FROM *MIORIȚA* TO *OEDIPUS*: ROMANIAN NATIONAL OPERA IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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Abstract. *Operas in Romanian language, on Romanian topics and written by Romanian composers emerge slowly in the second half of 19th century; the first works appear in the year of the 1848 revolution, other works follow later after the reunification of the two Danubian principalities into a Romanian national state in 1859. But their number remains limited. The most important Romanian composer, George Enescu, did not choose any topic from Romanian history or folklore for his opera works. Nevertheless, the Romanian opera of the 19th and early 20th centuries reflects the struggle for the construction of national identity. This identity under construction had to assert itself both in Romania, among the urban elites and the king (born in Germany), and in the European cultural centres, such as Paris, Berlin or Vienna. This contribution presents the opera Petru Rareş by Eduard Caudella (composed in 1889) in comparison with Enescu's Œdipe (composed in 1919–1931). Petru Rareş, based on a historical episode from the beginning of the 16th century, describes the nation building mainly in terms of a "pre-modern narration" (dreams, premonitory signs, religion and faith), but the decisive element of legitimation of power is a letter, a written document which belongs to the modern administration of governance.*

Key words: *identity, nation building, Romanian music, Eduard Caudella, George Enescu*

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Romanian operas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are not widely known by the general public. They are rarely staged outside of Romania, and no commercial recordings are available. The only opera written by a Romanian composer which is continuously staged to this day is George Enescu's Œdipe; but this work, composed between 1919 and 1931, deals with the Oedipus theme from Greek mythology, which moved Eduard Caudella, Enescu's teacher, to comment: "What a pity that it isn't about a Romanian subject".[1]

1 Nicolae Hodoarabă, *George Enescu: Contribuțiuni la cunoașterea vieții sale* (Iaşi: Institutul de Arte Grafice Viața Românească, 1928), 20; English in Noel Malcolm, *George Enescu: His Life and Music* (London: Toccata Press, 1990), 32.

The title of this paper shows two notions which are characteristic, and at the same time misleading, for understanding Romanian opera: *Mioriţa* and *Oedipus*. *Mioriţa* (The Little Lamb) is the title of a very old popular ballad, going back probably to the thirteenth century. The best-known version is a poem arranged in 1850 by the Romanian writer Vasile Alecsandri (1832–1890). Three shepherds, representing the three regions of Romanian settlement (Moldavia, Transylvania, and Wallachia), are grazing their sheep. When two of them decide to kill the third shepherd, the beloved lamb Mioriţa alerts his master. But instead of saving himself, the shepherd waits quietly for the others to come and kill him, telling Mioriţa that he will be married to a celestial princess. Alecsandri's wonderful, deliberately archaic verses turn the popular poetry into a romantic myth about the transformation of death into eternal life, of human wickedness into God's goodness, of suffering into fulfilment. The mythological categories refer first to the typical Romanian decor: the mountainous Carpathian region, the shepherds, and the diversity of the local resident population. But the story of Mioriţa also exposes a number of topics which are considered by Romanians as national characteristics: crossing the border between life and death, death as a symbolic wedding, transcending one's own existence, and the reinterpretation of defeat as victory.

For the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895–1961), Mioriţa symbolizes the Romanian nation. In the second part of his depth-psychological *Trilogia culturii* (Trilogy of Culture) entitled *Spaţiul mioritic* (The Mioritic Space, 1936), Blaga established a link between the geographical framework of the Romanian landscape and the "ethnic spirit": "you can hear a particular space in the melody of a song, because this space is present in any form within the psychic underground of the melody".[2] For Blaga, the central element of Romanian landscape is the *plai*, a high open land with a gentle undulation of mountains and valleys. Blaga recognizes the same topography in Romanian poetry (the meter of the *Mioriţa* ballad) as well as in Romanian popular music, especially in such dance forms as the *Doina* or *Hora lunga*. For Blaga, all becomes one: the ethnic spirit (or soul), the geographical landscape, religion, mythology, literature, and music. This is nothing other than a depth-psychological revival of Herder's romantic concept of the Nation.

But unfortunately there is no Romanian opera with Mioriţa as its main subject[3] – perhaps because of the difficulty in transforming the ballad motif into dramatic form, but perhaps also because this topic did not correspond to the expectations of urban elites during the patriotic period of reunification of the two Danubian Principalities in the late nineteenth century.

2 Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1944), 65.

3 But there exists an oratorio (*balada-oratoriu*) by Sigismund Toduţă (1908–1991) entitled *Mioriţa* from 1978.

Oedipus, on the other hand, is the most important opera by a Romanian composer: Enescu's Œdipe was premiered in 1936 at the Paris Opéra. But what is particularly Romanian about it? The mythological subject is Greek, the libretto written by Edmond Fleg is French,[4] and the music sounds like a mixture of German and French styles, somewhere between post-Wagnerian, Debussy, and Arthur Honegger. But could not we see in this, following Blaga, a typically Romanian work: the Mioritic category in the habits of Ancient Greece? Anyway, Enescu's opera differs from other twentieth-century versions of Oedipus: the primary focus is not on not the tragic hero blinding himself; Enescu's opera ends with a long fourth act which shows the blind Oedipus at Colchis, where he finished by accepting his tragic destiny as well as his approaching death.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROMANIAN IDENTITY

