.)

<sup>12</sup>. Ioan Aurel Pop, *Istoria și semnificația...*, 21.

<sup>13</sup>. Daniil Dimitrie Philippide (1750/1755? – 1832), Greek monk, man of letters and historian, author of a *History of the Romanians* and of a *Geography of Romania*, both published in 1816 in Leipzig.

by the first ruler of the United Principalities, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, nor by his minister of foreign affairs<sup>15</sup>, Mihail Kogălniceanu. This name was kept in the collective memory, emerged from a distant past, a name that, at a point in time, all the political organizations of the Romanians had borne. This was also the name that 'Țara Românească' had had since 1300, i.e. the oldest and most prestigious Romanian medieval state, around which the political unification of the people that gave its name occurred."<sup>16</sup>

### **The First Allegorical Representations of Romania in the Realm of the Visual Arts**

We were saying above that, in the 5 and 6 decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. around and after the (failed) Revolution of 1848, the name of "Romania", in its modern meaning, started to be used more and more often. Gazettes were published with this name, such as "Romania" (Bucharest, 1848), a magazine with commented domestic and foreign news and educational materials, the *motto* of which was the French Revolution's "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité"; "România viitoare" (single issue), magazine published in Paris, in November 1850, by historian Nicolae Bălcescu and by an editorial board made from exiled Romanian revolutionaries; "România literară" (Iasi, 1855), led by writer Vasile Alecsandri (a first issue of the magazine had been published in 1852, but censorship required immediately the closing of the periodical); "România" (Bucharest, 1857), political and literary biweekly, which was no longer published after 48 issues because of censorship and of financial problems; or "România", political and literary periodical edited in Iasi by writer, historian and philologist B.P. Hașdeu between 18 November 1858 and 26 January 1859.<sup>17</sup> (These were not the first magazines named as such; between 20 December 1837 and 31 December 1838, the existence of the first Romanian newspaper, which had also been the first press element with

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<sup>14</sup>. Participants at the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian countries.

<sup>15</sup>. In fact, Mihail Kogălniceanu was not the minister of foreign affairs during Cuza's rule, but later, under Carol I, in 1869-1878. During Cuza's rule, Kogălniceanu was: president of the Council of Ministers of Iasi; minister of the interior; minister of the interior, agriculture and public works; and prime-minister.

<sup>16</sup> Ioan Aurel Pop, *Istoria și semnificația...*, 21-22.

<sup>17</sup>. See *Dicționarul literaturii române de la origini până la 1900 [Dictionary of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to 1900]* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1979), 741-746.

this name – spelled “Pomania”, in the transition alphabet<sup>18</sup> - had expired. Published in Bucharest, by the Editing and Printing House Frederic Walbaum, the magazine had as editors in chief professors Florian Aaron and Georg Hill.)<sup>19</sup>

Around 1850, the first iconographic representations of Romania appeared, from painters Constantin Daniel Rosenthal (1820-1851) and Gheorghe Tattarescu (1820-1894), both of them participants, one directly, the other indirectly, to the Revolution of 1848. We are talking about the allegorical paintings “România rupându-și cătușele pe Câmpia Libertății” [“Romania Unshackled on the Field of Liberty”] (1848) and “România revoluționară” [“Revolutionary Romania”] (1850), respectively “Renașterea României” [“The Rebirth of Romania”] (also known as “Deșteptarea României” [“The Awakening of Romania”], 1850), painted by their authors abroad (after the defeat of the Revolution in the Principalities, Rosenthal was in refuge in Paris, and, in the same period, Tattarescu was pursuing his studies in Rome). In the three paintings, Romania is depicted as a young woman, like the modern state that the Romanian revolutionaries of 1848 had tried to obtain and which would appear with the Small Union of 1859. Probably an important source of inspiration for the two artists was, in this sense (the representation of the country as a young woman), the famous Marianne of the French, symbol of their nation during the Revolution of 1789, to the principles of which the generation of the Romanian Forty-Eighters was deeply attached. Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, the author of a study called *Ipostaze feminine în cultura română a secolului al XIX-lea: “Marianne”-le românești*, finds that the authors of the three paintings tried to “fit in the Romanian setting (national costume, necklace, other details) the feminine allegories of the second French Republic, of 1848”<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The alphabet that allowed the transition from the Romanian Cyrillic alphabet (used in the writing of Romanian starting from the 14th and 15th centuries) to the Latin one. This was done between 1828 and 1862 by the gradual replacement of one Cyrillic letter at a time with its Latin alphabet equivalent.

<sup>19</sup> *Dicționarul...*, 741.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, “Ipostaze feminine în cultura română a secolului al XIX-lea: «Marianne»-le românești” [“Feminine Aspects in the Romanian Culture of the 19th Century: the Romanian ‘Mariannes’”], in *Études sur le texte dédiées à Halina Grzmil-Tylutki*, edited by Joanna Górniewicz, Barbara Marczuk, Iwona Piechnik (Kraków: Jagiellonian Library, 2016), 312-313.



**Fig. 2:** "Revolutionary Romania" (1850) by Constantin Daniel Rosenthal

The author also observes that Rosenthal's and Tattarescu's paintings were, "in the Romanian context of the age, exceptions"<sup>21</sup>, the feminine allegorical representations being "absolutely sporadic in the Romanian Principalities"<sup>22</sup> at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Like in the France of 1800-1830, notes the author, when, according to historian Maurice Agulhon, "'Marianne' left room to the virile, militarized patriotic representations, to the cult of Napoleon"<sup>23</sup>, "the revolutionary imaginary of

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<sup>21</sup>. Ibid., 312.

<sup>22</sup>. Ibid., 307.

<sup>23</sup>. Ibid., 312.



the Romanian Forty-Eighters was dominated by masculine, ruling tutelary personalities, with a privileged place occupied by Mihai Viteazul, Vlad Țepeș, Avram Iancu, and Tudor Vladimirescu<sup>24</sup>. In the opinion of Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, the explanation is the deeply patriarchal nature of the Romanian society of that Turkish-Oriental age, but also the delay of its development in relation to the West, especially with regard to the laicization of culture and of public life dominated by a “suffocating Orthodox ethicism”, as put by the literary critic Mihai Zamfir. Given the resistance of patriarchy to the wind of change (which blew mainly from France, first through Russian and Greek channels), by virtue of which, says the author, “the rulers’ and the fighters’ (or even the outlaws’) personalities would come to dominate the Romanian imaginary” in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the feminine ones would be assigned, both in the age and later, the marginal zone, of the ridicule and of parody”<sup>25</sup>.