The term "national opera" in the title of this paper might be problematic. Speaking about national opera assumes that we could define a national character and that this national character would be manifest within a particular work. First of all, the national character is a construction, sometimes useful and constructive, but more often destructive, especially when the construction of identity is based on the exclusion and discrimination of the Other. Sigmund Freud describes this self-construction by excluding the Other in his late essay *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (Moses and Monotheism).[5] This paper will show that the Romanian national opera (in terms of Romanian self-perception) is a product of the process of national identity construction, and that, as such, this process has contributed to shaping this construction. The theoretical basic concept is the "construction of the nation" as Benedict Andersen defined it: as an "imagined community"[6] – in opposition to the Romantic concept of the nation that we found in Herder, where music is presented as a subtle expression of the ethnic spirit (or Soul).

Far from these modern definitions, Romanian historiography continues to this day to define every composer's contribution to the "typical national idiom". According to Romanian scholars like Pascal Bentoiu and Vioral Cosma, this "na-

4 The Romanian version by Constantin Silvestri was premièred in 1958 at the Bucharest Opera.

5 Sigmund Freud, "Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion", in *Sigmund Freud, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 16 (London: Imago Publishing, 1950), 101–246. The two first parts were published in the review *Imago* 23/1, 23/4 (1937), the third part in 1939 in the Allert de Langein publishing house at Amsterdam. English translation: Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (London and New York, Hogarth Press and A. A. Knopf), 1939.

6 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Vero, 1983; new revised edition 1991).

tional idiom" can be shown in two ways: through the use of national subjects, on the one hand, and of ethnic musical material on the other. Subsequently, they managed to identify national topics in all musical forms based on literary texts: in songs, symphonic poems, oratorios and, of course, in operas. They consider as "particularly national" all music based on texts written by the national Romanian poets of the nineteenth century such as Vasile Alecsandri and Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889).

It is, however, much more difficult to identify typically Romanian elements within the musical material: the question of "folkloristic elements" gets a reliable musicologist into trouble. Certainly, we can try to identify specific "ethnic" scales, rhythmic patterns, and melodic formulas or gestures, but it is hard to attribute these characteristics to specific ethnic groups. Moreover the works of the so-called "popular culture" are often a construction of urban elites and correspond more to the expectations of the recipients than they are "inherent" qualities of the musical material – as we can also see in the construction of "oriental music" in French late-nineteenth-century opera music, where the fascinating and at the same time repellent Orient was musically constructed by western phantasms.

Let us start with some considerations about the construction of Romanian identity. As Sigmund Freud showed, the construction of the "Self" (one's proper identity) comes along with the rejection of the Other. The construction of musical identity is no exception to this rule, as we shall see below in the case of Romania in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The construction of Romanian identity takes place in interdependency with the Other. This different Other is first of all the omnipresent Ottoman heritage, which is problematic in a twofold way: on the one hand because it is common to all people formerly under Ottoman rule and therefore cannot serve as specifically "national" or Romanian; and also because this cultural reference, in spite of an age-long presence, was always rejected as "strange" or "external". Also the genuine and constructive element within the Romanian identity construction is problematic. Their self-designation as a people – "român" – refers to "Roman".[7] But the reference to the Roman heritage is tricky, first of all because the "foundation date" of the Romanian identity was a defeat: the Getae and Dacians were defeated by the troops of the Emperor Trajan in 106 AD. To fix the beginning of the Romanian "ethnogenesis" at the Roman conquest would mean accepting that "foreigners" had destroyed the indigenous culture and replaced it with their own. The central point of the Roman/Roma-

7 In medieval sources, the Romanian-speaking people was called "vlahi", or similar, which means "Wallachians". This designation comes from the root "welsch": Latin-speaking people. The inhabitants of the southern Danubian Principality were also called Wallachians until the creation of the modern Romanian state in 1859.

nian identity is an ideological one: the rejection of Others. The "Others" are first of all the "barbarians" coming from the East. In the light of continuous barbarian invasions, the Romanian people had been the guardians and preservers of Roman (and thus of European) culture and civilization. Hence, the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) emphasized pathetically that Romania would be "a Latin rock in the midst of a Slavic ocean"; and the politician Gheorghe I. Brătianu (1898–1953) designated the Romanian people as "an enigma and miracle of History",[8] a nearly eschatological dictum: the battle against the Turks as a defence of the Promised Land.