### The First Theatrical Representation of Romania

Nevertheless, in the area of theatre, unexplored by Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, we can identify several very interesting feminine allegorical representations. One that deserved increased attention dates back to 1852 and belongs to the Wallachian actor and playwright Costache Caragiali (1815-1877), from the famous family that also gave Iorgu Caragiali (1826-1894; brother of the former, him too an actor and a playwright), Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912; nephew of the two mentioned before, considered a classic of the Romanian literature and the greatest Romanian playwright), Mateiu and Luchi Caragiale (Ion Luca’s sons, both of them writers) to the Romanian culture. This is the first allegorical-dramatic representation of Romania (which appeared only two years after its first iconographic representations), in a too little known *Prolog pentru inaugurarea noului teatru din București* [*Prologue for the Inauguration of the New Bucharest Theatre*], written by Costache Caragiali at the inauguration of Teatrul cel Mare [The Grand Theatre] of the Wallachian capital (which will be later called the National Theatre). Actually, this is not unprecedented: before him, the writer and cultural promoter Gheorghe Asachi (1788-1869) had turned Moldavia in a dramatic feminine character – “Zâna Moldovii [the Moldavian Fairy]” -, in

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<sup>24</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 313.

a *Prolog [Prologue]*<sup>26</sup> made for the debut performance of the students at the Iasi Philharmonic-Dramatic Conservatory (the first school of theatre in Moldavia), which occurred on 23 February 1837, on the stage of Teatrul de Varietăți [Variety Theatre]. Asachi's prologue "dramatized", in fact, an even older representation painted according to his own sketches on the curtain used on 27 February 1816, during the play with *Mirtil și Hloe [Myrtil et Chloé]*, after Gessner and Florian, which went down in history as the first representation of (semi)professional, "art" theatre (as opposed to folkloric, traditional performances or school drama), given by Romanians in their language.

Asachi, who would draw quite well and had studies in this field, first taken in Vienna and, then, between 1808 and 1812, in Italian towns – had also executed – additional to the translation of the text and its staging – the stage design of the play performed in the house of hetman Costache Ghica. The aforementioned curtain, which was an imitation of a model he had brought from Rome, showed god Apollo extending his hand to Moldavia. In the later prologue, with a marked pictorial tinge of "*tableau vivant*", Asachi introduced other characters, apart from the already described one: Genius<sup>27</sup>, as guide of the Moldavian Fairy to Mount Parnassus, and the "Muses", "with their traits"<sup>28</sup>, companions of the god of arts (together with whom they made a decorative plastic group placed on the summit of Parnassus "like in the famous icon of Raphael"<sup>29</sup>). The whole "action" of Asachi's *Prolog...*, which takes place, according to the stage directions, during a frightening night, with "lightning in the distance"<sup>30</sup>, is the travel of the Moldavian Fairy, led by Genius who holds a torch with the other hand, to the site of the divine protectors of the arts, which is shown only at the end of the sketch, like a sudden musical-bright vision (according to the stage directions, a "slow harmonious music" streams over to the audience<sup>31</sup>). At first, the Fairy, "used

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<sup>26</sup>. See Gheorghe Asachi, *Prolog rostit în Teatru Național din Iași la ocazia deschiderii și inaugurării sale în 23 Febr. 1837*, apud Teodor T. Burada, *Istoria teatrului în Moldova [History of Theatre in Moldavia]*, vol. I (Iasi: Institutul de Arte Grafice N. V. Ștefaniu & Comp., 1915), 170-172; as well as "Prolog compus de A. G. Asachi, și rostit pe Teatrul Varietăților din Iași în 23 februarie 1837. La acea întâi dramatică Reprezentație Moldovenească a Conservatorului Filarmonic", in *Albina românească (supliment)*, no. 18, March 4 (1837): 83-84 (in Cyrillic script).

<sup>27</sup>. "Ghenius" as transcribed by Teodor Burada.

<sup>28</sup>. The specification can be found only in the supplement to *Albina românească* of March 4 (1837): 84, in a *Însemnare [Note]* that Burada no longer reproduces in his *Istoria...*

<sup>29</sup>. See the previous note.

<sup>30</sup>. "Thunders", as transcribed by Teodor Burada.

<sup>31</sup>. See note 28.

to leisure”, as she admits it herself, expresses her fears with regard to the difficult road that Genius had convinced her to follow, while the latter, without hiding from her its challenges and dangers (including temptations), also finds words of encouragement, reminding her of her “twin sisters” (probably the Western people of the Latin race) who had known a long time before her the same trials and who had got to smooth waters. Called to choose “between dark and light”, the Moldavian Fairy chooses to go forward, against any risk, ready to sacrifice herself for what seems to be a noble purpose: “Eu aleg petroasa cale, care văd că s-au deschis, / De-oi peri, frumoasă-i moartea, pentr-un lucru evghenis” [“I choose the stony path that I see open, / Should I succumb, death for a noble thing is beautiful”]. The *Prolog...* (printed in the national colours on leaflets that “would rain” on the spectators at a certain point, as shown by an unsigned review of the age<sup>32</sup>) was staged in the opening of a play that included two other adaptations by Asachi, based on *La Pérouse* (*Lapeirus* in his Romanian translation) and *Văduva vicleană* (*The Cunning Widow*) by August von Kotzebue.

The Moldavian Fairy was played by madame Elisabeta Fabian, and Genius by Alecu Asachi, son of Gheorghe Asachi, both students of the Philharmonic Conservatory. Costache Caragiali may well have known this *Prolog...*, just as he must have known about Iancu Văcărescu’s *Prologul la deschiderea teatrului întâiași dată în București* [*Prologue for the Opening of the Theatre for the First Time in Bucharest*] created for the performance at Cișmeaua Roșie, of 1819, of the Romanian students of Sf. Sava, a text in which god Saturn was the protagonist. (Văcărescu’s prologue was published in *Curierul românesc* in 1830<sup>33</sup>, while Asachi’s was published in *Albina românească*, in 1837.) The certain thing is that the list of *dramatis personae* of Caragiali’s *Prolog...* includes both Apollo with the Muses (but, here, they were named and individualized) and Saturn, so it is very likely that the author knew the previous similar writing of Asachi and Văcărescu, and, even more, he may have wanted to evoke them, reverently, by intertextual reference, thus placing himself and his writing in the lineage of a “founding” tradition. Unlike the previous prologues, however, Costache Caragiali’s text had an extremely rough, totally undeserved fate: written, as said before, for

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<sup>32</sup>. See *Albina românească (supliment)*, no. 18, March 4 (1837): 82. (The review, bilingual, printed on two columns in the pages of *Albina*, in Romanian and French, is reproduced by Burada in his *Istoria...*, 169-170.)

<sup>33</sup>. See *Curierul românesc*, no. 83, Friday, January 17 (1830): 347-348.

the inauguration of Teatrul cel Mare of Bucharest, it could not be put on stage, apparently because of its too markedly patriotic nature which did not sit well with the authorities of the age. "The inauguration took place; but it did so quietly, reservedly, without prologues, without patriotic hymns, all of them being cancelled... any hint at a national celebration was suppressed"<sup>34</sup>, noted, later, Cezar Bolliac in the gazette *Trompeta Carpaților*.

For an understanding of this interdiction, things should be seen in their historical context: this was an age of restrictions, of "restoration": after the suppression of the Revolution of 1848, by the Convention of Balta-Liman (1849), the organic Regulations had become effective once again; they (re)confirmed the domination of the Ottoman and Russian Empires (the sovereign and protecting powers) over the Romanian Principalities. The national rulers, considered high servants of the Sublime Porte, were required to take into account the preferences of both the Turks and the Russians, who took a poor view of the Romanians' attempts of national emancipation. This state of things lasted until the start of the Crimean War (1853-1856), when the Principalities were occupied by Russian and Austrian armies. In fact, the Romanian company of actors, led by Caragiali, who had been appointed director-lessee of the new establishment with the composer and conductor Ioan Andrei Wachmann (1807-1863), had been at threat itself of being excluded from the theatre opening program, because its manager, the Italian Papanicola, and the architect of the new building, the Austrian Heft, wanted to inaugurate the construction with Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, the topic of which allowed the display of the modern German machineries that they had. A fortunate event hindered the readiness of the machines within the due time, so that a new program was quickly drafted for the opening. It did not match Costache Caragiali's plans (nor did it match the plans of the former director of the theatres in the capital, cup-bearer Ioan Samurçaș, who had been removed right before the grand event and replaced with the grand logothete Ioan Slătineanul), but, at least, it allowed the Romanian artists (and Caragiali himself) to appear in front of the eager audience, on this great festive occasion, together with the performers of the Italian opera company, hosted in the same place. The intensely disputed inauguration occurred, in the end, on the evening of 31 December 1852, in the presence of ruler Barbu

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<sup>34</sup>. Apud Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică [Romanian Theatre. A Historical Perspective]*, vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1961), 416. (Hereinafter: Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc I*).

Știrbei, of the foreign consuls and of a motley crowd of spectators, from all classes of the society. The program was eclectic, including the overture of Ioan Wachmann's operetta *Claca țărănească* [*Peasant Corvée*], opened by a *doina* on flute (the only nationally specific moment of the program), several scenes of Italian opera and a vaudeville-comedy (with Costache Caragiali and Niny Valéry in the leading roles), which the theatre historians could not identify with accuracy: *Zoe sau Un amor românesc* [*Zoe or a Romanian Love Affair*], according to Dimitrie Ollănescu<sup>35</sup>, *Zoe sau Un amor romanesc* [*Zoe or a Novelistic Love Affair*], as rectified in a recently published article by historian Georgeta Filitti<sup>36</sup>, or *Zoe sau Amantul împrumutat* [*Zoe or the Borrowed Lover*], according to the officious "Vestitorul românesc"<sup>37</sup>, a play translated, apparently, from *Zoe, ou L'amant prêté* by Scribe and Mélesville, in the opinion of Ioan Massoff<sup>38</sup>.

Costache Caragiali's prologue remained in manuscript until after the author's death and was only published in 1881, when Vasile Alecsandri handed it over to Iosif Vulcan, to publish it in the magazine *Familia*, followed by a letter of recommendation. Both texts were published in the opening of issue 14 of *Familia*, of 15/27 February 1881. Ioan Massoff republished fragments of them in the first volume of his grand work, *Teatrul românesc* [*Romanian Theatre*], with a brief appreciative comment: "Costache Caragiale's prologue is effective and its performance would have borrowed the national character to the inaugurating play", claims the theatre historian.<sup>39</sup> Caragiali's *Prolog...* was never put on stage. In *Scrisoarea adresată redactorului* [*Letter to the Editor*] of *Familia*, Vasile Alecsandri painted a commemorative portrait of Costache Caragiali, without forgetting to emphasize his own artistic merits while evoking Caragiali's success, as actor, in the leading role of the play *Cuconul Iorgu de la Sadagura*, one of the first dramatic creations of the man who penned the letter. (In fact, therein, Alecsandri launched an inaccurate piece of information when he said that the play was presented by Caragiali, in Bucharest, in front of ruler Gheorghe Bibescu, while, after

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35. Dimitrie C. Ollănescu, *Teatrul la români*, edition managed, preface, notes, and comments by Cristina Dumitrescu (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 403.

36. Georgeta Filitti, "Teatrul cel Mare", in *Ziarul Metropolis*, March 9 (2016), accessed on February 15, 2018: <https://www.ziarulmetropolis.ro/teatrul-cel-mare/>

37. See the notice for the opening of the new theatre in *Vestitorul românesc*, XVII, no. 103, Wednesday, December 31 (1852): 412.

38. Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc I*, 414.

39. *Ibid.*, 415 (selections from Alecsandri's letter) and 564-567 (in the notes: beginning of the prologue, to the entry on stage of Romania and her first lines).

the performance, the Romanian theatrical company obtained an annual subsidy of 300 slots. But in fact, the play staged in front of the Wallachian ruler in 1845 had been *O bună educațiune* [A Good Education] by Costache Bălăcescu, as shown by Costache Caragiali himself in *Teatru Național în Țeara Românească*, a strongly autobiographic work of 1855.)

The protagonists of Costache Caragiali's *Prolog...*<sup>40</sup> are Apollo, God of Muses; Melpomene, Muse of Tragedy; Thalia, Muse of Comedy; Terpsichore, Muse of Dance; Erato, Muse of Lyric Poetry; Calliope, Muse of Poetry; Polyhymnia, Muse of Hymn; Urania, Muse of Astronomy; Clio, Muse of History; Euterpe, Muse of Harmony; Saturn, God of Time; Romania; and Fama (Pheme), Goddess of Rumors. The background characters include the spirits of "a number of dramatic authors of the classic school", peasants – men and women. The site of action is no longer the road to Mount Parnassus (like at Asachi), but Mount Parnassus itself: stepping on its peak, Caragiali's Romania will accomplish the journey begun by the other, older writer's Moldavian Fairy... The apotheotic nature of the image, tributary, like Asachi's, to the plastic arts, is made evident from the beginning:

*La ridicarea cortinei se vede Apolon pe muntele Parnas, cu lira sa pe genunchi. În giurul său Muzele în costum antic Elenic. În stânga și în dreapta, de la planul al 3-le până la planul 1-iu stau atârinate cununii mari de flori, purtând în mijlocul lor litera începătoare a numelui fiecărui autor clasic. Zeița Fama vine prin aer, anunțând. Fiecare Muză ține în mână emblema artei ce proteje. Zeul Saturn e cam în mijlocul scenei, făcând o dreaptă linie din partea stângă a spectatorilor cu cununele spiritelor autorilor. Muzica ezeută un tremolo; apoi un acord de anunțare ce precedează sosirea Famei.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>. The quotes are reproduced after Costachi Caragiali, „Prolog pentru inaugurarea noului teatru din București” [“Prologue for the Inauguration of the New Bucharest Theatre”], in *Familia*, XVII, no. 14, Sunday, February 15/27 (1881): 81-84.