At the centre of this "Roman" identity is yet another defence; this identity was less a rapprochement with Rome than a rejection of Byzantium. While the Romanians embraced Orthodox Christianity early, they nevertheless remained very sceptical toward the hub of Orthodoxy, Byzantium, due to their humiliations during the Phanariot period (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). The Phanariots (form the *Fanariot* quarter in Constantinople) were Greek princes who had been put on the throne of the Danubian Principalities by the Sublime Porte and who exploited the economy of the country. Based on the Byzantine model, they reintroduced ceremonies, liturgy, language, costumes, and music as they were before the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 – "Byzance après Byzance", according to Iorga's dictum. The rejection of the second Rome (Byzantium), and of course also the third (Moscow), was only partially a rapprochement to the "first Rome", since the Italian Rome is not only a cultural reference (the classical Rome of Antiquity) but also a religious one – and as a matter of course, Rome as the capital of Catholicism was unacceptable for Orthodox Romania. It is perhaps not surprising that the "Roman" identity, in nineteenth-century Romania, follows the model of France, which had an anticlerical orientation following the 1789 Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

The last point in rejecting the "Other" is the ethnic heterogeneity of Romania. While the two Danubian Principalities Moldavia and Wallachia (since 1859 a Union, the later Romania) were mainly composed of "Romanians", the territories inside the Carpathian Arc, such as the Banat, Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Dobrudja, are ethnically mixed: with Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, Turks, and other minorities. It is an irony of history that the realization of "Greater Romania" at the end of World War I permitted "all Romanian people" to live together within the borders of their homeland, but this new country became henceforth a multi-ethnic state with a variety of cultural references.

8 Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Une énigme et un miracle historique: le people roumain* (Bucharest: Institut d'histoire générale de l'Université de Iassy, 1937).

THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL ROMANIAN MUSIC CULTURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The creation of a "national Romanian music" was tardy, beginning only in the middle of the nineteenth century once the Phanariot epoch ended and the two Romanian Principalities became a Russian protectorate. Thenceforth the Principalities were for the first time, to a larger extent, exposed to western culture. From the 1830s onwards, military bands were founded, modelled on Austrian examples and playing marches, opera potpourris, and standard western dances. As it happens, their conductors were mainly Germans, respectively Austrians or Czechs.[9] While in the eighteenth century it was mainly itinerant companies from Italy and France who performed music, now the contact with Viennese culture became closer due to the proximity of the Austrian monarchy. Little by little a bourgeois culture emerged, but both of the two courts (in Bucharest and Iassy) preferred Turkish march music for a long time. In the regions where German culture prevailed (as in parts of Transylvania or in the Banat), western music was spreading rapidly. Even at the Boyars' courts, it became fashionable that women and girls should play the piano or harp.

One example to illustrate the cultural exchange between the Viennese centre and the Danubian Principalities is the extensive concert tour of Johann Strauss the Younger in 1847/48 through the Banat and Transylvania down to Bucharest. In the Wallachian capital, Strauss played at the residences of boyars and in a few public concert halls.[10] During this tour, which he called "a trip to the Orient",[11] Strauss composed a series of waltzes for piano, *Klänge aus der Walachei* op. 50 (Sounds from Wallachia), published in Vienna. Thus, one of the first attempts to describe the Romanian homeland musically was precisely the work of a foreigner – but the music does not sound in any way "Romanian", neither for us nor for the Romanian people.

It was not by chance that the first "genuinely Romanian"[12] composition appeared in 1848, in the political environment of the March Revolution. Starting in the Habsburg Monarchy (and also in Transylvania), the revolution soon spilled

9 The job title of the conductor is still *capelmaistru* in Romanian, from the German *Kapellmeister*.

10 The Bucharest National Theatre (Teatrul Național) was then still under construction. The building, in neoclassical style, was a work of the Viennese architect Anton Hefft.

11 Franz Metz, *O călătorie spre Orient: Johann Strauss și concertele sale în Banat, Transilvania și Țara Românească* (Bucharest: Editura ADZ, 2003), 48.

12 This term was used in a review of Alexandru Flechtenmacher's Overture *Moldova* in the journal *Albina Românească* of 1847: "Muzica făcută de Alexandru Flechtenmacher [...] este încîntătoare şi adevărat românească" (The music by Alexandru Flechtenmacher is charming and genuinely Romanian).

over into the two Danubian Principalities. In Iassy the insurrection ended without bloodshed, but in Bucharest the insurgents held the government for nearly three months, until Russian and Turkish troops restored the old order by violence. During these dramatic months, several national symbols were created, among them the "blue–yellow–red" flag (modelled after the German revolutionary colours "black–red–gold") and the patriotic poem by Andrei Mureşanu, the present-day National Hymn: *Deşteaptă-te Române* (Wake Up, Romanian).

It is in this context of political awakening that the emergence of the first Romanian compositions with a genuine Romanian musical language must be analysed. Johann Andreas Wachmann (1807–1863) founded an ensemble with local musicians who performed sixty-seven operettas and vaudevilles over the years, including some of his own compositions. Wachmann's career is a good example of the dependence of Romanian musicians on foreign music, especially from the Austrian monarchy. Their musical language does not differ principally from music written in Vienna, Berlin, or Leipzig; it is Central European bourgeois music close to German Romanticism.

Another eminent artist from the same generation is Carol (or Charles) Mikuli (1821–1897) who was a pupil of Chopin in Paris from 1844 to 1848. Mikuli transcribed Romanian folkloristic melodies and published them between 1852 and 1867 in four booklets under the title *Quarante-huit airs nationaux roumains* (Forty-eight Romanian national melodies). Through his romantic harmonization *à la Chopin* he reproduced the specific sound pattern of the musical tradition of the Romanian *lăutari*.[13] This is not surprising, since Mikuli was a sympathizer with the March Revolution of 1848: the rural "fiddler", the *lăutar*, was for him a typical representative of Romanian national values.

These examples show to what degree the arts, and also music, were an important part of the construction of national ideas in the mid-nineteenth century, and how vague the outlines of this "Romanian-ness" were, particularly at the moment when "Romania" as a political reality did not yet exist. The typically Romanian was thus simple, rural, and folkloristic – but this identification was proposed by the urban elites in Bucharest and Iassy. The concept of "typically Romanian" music in these early times was realized concretely by using orientalizing stylistic elements borrowed either from Byzantine Church music (and therefore recalling the odious Phanariot epoch) or from the *lăutari* repertoire of Gipsy bands that were not considered authentically Romanian.

13 For a musical example see Zeno Vancea: *Creația muzicală românească*, vol. 1: sec. XIX–XX (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din Republica Socialistă România, 1968), 74–75.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the cultural and musical level rose rapidly. After the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the Treaty of Paris, in 1859 the two Danubian Principalities elected the same ruler, Alexandru Ion Cuza, who unified the two Principalities into an administrative unity called "Romania". After the overthrow of Cuza in 1866, a foreign prince, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, was declared ruler of Romania. In 1878 Karl proclaimed Romania a sovereign nation, independent of the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, and in 1881 he was proclaimed King Carol I of Romania.

The modernization of the country, begun under Cuza and continued under king Carol, included also the creation of universities and conservatories. At Iassy, the State Conservatory opened its doors in 1860 under the direction of Francisc Serafim Caudella, and at Bucharest four years later under Alexandru Flechtenmacher; the curriculum and the training models followed French examples. The first permanent symphony orchestra was founded in 1868, and the first string quartet in 1880.

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the time of national independence, musicians went abroad to study, mainly in Paris but also in Vienna or in Germany. However, when they returned, Romania offered them the opportunity of a challenging job in their home country. In the euphoric mood of national unity and independence, a great many "national" compositions were created. But the music remained within the frame of the classical-romantic style, from Haydn to Schubert and Brahms, with some "exotic" elements added.

Local audiences, however, preferred foreign productions, and not only in terms of music. The identification of Romanian identity with its Latin roots led to increasing interest in the French model. Although the king was German, the administration, the military organization, the school system, and the jurisdiction were French; Bucharest changed from a chaotic oriental town into a "petit Paris". The *jeunesse dorée*, back from their studies in France, preferred to speak French (and were mockingly called *bonjouristes*). The bourgeoisie enjoyed vaudevilles and foreign comedies. The composer Gavriil Musicesu (1847–1903), who arranged numerous traditional Romanian melodies, deplored this situation: "We observe such indifference, or better such contempt of all that is national, that we are sad and first of all bitter. There is nothing better in music than the fiddler [i.e., the *lăutari*] who played the old songs of his forefathers".[14]

Against this background it seems obvious that George Enescu should be immediately and unanimously acclaimed as a national composer. Both his *Poème rou-*

14 "Un asemenea indiferentism sau mai bine-zis dispreţ ce se pratică faţă de tot ce-i naţional ne-a lăsat urme triste şi rele în toate. Nu a lăsat nici în muzică urme bune, căci pînă şi trubadurii (lăutarii de prin sate – *n.a.*) nu mai cîntă cu acea dragoste şi foc cîntecele moştenite de la strămunii lor". Ibid., 103.

main, op. 1, premiered in 1897 almost simultaneously in Paris and in Bucharest, and the two *Rhapsodies roumaines*, op. 11 (written in 1901), construct the nascent National State of Romania. All three of these compositions, bearing the explicit denomination "Romanian", appeal first to a foreign auditory. They introduce the Parisian public to a "typical Romania" in the manner of exoticism: with rurality, archaic dances, violin virtuosity, gipsy folklore – and all within a perfectly shaped European Art Music.

In Romania, the *Poème* and the *Rhapsodies* were acclaimed enthusiastically, establishing the fame of Enescu as a national composer. Here, in the face of an urban auditory (composed by the aristocracy and bourgeoisie) and in the presence of the king and the court, the focus was different: not exoticism but authenticity was paramount. The urban elites, modelled on western (French) culture and society, were constructing on the basis of rural values an "authentic" Romania that had never before existed and was also not the country they were about to create.

ROMANIAN "NATIONAL OPERA" IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

We will now analyse the construction of Romanian identity by means of selected examples from the Romanian opera history. We are particularly interested in the topics Romanian composers used for their operas and in the stylistic means they employed for constructing "Romania" musically.