<sup>41</sup>. “When the curtain lifts, the audience can see Apollo on Mount Parnassus, his lyre on the knees. Around him, the Muses wearing ancient Hellenic costumes. On the left and right, from the third to the first plane, large wreaths of flowers, with the first letter of the name of each classic author at the center. Goddess Fama arrives by air, announcing. Every Muse holds the emblem of the art that they protect. God Saturn is at the middle of the stage, going in a straight line from the left side of the spectators, with the wreaths of the authors’ spirits. The music is in tremolo; then an announcing tune preceding the arrival of Fama”.

She descends on the stage in a cloud, in grand style. The God of Rumors announces the arrival of a girl whose traits she emphasizes are – and we note this – youth, beauty, and modesty: „Juneța-i, frumuseța-i,/ Plăcuta-i modestie,/ E scumpa cheazășie/ De ceea ce doriți” [“Her youth, her beauty,/ Her lovely modesty,/ Are an assurance/ Of what you desire”]. Romania appears in front of Apollo and she wears “splendid national costume”. When she reaches close to him, “she greets everyone majestically”, while the orchestra starts playing the prelude of a national area. The choir and god Apollo praise and sing the girl’s grace. Despite the much-mentioned shyness, Romania introduces herself to the group of divinities fairly disinhibited:

*România.*

Apolon, mă ascultă,  
Ascultă cu răbdare.  
Dorința mea e multă  
Și ruga-mi este mare.  
Sunt Țeara România!  
Din mica mea pruncie  
Mereu am suferit  
Resboaie de orice treaptă  
Și soarta mult nedreaptă  
Adesa m-au oprit  
De-a face-naintări.  
Sosita acum vreme,  
Încât nu se mai teme  
Românu-n veatra sa.  
Protecția ce are  
I face lui carare  
Spre a înainta  
În lumea de-ncântări.

*Romania:*

Apollo, listen to me,  
Listen to me patiently.  
My desire is great  
And my prayer is deep.  
I am Romania the Country!  
From my infancy  
I have always suffered  
All kinds of wars  
And the unfair fate  
Have often stopped me  
From going forward.  
But now the time has come  
For the Romanian not to be afraid  
In his land  
The protection he enjoys  
Paves the way  
For the world of delight.]

The character’s speech is illustrative for the way in which the meaning of the denominative Romania would go, in that age, between the more restricted meaning of Wallachia to the more comprehensive one of all the territories inhabited by a majority Romanian population, a polysemy that was kept by the writers (and probably the speakers) of the age in order to disguise, to some extent, their union-wise ideas that were not seen exactly favourably by the authorities.



Fig. 3: "Rebirth of Romania" (1850) by Gheorghe Tattarescu

The playwright proves his diplomatic tact also when he invokes, through his character, the "protection" that the Romanian people would enjoy in their land (hinting at the protection of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, whose representatives would assist the inauguration of Teatrul cel Mare) and which would finally allow them, after a long and difficult wait, to advance on the



land of arts. "Diplomacy and skills are not necessary only in parliaments"<sup>42</sup>, would note Caragiali later, in *Teatru Național în Țeara Românească*, with regard to his attempt to defeat the misconceptions of the higher classes in reference to the very young Romanian theatre. Although the author was well endowed with both, diplomacy and skills did not work their magic this time and failed to save his *Prolog...* from censorship.

The next fragment – the answer of the God of the Muses to Romania – can be another argument in favor of a filiation between Caragiali's and Asachi's prologues, because, like Genius, who recommended that the Moldavian Fairy measure her step for an easier achievement of her goal, Apollo (in whom we can reasonably see an *alter-ego* of the Wallachian playwright) teaches Romania the lesson of measure, advising her to walk with "tact and measure" on the path she chose. To strengthen his message, Apollo proposes that Romania take as guide the God of Time, Saturn. Like a good and docile daughter, she vows to abide by his advice and to take time and patience as her allies in her progress. The choir sings triumphantly, proclaiming her saved, redeemed (even in the religious sense of the word) from under the power of evil and of ignorance. Apollo repeats his invitation for the young woman to share her requests. Making a confession out of her ignorance, Romania asks to partake, like others before her, of the sciences and *belles arts* hosted on Mount Parnassus. The god is again moved by the girl's decency and spells a better fate for her:

*Apolon:*

Îmi place modestia-ți! Ea îți  
făgăduiește  
Progres!  
Acel ce se cunoaște pe sine,  
acela crește,  
Acela se mărește,  
Acela-naintează,  
Acela prosperează,  
Acela dobândește  
Înaltul înțeleș!

*Apollo:*

I like your modesty! It promises  
Progress!  
The one who knows herself grows,  
Expands,  
Goes forward,  
Prosperes,  
Finds  
The higher meaning!

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<sup>42</sup>. C. Carageali, *Teatru Național în Țeara Românească. Dedicată publicului român (București, iulie 1855) [National Theatre in Wallachia. Dedicated to the Romanian Audience (Bucharest, July 1955)]* (Bucharest: Printing Office C.A. Rosetti, 1867), 18.

Apollo then encourages the Muses to share their gifts to the new proselyte, which they hurry to do, elatedly. In fact, in the guise of old Hellas, the Muses perform a rite with autochthonous origins, the whole scene being a reminder of the well-known motif of the Ursitoare (Fates) in the tales of the Romanians. The Muse of Tragedy, Melpomene, as coryphaeus, speaks to Romania in the beginning and at the end of the rite, on behalf of the other Muses' choir, treating her like a sister. (Although, as playwright, Caragiali wrote exclusively comedy, he did hold tragedy in higher regard – like most of his contemporaries -, given that he had been raised, mainly, in the school of the Greek classics, of neo-classicism, and of the Enlightenment). Then comes the turn of the spirits of the “dramatic authors of the classic school” to agree with helping Romania by their knowledge and advice, as masterfully suggested by god Apollo. For this purpose, the “sublime” Shakespeare, the “blissful” Molière, Aeschylus, Racine, Corneille, Aristophanes, and Voltaire are invoked. The wreath of flowers that represent them tilt for approval, while “a light fills the stage”, as shown in the stage directions. The choir rejoices again:

*Cor:*

Au primit! au primit!  
 Te bucură, fetiță.  
 Iubită copilă,  
 Acum s-a hotărât!  
 Junimea ʼnaripată  
 De-acum povățuită,  
 Va fi neobosită  
 La scrieri mai solide, la faptă  
 mai bărbată!  
 Te felicităm,  
 Te felicităm,  
 Și progres în toate cu drag îți  
 urăm!

*Choir:*

They agreed! they agreed!  
 Be happy, little girl.  
 Darling child.  
 Now it's decided!  
 The youth now inspired  
 And instructed  
 Will be determined  
 To more solid writings, to more  
 steadfast doings!  
 We applaud you,  
 We applaud you,  
 And far-reaching progress  
 we wish you!



DUMINECA (SABOATĂ) Va est'j'at' si domine's'a. ANUL XVII. Prețul pe un an 10 R.  
 15 Febr. st. v. Redacțiunea în 1881. Pe 1/2, de an 5 R.; pe 1/4,  
 27 Febr. st. n. Măp-atca nr. 395. Nr. 14. de an 2 R. 70 cr.  
Pentru Românii a 2 galbeni.

**Serisire adresata redactorului.**

Miracesi 2/14 febr. 1881.

Domnul meu!

Pintre hârtiile mele gasesc un manuscris ce nu lipseste de oare-care interes în privirea datei sale și a ocaziunii la care a fost compus. Este un prolog în versuri, destinat a fi pus în muzica, și executat la inaugurarea teatrului celui mare din Bucuresti.

Autorul, dl Costachi Caragiali a fost unul din cei întâi timeri Români care adâmbrașat carier'a dramatica. Elev distins al repausatului Aristia, el a fost imororat de art'a teatrului și într'un șie de mulți ani a luptat cu dificultățile vieții care au fost și sânt încă astăzi partea actorilor noștri. Dar nu s'a descurajat până când bețușetele l'au lipsit de puteri.

Pe la anul 1844 Caragiali se găsea la Iasi, și a creat cu mare succes rolul cel mai principal din comedia „Jorga dela Sadagura”, apoi s'a dus de a format o trupa în Bacuresci, unde ca director, ajunsese aproape de o ruina completa, atât ead de poșin susținut pe atunci tot ce eră național.

Pe când luse eră gata să închida teatrul, i veni ide'a să poze în scena pe „Jorga dela Sadagura”, în care avusese atâta succes la Iasi, și acesta însprăție l'a scapat de naufragiu. Ca prim varg'a unei vrajitoare, sal'a teatrului se umpli de spectatori, recet'a se mari, și comedia fu așa de gustata de publicul Bacuresciscin, încât ănsuși Voda Bibescu veni să asiste la una din reprezentații. În acea seră memorabila guvernul se gândi mai serios la nou'a instituție a teatrului național și o ajută cu o subvenție de 300 galbini pe an.

Costachi Caragiali în avântul seu artistic, a fost și actor și director și autor. El a compus mai multe drame (preparate cu oare-cari anachronisme de cari ănsuși ridea mai târziu) și între' alte scrieri, prologul alăturat. Ve comunic o copie de pe el, nu ca o piesa de tranala literatură, dar ca un testimoniu al activității spirituelor la anul 1862.

Dacă credeți, că e bine a se publica tot ce va pute servi în istoria teatrului în Români'a, binevoiti ai deschide colozede „Familiei”. La ens contrar pastrati prologul cu o curiositate literara.

Costachi Caragiali a murit nu demult, lasând un fiu care pare a calca pe urmele purintelui seu. El a mai lasat și un volum întreg de poezi nepublicate, dintre cari unele merita a fi date în lamina.

Acosta datoria privesc pe fiul repausatului, cât pentru mine, marturisesc că zg fi bucuros să nu se pierda cu totul numele umnia din cei întâi pionieri pe calea spinosa a artei dramatice în Români'a.

Primiti etc.

V. Alecsandri.

**P r o l o g**

pentru inaugurarea noului teatru din Bucuresti.

1852

de Costachi Caragiali.

Personagi:

Apolon . . . . .	Deul Muzelor.
Melpomena . . . . .	Muz'a Tragediei.
Talia . . . . .	Muz'a Comediei.
Terpsihora . . . . .	Muz'a Danțului.
Ereto . . . . .	Muz'a Grățului.
Calliopi . . . . .	Muz'a Poeziei.
Polluxia . . . . .	Muz'a Imnelor.
Urania . . . . .	Muz'a Astronomiei.
Clio . . . . .	Muz'a Istoriei.
Euterpa . . . . .	Muz'a Armoniei.
Saturni . . . . .	Deul Timpului.
Români'a	
Fam'a	Dei'a Vestitorilor.

Spirite a mai multor autori dramatice din școl'a clasice. Terani. Terance.

Teatrul reprezinta muntele Parnas.

La ridicarea cortinei se vede Apolon pe muntele Parnas, cu lira sa pe genunchi. În giurul sech Muzele în costum antic Elenic. În stâng'a și în drept'a, dela planul al 3-le până în planul 1-in stau atârinate canuni mari de flozi, purtând în mijlocul lor liter'a începătoare a numelui fie-cărui autor classic. Dei'a Fama vine prin aer, anunțând. Fie-care Muză ține în mâna emblemei artei ce proteje. Deul Saturn e cum în mijlocul scenei, facend o drepta linie din partea stâng'a a spectatorilor cu emanele spiritelor autorilor. Musica asculta un tremolo; apoi un acord de anunțare ce precedeaza sosirea Famei.

Apolon, către Muză.

Imi place-adesă să ve ved  
 În fugă-mi adunato,  
 Fiuște îndestrate  
 De grație divina.  
 Ca voi imi place să consult  
 De sôr'a omenirei.  
 Căci numai voi puteți a fi  
 Organul fericirei  
 La trist'a omenire.  
 Când de dureri, mahnire  
 Săpăsa și suspini!  
 Aș dar astăzi v'am vestit  
 Să fiți în pregătire.  
 Că de'n Fama mi-a promis  
 S'aduca o vestire  
 Și un noț prozeit...