Alexandru Flechtenmacher

Alexandru Flechtenmacher (1822–1898), an ardent partisan of the ideas of unification and a companion of the national poet Vasile Alecsandri and the politician Mihai Kogălniceanu, composed a few songs for piano in "folkloristic style" and imitated traditional folk dances (like the round dance *Hora*). In 1846 he wrote the overture *Moldova*, where he arranged motives and melodies from the urban folklore of his Moldavian homeland in a rhapsodic manner.[15] However, the music rarely extends the frame of western art music, such as the use of augmented fourths in a minor key to produce an augmented second. This orientalizing element remains singular and does not concern in any respect the harmonic or formal dimensions. His operetta *Baba Hârca* (Baba the Witch), based on a libretto by Matei Millo, tells a wedding story in a rural milieu. Premiered in December 1848 in Iassy, the work was immediately acclaimed as a political statement, as an "authentic Romanian

15 Musical examples in ibid., 57.

work" which depicts the milieu of simple people. One newspaper critic wrote: "The music of this operetta is simple and really beautiful. The composer was simply trying to draw inspiration from the joys and sufferings of the Romanian people".[16]

Johann Andreas Wachmann

The aforementioned Johann Andreas Wachmann also wrote a couple of interesting operas. We know very little about his life. Descended from an Austrian family, he was born in Budapest and studied probably in Vienna. At the end of the 1820s he arrived with an itinerant company in Bucharest, where he settled down. His nearly fifty stage works (a great number with librettos by Caragiale), include the "national" opera *Mihai Bravul în ajunul bătăliei de la Călugăreni* (Michael the Brave on the eve of the battle of Călugăreni). The libretto is based on a theatre play by Ion Heliade Rădulescu. The story is about the most important battle in Romanian history, when the Moldavian prince Mihai Viteazul (called Michael the Brave) defeated a larger Ottoman army under Sinan Pasha in 1595. In Romanian history, Prince Mihai is considered the precursor of unification because under his reign the two principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia (and even part of Transylvania) were briefly ruled by one sovereign. It is significant that Wachmann's opera was written in the revolutionary year 1848, at the moment when claims emerged for freedom of the press and abolition of the privileges of the nobility. The chorus plays an important role in the opera, representing the "revolutionary" voice of the Romanians against their oppressors – who in the historical context of the late sixteenth century were the Ottomans, but in the political environment of the March Revolution were the aristocratic Romanian or Phanariot upper-class.

Wachmann and other musicians of his generation were not really "national composers", not only because they were mainly foreigners, but also because their mission was to elevate the musical activities of the two principalities to a European level. They were rather "cultural bridge builders" than constructors of national identity.

Eduard Caudella

The biography of Eduard Caudella (1841–1924) is exemplary for the generation of Romanian musicians during the last decades of the nineteenth century.[17] His fa-

16 "Muzica de la această operetă este simplă şi foarte frumoasă. Autorul ei nu a căutat să se inspire decît din suferinţele şi bucuriile poporului român". Anonymous (attributed to Nicolae Filimon), in *Ţăranul Român* 2 (1861).

17 About Caudella and his opera see: Vancea, *Creaţia muzicală românească*, vol. 1, 94–106; Viorel Cosma, "Caudella, Eduard", in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Ludwig Finscher, vol. 4 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000, 2nd edition), cols. 451–452.

ther, Franz Serfim, was a musician who moved from Vienna to the Moldavian capital. Eduard Caudella began his musical training as a twelve-year-old in Berlin and arrived in 1857 in Paris, where he studied with Jean-Delphin Alard and Lambert Massart. One year later he was back in Berlin, where he studied with Carl Böhm, and finally he settled in Frankfurt am Main with Henri Vieuxtemps. Appointed "court violinist" by prince Cuza in 1861, Caudella consecrated himself henceforth to composition and the musical training of the youth in Iassy. Furthermore, he was chief conductor of the National Opera between 1861 and 1875 and, from 1893 on, director of the State Conservatory in Iassy. He staged a great many Italian operas by Verdi, Donizetti, Rossini, and Bellini, and also works by Romanian composers like Wachmann and Flechtenmacher.

Between 1872 and 1907, Caudella wrote a series of operas, operettas, and vaudevilles, mainly on subjects from Romanian history. He preferred Romanian topics in his symphonic and chamber music as well. His music remains within the borders of the classical-romantic style, with some "exotic" elements borrowed mainly from the Hungarian *verbunkos*. The augmented second is already present, but now between the sixth and augmented seventh degrees of the minor scale. There are non-influences from then-modern movements (Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, or Claude Debussy).

The titles of Caudella's operas and *singspiels* show the predominance of Romanian topics: *Harță Răzesul* (The Yeoman Harță, 1872), *Olteanca* (The Oltenian Women, 1880), *Fata răzeşului* (The Daughter of the Yeoman, 1881), *Beizadea Epaminoda* (The Bey Epaminoda, 1883), *Dorman sau Romanii şi Dacii* (Dorman or the Romans and Dacians, 1896), und *Traian şi Dochia* (Trajan and Dochia, 1907). His opera *Petru Rareş*, written in 1889 and premiered in 1900, is of particular interest. We return later to this important work.

George Enescu

As we noted at the beginning, Enescu did not write any "Romanian" operas. His "Romanian" symphonic or chamber works are either early compositions, written at a time when the young composer presented himself to the Parisian public as the "Moldavian Orpheus":[18] the *Poème roumain* and the two *Romanian Rhapsodies*, or they are later works with a nostalgic and retrograde note which remembers an irretrievably lost time, as in the third Orchestra Suite "Villageoise" ("from the village") or the Violin Sonata *Impressions d'Enfance* (Impressions of Childhood), both from the late 1930s.

18 This is still an actual denomination for Enescu in Romania: the International Music Festival of Bacau is called "Enescu – Orfeul Moldav".

For the stage, Enescu intended only once to set a Romanian topic to music: namely, in 1929, the well-known legend *Meşterul Manole* (Master Manole) based on a theatre play by Carmen Silva, better known as Elisabeth zu Wied, Queen of Romania.[19] In this popular legend, Master Manole is asked to build for the Black Prince the most beautiful monastery in the world. But the walls crumble again and again. Manole learns in a dream that he should immure the first female person coming to the construction site in order to fix the walls. The next day, his own wife approaches. Manole prays to God to send rain and storm, but she continues on her way. Finally, Manole builds the wall around her and the monastery is accomplished. The theme of this legend can be found in numerous variants over the Balkans (Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria), but in the end it is the Biblical story of Jephthah and his daughter (Judges, chap. 11).

While Enescu failed to write a Manole opera, other Romanian composers did. Alfonso Castaldi (1874–1942), who was born in Italy and became later a Romanian citizen, wrote in 1913 a *Meştre Manole* in two acts. His music was strongly influenced by French composers, especially Debussy. Castaldi was also the author of further patriotic pieces such as the hymn *La arme* (Take Up Arms), written for the entry of Romania into World War I. In the 1980s, Sigismund Toduță (1908–1991) composed another version of Master Manole in form of an opera-oratorio on a text by Lucian Blaga. Toduță received most of his training at the Academia Santa Cecilia in Rome, so his music is strongly influenced by western church music; he used baroque forms and models as in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. Finally, between 2008 and 2013, the Romanian electronic bass player and composer Josef Kappl (b. 1950) wrote a rock opera *Meșterul Manole*, initially a project of the rock band *Transylvania Phoenix* from the 1970s, but he never staged it because of communist censorship. According to a short video on You Tube,[20] it was apparently a conventional musical for mass audiences with some "exotic oriental inclusions". Welcome back to the 19th century!

Enescu's unique opera, Œdipe, is based on a subject from classical Antiquity. Classical Greek topics were not unusual in the 1920s, for example Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* or Othmar Schoeck's *Penthesilea*, both premiered in 1927. However, Enescu's opera is a complex philosophical music drama which is, in spite of its moderate tonal language, a real modern opera. Dominating the entire action, as if the opera were a kind of interior monologue of the protagonist, Oedipus is a real subject of modernity in the Heideggerian sense of "thrown-ness" (*Geworfensein*) into existence. But this masterpiece of twentieth-century opera is certainly not a

19 See Malcolm, *George Enescu*, 189.

20 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-HnJtv_-bQ, accessed 7 October 2019.

Romanian opera or even a Romanian "national opera", although it was written by the most Romanian of all Romanian composers.

The opera Petru Rareş by Eduard Caudella

Does this mean there is no Romanian opera at all? It should first be noted that only a few works could be considered as "Romanian": operas which present topics from Romanian history or the daily lives of Romanian people to a domestic (and at most also foreign) audience in order to describe Romanian "authenticity" and to construct a national identity.

In the following, we will discuss one opera work that is characteristic of late nineteenth-century Romania and the discourses in Romanian society in the years between the unification of the two Danubian Principalities and World War I: *Petru Rareş* was, as mentioned above, written by Eduard Caudella in 1889, but premiered only eleven years later at the Bucharest National Opera.

The musical and dramaturgical model for *Petru Rareş* is clearly the French Grand Opéra, such as the works of Meyerbeer. But Caudella deals very freely with the French model and does not respect the requirements of the Paris opera conventions. In contrast to the Grand Opéra, *Petru Rareş* has only three acts (and not five like the French one) and the obligatory ballet is in the last act. On the other hand, the topic is typical for Grand Opéra: a historical theme with intrigue and political insurrection. Several elements – like, for example, the scene with the fiddler or the call to arms by the insurgents – are directly modelled on Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, although the musical skills of Caudella cannot get close to the Parisian model.

Petru Rareş is set at the beginning of the sixteenth century in the northern part of the two Romanian principalities, in Moldavia, where the ruling sovereign, Prince Ştefaniţa, has made a deal with his enemies, the Ottomans and Poles. In the first scene, the fisherman Petru Rareş confides to his sister Ileana that he had seen himself in a dream as the ruler of the country. The noblewoman Tudora, whose husband was forced by Ştefaniţa to go in exile, appears together with her follower Marin. Both hope to dispossess the usurper Ştefaniţa and restore to the throne the legitimate but unknown son of the former Prince Ştefan the Great. Tudora and Marin know that a document written by the deceased prince must exist, but it was hidden in a castle by Ştefaniţa.

In the next scene, Prince Ştefaniţa and his suite appear, returning from hunting in the forest. Petru Rareş is accused of being a poacher and is to be killed on Ştefaniţa's orders. Ileana begs Ştefaniţa to pardon his brother. Ştefaniţa frees Petru, but demands in return that Ileana follow him as his mistress. She accepts to save her brother and leaves the scene together with Ştefaniţa and the noblemen. Petru

Rareş swears to take revenge and joins the insurgents under the leadership of Tudora.