Fig. 4: The beginning of Costache Caragiali's prologue in *Familia*

Romania thanks her “divine sisters”, reassuring them that: „Pe plaiul nostru românesc / Primate-ți fi cu bine!” [“On our Romanian land / You’ll be welcome”]. These are her last replies in the prologue. Thereafter, Apollo offers a number of directions to the Muses. The idea on the mission of the arts, suggested by his words, is the one that dominated the Romanian culture in the first three quarters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tributary to the previous, “meliorist” century of Reason and to the principles of neo-classicism. According to this idea, arts were tasked with fighting against the flaws (vices) and with correcting the society’s mores, with eliminating the ignorance of the masses and with offering them delight with beautiful visions or offering consolation. „Încoronați virtutea! Blamați neomenia. / Prin blânde maniere poporul îndreptați. / Și ca să prospereze în secolii România / O școală de năravuri frumoase întemeiați” [“Crown virtue! Blame inhumanity/ With gentle manners better the people. / And for Romania to thrive across centuries/ A school of good habits you should establish”], tells Apollo to the Muses. The phrase “school of good habits” means, of course, the theatre. This synonymy, passionately nurtured by the pioneers of Romanian theatre, was long-lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, up to it becoming a cliché. The same god voices the following belief, which, certainly, was also the playwright’s: „Teatrul e știința! Și școala de lumină! / El viața îndreptează, durerea ne alină / Prin raza cea divină” [“Theatre is lore! And school of enlightenment! / It betters our life, and soothes our pain/ By the divine light”]. One “detail” of which Caragiali, and, in fact, his whole generation, were too painfully aware was that a preliminary condition for the arts to achieve their forward work was that this progress should be desired and promoted by the state authorities – hence the request for the ruler’s support, masked by Apollo’s shout: „Ferice este țeara al căreia părinte / Cu inima fierbinte / O ndeamnă, o împinge să meargă înainte!” [“Happy the country whose parent / With a heart fervent / Encourages it, pushes it to go forward!”] – an exclamation that will then be reprised by the choir of the Muses. In the end, the god hurries the Muses to the inauguration of the new construction, which they should perform, by giving them one last order: „Cântați un imn de pace, de mândra reînviere, / Poporului ce are un nume drept avere, / Și tot pe cale bună voi mersu-i îndreptați!” [“Sing a hymn of peace, of proud resurrection, / To the people whose name is its treasure, / And keep showing it the good way!”]. The characters and the setting are put in motion, according to a choreography very well-orchestrated by the author:

*Pornesc cu toți în modul următor: Saturn ținând de mână pe România și Muzele fac un giur pe dinaintea spectatorilor. Ies în stânga, în vreme ce se coboară o cortină în dreapta muntelui Parnas. Pe cortină se văd zugrăvite armoriile țării. Culisele sunt unite prin semighirlande de flori cu culorile României. Orchestra ezeceutează arii naționale. Apoi intră de prin stânga toți personajii din acest prolog; și din dreapta toți actorii îmbrăcați în costume naționale bogate. Ei cântă imnul. Pe urmă șese mici fete și șese băieți costumați în silfi fac un semi-rond, și după ei vin alți doi, cari aduc două mari buchaturi; și le oferează, zicând: Ție, prea înălțate Doamne! Ție, înaltă nobleță și generosule public!”<sup>43</sup>.*

All the actors chant in the end a hymn in two stanzas, the last one proclaiming:

Vivat! trăiască Prințul! Vivat iubita țeară! / Vivat noul Teatru! în el chiar  
astă seară / Românii s-au adunat / Și-n limba strămoșească / De trupa  
Românească / S-au inaugurat! / Vivat! Vivat! Vivat! / Trăiască Prințul,  
țeara și cei ce l-au fondat!<sup>44</sup>.

Of course, as noted by Alecsandri, Costache Caragiali’s prologue is not “a piece of great literature”, nor was it created to be one, but, for all intents and purposes, i.e. for a (dramatic) poem of occasion, it is very well articulated and cleverly constructed, designed thoroughly in relation to the history of European and national theatre, to the national aspirations and to the audience. Significantly more complex, as compared with the similar creations of his

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<sup>43</sup>. “They start moving as follows: Saturn hand in hand with Romania and the Muses move in rounds in front of the spectators. They exit through the left, while a curtain goes down near Mount Parnassus. The country’s coat of arms can be seen painted on the curtain. The wings are joined by semi-garlands of flowers, in Romania’s colours. The orchestra is playing national areas. Then, through the left, all the characters in the prologue enter; and from the right, all the actors dressed in splendid national costumes. They sing the anthem. Then six little girls and six boys dressed as sylphs make a half circle, followed by two more who bring two large bouquets and offer them, saying: To you, our grand Lord! To you, our noble and generous audience!”

<sup>44</sup>. “Vivat! Long live the Prince! Vivat beloved country! Vivat the new Theatre! In it this very evening/ Romanians have gathered/ And in our ancestors’ language/ The Romanian company/ Was inaugurated!/ Vivat! Vivat! Vivat! / Long live the prince, the country and those who founded it!”

predecessors, Gheorghe Asachi and Iancu Văcărescu, Caragiali's play tells of another, perhaps greater ambition: the playwright wanted to go down in history as the author of the – theatrical – baptismal act of Romania (see the sequence with the Muses-Fates), while also searching for the official recognition of the primacy of the Romanian theatre company (which he led) in front of the foreign companies (fairly numerous at the time in the capitals of the Principalities) with which they have to compete for the audience's favour and, especially, for the state-granted subsidy (always lower than the one granted to their rivals). Caragiali would have wanted his play to be the foundation stone of a real National Theatre, in the sense that it would only acquire around the War of Independence (1877-78), i.e. of fundamental state institution meant to encourage, through theatre, the national idea and identity, the national specificity. The stars were against it. Romania's theatrical-dramatic "christening" act has remained, undeservedly, an obscure document.

In *Visualizing the Nation. Gender, Representation and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, when examining the feminine visual representations of the French nation in the age of the first Republic, Joan B. Landes finds that nationalist ideology involves a convergence of the patriotic sentiment and of eroticism.<sup>45</sup> The nation and the homeland are entities that are too abstract to be able to stir the imagination of the masses in the absence of representations that approach the senses, she notes, treading in the steps of the aforementioned historian Maurice Agulhon. When the political community is exclusively masculine – as the French one became (again) starting from 1793, when the attempts of feminine emancipation, seen in the first stage of the Revolution, were suppressed -, the feminine representations of the nation may help to stimulate the sentiments of (erotic) desire and (filial or passionate, or even filial-passionate, oedipal) attachment of its members to the thus embodied idea (of nation). They are the vehicle of a close intimacy between the citizens and the nation (homeland or state). The privileged position occupied by the woman in the system of the representation during the first French republic should not deceive us as to her condition: as shown by Joan B. Landes, this can be seen as a form of compensation for the social and political inequality that described her position in the real order of things.<sup>46</sup> In fact, says the author, while quoting a number of studies, it has been proven that there is an

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<sup>45</sup>. Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation. Gender, Representation and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (New-York, London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 80.