In the second act, Tudora and Marin make an unsuccessful attempt to liberate Ileana from the castle where she is held captive. Meanwhile, in a forest, Petru Rareş is ready to conduct the insurrection again the despot and assembles his soldiers. In the last act, Prince Ştefaniţa appears in the castle of Nikita where Ileana is imprisoned. She is supposed to give the names of the insurgents. These have crept with artifice into the castle. Petru Rareş kills Nikita and liberates his own sister. Tudora arrives with the document which reveals that the unknown son of the former prince Ştefan the Great is none other than Petru Rareş. As a proof, he has a tattooed cross on his arm, just as described in the letter. The present boyars render homage to the new sovereign, while the usurper Ştefaniţa commits suicide.

It is characteristic for Caudella's opera that there is no sentimental love story at the centre of the plot, but a historical episode including a number of freely invented scenes. The main theme of the opera is the succession of the Moldavian sovereign Ştefan II, also called the Great. He remains to this day one of the most important figures of identification in the collective memory of Romanians because he fought with determination against exterior enemies, primarily Ottomans (the Pope granted him the title "Athleta Christi"), and he pursued the unification of the two Romanian principalities – albeit without success.

After his death in 1504, his son Bogdan III followed him on the throne. After the death of Bogdan, his eleven-year-old son Ştefaniţă Muşat, or Ştefan IV the Younger, became the next Moldavian sovereign in 1517. Prince Ştefaniţa made a deal with the Poles and devastated Wallachia in 1526. He was an extraordinary intelligent and gifted young man who intended to unify the two Romanian principalities. He was allegedly poisoned by his wife and died on 12 January 1527 in Khotyn (today in Ukraine).

The opera figure Ştefaniţa has less to do with the historical Ştefan IV. The operatic Ştefaniţa is described as a completely negative character who betrayed the Romanian country, made deals with their enemies (Ottomans, Poles, Cossacks), and was a usurper. Even the age of Ştefaniţa does not play any role in the opera (in reality he was only twenty-two years old when he died); his vocal range is baritone and not bass, as it should be for a villain (this role is held by the bass Nikita, an invented character).

The title role of the opera has also a historical background. Petru Rareş was an illegitimate son of Prince Ştefan the Great and was born between 1483 and 1487. We know almost nothing about the time before he acceded to the throne. According to the contemporary chronicler Ion Negulce, Petru Rareş was said to

be a fishmonger in the district of Galați near the Black Sea. He came to the throne in 1527 after the death of Ştefaniţa.

What is historically correct is ultimately only the fact that Ştefaniţa succeded Ştefan the Great as sovereign of Moldavia and that he died very young in obscure circumstances, and also that an illegitimate son of Ştefan the Great appeared suddenly from nowhere and ascended to the Moldavian throne. The opera puts this episode in 1529, while the historical prince Ştefaniţa died, as we have seen, two years earlier.

This very flimsy frame accorded the librettist Theobald Rehbaum[21] and the composer Caudella a great freedom to arrange the motives of the acting characters and the details of the plot according to their own intentions or the expectations of the public. Except for Petru Rareş and Ştefaniţa, all the characters are freely invented: Ileana the sister of Petru, the noblewoman Tudora, her follower Marin, and Nikita the henchman of the sovereign. Another very important element of the opera is also invented: the hidden document which reveals the identity of the legitimate pretender to the throne. Finally, the whole story of how the fishmonger Petru Rareş becomes the new sovereign, and the ignominious end of the usurper Ştefaniţa, are also freely invented elements.

Thus, the opera does not really reflect a historical episode of sixteenth-century Romanian history, but rather the historical context of the time of its creation: the situation of the modern National State in the last decades of the nineteenthth century. What are the dominating discourses in this opera? Two competing models are presented which we could designate as "mythos" and "logos".

First of all, there is a dream in which Petru Rareş sees himself as the new ruler of the country. This is a pre-modern form of communication; it is the realm of myth. Petru Rareş' dream is not presented as a modern dream in a Freudian or Jungian sense. It is not the secret or subconscious desires of the individual that become manifest. In his dream we hear a mythic voice: Petru Rareş is designated as the legitimate sovereign of Moldavia by God or a benevolent Destiny. It is characteristic that this dream is not reported directly by the dreamer himself, but by his sister Ileana who overhears her sleeping brother. In this way, the dream steps outside of the mythic mist into the sphere of clearly understandable discourse. Mythos becomes logos.

But this mythic legitimacy in the form of a dream has no concrete consequences. Nobody would crown the fisherman Petru Rareş only for the sake of a dream.

21 The libretto is based on a novel by Nicolae Gane (1838–1916), a Moldavian politician and writer. Theobald Rehbaum (1835–1918), a German violinist and composer, wrote the libretto in German; his text was afterwards translated into Romanian.

Even Ileana, the only one who heard its contents and reformulated them in comprehensible words, is rather frightened by the dream because she fears being separated from her brother if he becomes a ruler.

The mythic, pre-modern model appears at another moment of the opera. The usurper Ştefaniţa meets an old woman who foretells his dethronement and the ascension of the legitimate son of Ştefan the Great. Although Ştefaniţa's henchman Nikita mocks his master's credulousness, the prophecy of the old woman will finally be fulfilled.