<sup>46</sup>. *Ibid.*, 82.

affinity between nationalism and the societies defined, mainly, as masculine fraternities; in other words, nationalism goes hand in hand with the tendency of excluding women from the public life.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, nationalist ideology cannot do without the woman's reproductive body, which represents the promise of historical continuity on which the nation is established.<sup>48</sup> The possibility of social regeneration, of national rebirth depends on this body. Subsequently, the maternal role becomes the core of the nationalist project, with a both public and private relevance, circumscribed to the domestic sphere.<sup>49</sup> Joan B. Landes also observes that, as allegory of the nation, the female body may stir more than feelings of affection; it may also lead to jealous possession: the nation's feminine allegorical body – the object of patriotic love – is to be protected at all time against a potential assault of internal or external suitors or assailants, against the "rape" (by the representatives) of other states or nations.<sup>50</sup> Because the citizen's "honour as family man" (as the famous nephew of Caragiali would write) relates to it, it is preferable that this body has a seductive but chaste, "desexualized but not altogether desensualized" representation<sup>51</sup>.

We have mentioned above a study by Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei, which noted that the feminine allegorical representations (in literature and in the plastic arts) belong rather to a field of exception in the Romanian culture at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century-the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. This does not mean that the women of the Romanian principalities had more rights, at that time, than their sisters in the France during the first republic. Quite the opposite. Neither women, nor culture had it better. (Gabriela Gavril-Antonesei does not seem to consider this latter aspect: the backward position of our visual arts in relation to the West, the delayed development, in our country, only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the illustrated press, for example, or the slow process of laicization of Romanian painting. For instance, Tattarescu began his career as church painter.) Despite their sporadic nature, feminine allegorical representations appeared, in the Romanian culture, in close connection with the emergence of national consciousness – or the "awakening of Romania", a leitmotif of the age – and with the attempts of national emancipation that would lead, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>. Ibid., 138.

<sup>48</sup>. Ibid., 173.

<sup>49</sup>. Ibid., 91.

<sup>50</sup>. Ibid., 165.

<sup>51</sup>. Ibid., 168.

century, to the formation of the modern Romanian state and, in the end, to the Great Union of 1918. This stands true also for the theatrical-dramatic feminine allegorical representations discussed above, coming from Gheorghe Asachi and Costache Caragiali. The symptomatic aspect is that none of them seems to threaten the patriarchal order that, in both prologues, remains firm: men continue to hold the tutelary position (Genius, Apollo, Saturn); the man is the tutor, the guide, the protector, the one who counsels the woman, who has paternal authority, and the one who takes her hands (literally) to show her the way. Therefore, he is the tutor and the guardian of a still innocent country/nation. The woman (the Moldavian Fairy, Romania) has all the traits of the ideal daughter: she is young, beautiful (there is nothing provocative or indecorous about her, there is no sign of depravity), robust, docile, and amenable, but not fearful, modest, and dignified. Romania, in particular, promises to be the perfect wife... (The Fairy seems to be rather... otherworldly, she is of a different class. From Asachi to Caragiali the representation of the country seems to become humanized, slightly more familiar, and more manageable. Perhaps the image of the woman had also changed: she had begun to be included in the same species as the man.)

### **Other Allegorical Depictions of Romania on Stage until the End of WW1**

Unfortunately, the text on which the performance that allowed the first on-stage live representation of Romania – i.e. the debut show of the dramatic character called Romania – was based has not survived. Titled *24 Ianuarie sau Unirea țărilor și a tuturor partitelor* [24 January or the Union of the Countries and of All the Parties], it was written by actor Mihail Pascaly (1830-1882), one of Caragiali's disciples and the most notable of the national Romantic stage art representatives; it was performed at the celebration of one year after the Small Union, on the evening of 24 January 1860, in the presence of Ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza. "The title of the play – notes historian Ioan Massoff, *our note* – was a suggestion of amnesty, which, in fact, would occur on 24 January/ 5 February 1860, when those involved in the 28 September 1859 manifestation of the 'Bossel' hall were released; through it, the liberal-radical group had tried to twist the ruler's hand."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>. Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică (1860-1880)* [The Romanian Theatre. A Historical Perspective], vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1966), 27 (footnote).



According to an on-site report for *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, the fragment “depicted the events of 23 and 24 January of the last year, at the proclamation of the union by the re-election of a single Ruler for both Principalities”<sup>53</sup>, and the spectators’ reaction was enthusiastic: “The audience could not stop repeat their joy and praises, thousands and thousands of long live Romania and its Ruler”<sup>54</sup>.

The part of Romania was played by the famous Eufrosina or “Frosa” (b. Vlasto) Popescu, former student and prima donna of the Philharmonic School (the first school of theatre in Wallachia, of which Caragiali had also been a student), recently returned permanently from the West, where she had delivered a good impression as lyrical artist with the name of E. Marcolini, singing on the stages of theatres such as Scala of Milano or La Fenice of Venice. No other Romanian-born woman artist could boast a career with such a scope; none until her had enjoyed such reputation. Immediately welcomed among the employees of Teatrul cel Mare, the “prodigal daughter” of Romanian theatre had reasserted herself strongly in the first part of the 1859-1860 season, by approaching in only several months the role of Fiammina in the same-title play of Mario Uchard and the one of Adrienne Lecouvreur in the same-title play by Scribe and Legouv . These were two difficult scores, in vogue in Paris, which approached the condition of being an actress, slurred in the former and defended, rehabilitated in the latter. When she played Romania, Eufrosina (born on 20 October 1821) was not yet 39. The former beauty continued to score success after success not only as an artist, but also as a woman. Apparently, in her not too distant past, one of her conquests had been Napoleon III himself, “a kind of a godfather to the making of Romania”<sup>55</sup>, as put by historian Neagu Djuvara, with whom, according to Ioan Massoff<sup>56</sup>, Eufrosina Popescu had corresponded a long time after her return in the country. We can, thus, imagine that Romania

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<sup>53</sup>. “Cronica str in ” [“The Foreign Review”], in *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 5, February 2 (1860): 19.

<sup>54</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>. Neagu Djuvara, *O scurt  istorie a rom nilor povestit  celor tineri* [A Brief History of the Romanians for the Young], 12th edition, revised and expanded (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2010), 201.

<sup>56</sup>. See Ioan Massoff, *Istoria Teatrului Na ional din Bucureşti, 1877-1937* [The History of the Bucharest National Theatre, 1877-1937] (Bucharest: Editura Libr riei „Universala” Alcalay & Co, 1937), 60; and Ioan Massoff, *Actorul de la miezul nopţii. Oameni şi int mpl ri din lumea teatrului de alt dat * [The Midnight Actor. People and Events of Olden Theatre] (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Rom neasc , 1974), 263 and 265 (footnote).

played by “Popeasca” in the play staged by Pascaly looked like an attractive and vigorous woman. The character was supposed to sing national songs, so the performer must have been at home playing her. The music of the play was composed by Alexandru Flechtenmacher. That Eufrosina was the ideal choice for this role is proven by the fact that the actress would later be asked constantly to play “national mothers”, thus becoming a true specialist in national roles. Another peak of her career in the same type of “*emploi*” was the role of Dochia<sup>57</sup> in the dramatic poem (translated from French) *Visul Dochiei [Dochia's Dream]*<sup>58</sup> by Frédéric Damé<sup>59</sup>, which premiered on 9 October, in the opening of the 1877-1878 season, amid the Russian-Turkish war that also involved the Romanian led by the Ruling Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern, fighting for the Tsar's subjects, in the hope of obtaining their own independence. The younger Maria Vasilescu played Romania, here as daughter of Dochia.

A novel view on the character comes from Ion Luca Caragiale, who, in 1899, on the eve of the new century, at the invitation of the Bucharest National Theatre director, “arranged” for the stage a setting of lyrics, prose fragments and theatre play scenes signed by Romanian authors before or contemporary with him, which he titled *100 de ani. Revistă istorică națională a secolului XIX, în 10 ilustrațiuni [100 years. National Historical Revue of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in 10 Illustrations]*<sup>60</sup>. Caragiale's script (which premiered on 1 February 1899) did not have too many original lines, but the playwright envisaged then an “armed Romania”, a character against the established tradition of dramatic representation of the nation (launched by his uncle) and a lot closer to the Western representations of the same type (Germania, Britannia, Marianne, etc.). The character was played by Eugenia Ciucurescu,

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<sup>57</sup>. Personality of Romanian mythology, linked with the Dacians, the ancestors of the Romanians, as well as with the moment when a significant part of the territories they occupied was conquered by the Romans, in the 2nd century AD.

<sup>58</sup>. See Frédéric Damé, “Visul Dochiei. Poemă dramatică” [“Dochia's Dream. Dramatic Poem”], translation by D.Ollănescu and T. Șerbănescu, in *Familia*, III, no. 10, February 28 (1879): 150-152; no. 11, March 15 (1879): 161-162; and no. 12, March 31 (1879): 183-184.

<sup>59</sup>. Frédéric Damé (1849-1907) was a French-born journalist and writer (dramatist, theatre reviewer, translator amateur historian, etc.), who settled in Romania in 1872.

<sup>60</sup>. See I.L. Caragiale, *100 de ani. Revistă istorică națională a secolului XIX, în 10 ilustrațiuni*, in *Opere. Teatru. Scrieri despre teatru. Versuri*, vol. III, second edition, revised and expanded by Stancu Ilin, Nicolae Bârna, Constantin Hârlav, preface by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, 2015), 673-716.

a young actress at the beginning of her career. With *Poemul Unirei* [*The Union Poem*], which premiered at the Bucharest National Theatre on 24 January 1919 (i.e. at the end of the First World War and after the Great Union of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, of 1918), the actor and writer Zaharia Bârsan (1878-1948), from Transylvania, rechanneled the allegorical character of Romania. The play was staged under the title *24 Ianuarie* [*24 January*] (probably the initial title of the short dramatic work), together with Nicolae Iorga's *Învierea lui Ștefan cel Mare* [*The Resurrection of Stephen the Great*]. But the greatest echo would be seen some time later, during the symbolic tour performed by the Bucharest National Theatre, at the initiative of director Ioan Peretz, in the Transylvania that had just been released from under the Dual Monarchy and unified with Romania.

The tour began on 25 April 1919 and took place in 13 Transylvanian localities, the first destination being Brașov, where Bârsan had spent his childhood. Then there were stops in: Sighișoara, Mediaș, Sibiu, Blaj, Turda, Cluj, Dej, Bistrița, Alba Iulia, Orăștie, Deva, and Lugoj. Bârsan's allegorical sketch *Poemul Unirei* would open every performance. The peak moment of the tour was the troupe's arrival and performance in Cluj, at the National Theatre, a stage to which the Romanians' access had been denied constantly since 1906, when the building was inaugurated. (In fact, the location was taken over on the same day from the Hungarian company, led by the talented theatre and film expert Jenő Janovics). In the Austro-Hungarian Cluj, which was the cultural and administrative hub of the Transylvanian Hungarians, only once, in 1870, in exceptional circumstances, was a company of Romanian actors allowed to perform on the main stage of the town (in the former Hungarian theatre).

The company was from Bucharest and was led by the great actor Matei Millo. All this time - from 1867 (and even before, under the Habsburgs) until the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire - the Romanians had been also denied the right to build their own theatre. This is how the unparalleled emotion linked with the performance of 14 May 1919, given by the actors of the Bucharest National Theatre in Cluj, is explained. "Romanians were coming in frequent and quick waves, in the evening, at eight, towards the theatre, for the first Romanian performance in the former Hungarian theatre. Seldom had we seen a hall filled by people as happy as

they were"<sup>61</sup>, notes Ștefan Mărcuș in *Thalia română [Romanian Thalia]* (1945), an important history of Romanian-language theatre in Transylvania, from its beginning to 1919. The first Romanian season of the Cluj National Theatre, the management of which was entrusted to Zaharia Bârsan after the Union (owing to his special success in promoting Romanian-language theatre in pre-war Transylvania), opened several months after the great tour of the Bucharest National Theatre, on 1 December 1919, with two of the new director's plays: *Se face ziuă [Daybreak]* (drama in one act) and *Poemul Unirei*, with Olimpia Bârsan – then 37 years old – in the female leading roles (the poster of the play has an honored place in the hallway of the Cluj National Theatre). *Poemul Unirei* was first published only in 1921, in a volume, at the Printing Office W. Krafft of Sibiu, enclosed by the poems *Furtuna* and *Cu toții una!...*, written by Bârsan again on the occasion of the events of 1918.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ștefan Mărcuș, *Thalia română. Contribuții la istoricul teatrului românesc din Ardeal, Banat și părțile ungurene [Romanian Thalia. Contributions to the History of Romanian Theatre in Transylvania, Banat and the Hungarian Parts]* (Timișoara: Institutul de Arte Grafice "G. Matheiu", 1945), 474.

<sup>62</sup> See Zaharia Bârsan, *Furtuna. Cu toții una. Poemul Unirei [The Storm. All Are One. The Union Poem]* (Sibiu: Printing Office W. Krafft, 1921), 3-11.

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