The second model of legitimate succession is a document which the dying sovereign Ştefan had written and hidden in a secure place. It contains the proof that Petru Rareş is the legitimate successor to the Moldavian throne. This document will be discovered at the end of the opera. It confirms the true identity of Petru Rareş as the legitimate successor – and immediately all the boyars accept him as the new ruler. This is definitely a modern form of communication: it is the realm of the written word, of records, of administration. Legitimacy is an affair of documents and seals. But also in this modern model, elements of the opposite, mythic model can be found. First, the document is hidden behind an icon, a reference that finally only God can guarantee legitimacy, even those of written and modern documents. Second, the sign which proves the legitimacy of the pretender to the throne is a cross tattooed on his arm, another reference to the religious sphere even for an "administrative act".

These two models of legitimacy are not presented as antagonistic, but rather complement each other. The mythos does not contradict the logos; both speak with one voice. However, it seems that in the opera the documentary proof is ultimately the real one which attests to the truth: the dream would finally remain ineffective without the written testament.

However, this interpretation misconstrues a central point of the opera: at the moment when the document of Ştefan the Great is revealed, Petru Rareş has clarified the situation by force. The tyrant's castle is in his hands, and for the usurper Ştefaniţa the game is over. Thereby, another model of historical effect becomes crucial: the heroic element.

Let us analyse this central motif in terms of the acting characters and then raise the question of its function for the Romanian society of the 1880s. The two protagonists of the opera are doubtlessly Petru Rareş and his sister Ileana. It is striking that Petru, after he has dominated the action of the entire first act, disappears from the scene (and from the plot) and reappears only at the end of the second act when, after having another dream, he goes into action with determination and fights against tyranny at the head of the insurgents. Even in the third

act he is absent for a long time. Petru and the insurgents finally triumph, but more by ruse than by force – and not before Tudora comes and shows the document which proves the legitimacy of Rareş. The boyars acclaim him as their new ruler for a written document and not for his heroism or military force. His adversary Ştefaniţa kills himself; and finally, the main motive of Petru Rareş for fighting is a sentimental one: he wants to save his sister.

The heroism of the protagonist is very ambiguous. He is shown several times as a dreamer. Even if these dreams reveal themselves as a vision of the truth, they are nevertheless not attributes of heroic actions. Rareş achieves his goal by ruse and not by military force. His only real determined action is the killing of the villain Nikita when he is brutalizing Ileana. But Petru Rareş kills an unarmed man taken by surprise – not really a heroic action.

The ambiguity of this "dreaming heroism" is the subject of scenes 10 and 11 of the second act when the dreaming Petru sees himself as the new ruler of Moldavia:

> *Petru Rareş (speaks in his dream):*
> People bow before my face, because I am your new ruler ...
> *(He wakes up)*
> Where am I? Was it only a dream? Without any importance? My sovereignty over the people is only a dream? I was the ruler, I went into the battle, I was in front of all. Crazy to imagine such things! Is it allowed to have such vain dreams? I am crazy to have such vain dreams!
> I will defend my country with great courage. I will trust my star with strong faith. Alert, with endurance and power, that is what I want to be every time. I want fortune to favour me.
> My courage should have the opportunity to be proud of me!
> My country should have the opportunity to be proud of me!

Ileana is a different character. At the beginning of the opera, when the despot Ştefaniţa gives her the choice of whether her brother will be killed or not, depending on whether she will be his mistress, Ileana agrees to sacrifice herself. The shame of giving her body to the tyrant is here assimilated to death: "One of us two will die", Petru Rareş says. The fact that Ileana is ready for this shameful symbolic death is indeed heroic, because it has a concrete result: to save another life, that of her brother. And again at the end, when Ştefaniţa and Nikita menace her with torture and death if she does not reveal the names of the insurgents, Ileana is ready to die heroically.

These two heroic models – Petru's and Ileana's – are not contradictory but complementary. Together, the two models correspond to the "mioritic" principle

of Romanian heroism: Rareş sees his victory in dreams, just as the Moldavian shepherd in the ballad dreams of the mystical wedding. Ileana represents the principle of offering herself as the shepherd does in the ballad.

Let us finally place these results in the historical context of the construction of an identity for Romanian society within the new national state. When the opera was composed in 1889, the question of the legitimacy of the ruler was a highly actual one. As we have seen, Prince Cuza was elected sovereign of both Wallachia and Moldavia at the same time, whereby the two principalities were in fact unified. In 1866, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen became sovereign of Romania. But the country was still a vassal of the Sublime Porte. In 1878, Romania seceded unilaterally and Karl declared himself King of Romania. In contrast to other peoples of Central and Southeastern Europe, like for example Greece, Romania obtained its independence not by heroic fighting against oppressors, but by diplomatic skills. This lack of historical heroism is reflected in the opera: in the legend of Miorița, the heroic attitude is transformed and transcended.

Concurrently the opera shows also the transition of a mythic people into a modern national state based on administration: power and authority are ultimately legitimized not by a divine destiny revealed in dreams but by a written document.

The omnipresent allusions to the legend of Miorița, where three shepherds are mentioned, refer to the absent third: Transylvania, that part of present-day Romania which was Hugarian in 1889 (and also in 1900 when the opera was premiered). This territory, however, came to the Romanian state neither by ruse nor by an administrative act, but by the force of arms during World War I.