THE DRAMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF PICU PĂTRUȚ AND THE EUROPEAN MODEL

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Abstract:
An adequate approach to the works of Picu Pătruț – poems, adaptations, copies, popular theatre plays, miniatures – demands a discussion of the concepts of model and original creation, and an analysis of that which various scholars have deemed to be an adaptation of certain themes to fit local specifics.

Popular theatre, and more so religious popular theatre, developed in Romanian territories and across all of Europe based on certain models that, as much as one may try, cannot be made secular, since they are in fact dramatizations of biblical situations. A servant of the church, though he may add his own contributions to a text or a picture, cannot and may not overstep the boundaries of the canon.

Keywords:
Religious popular theatre, *Nativity Plays*, *The Myrrh-Bringers*.

In 1918, in the town of Săliștea Sibiului, Oprea "Picu"* Procopie Pătruț was born.

After 1905, when Onisifor Ghibu discovered the meek clergyman Picu Pătruț, over 30 after his death (Picu Pătruţ lived as a monk in his village, which is to say *in the world*, up until 1872, when he was taken by a chest illness brought about by a great crisis of conscience), his works not only roused interest, but awe and admiration.

In the magazine Manuscriptum XVI, no. 4(61), 1985. P.115-132, a text belonging to Onisifor Ghibu was published; a document filled with pathos, but at the same time a declaration of faith in the talents and the modest but unique destiny of Picu Pătruț: *From a very young age, he displayed strong inclinations toward a religious life, which determined his parents to allow him to enter the service of the church, like Abton Pann, at*

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the age of 11. From 1829 until 1872, he would serve first as a cleric's helper, then as a cleric or vicar of the "great" church in his village. He continued this work in the years 1848-1852, when he also worked as a teacher at the local elementary school, a substitute for one of the two teachers who had joined the military. During his lifetime, Picu was most intimately connected to his town of

* Picu is a diminutive of Oprea, Procopie is his monastic name.

Săliştea, which he only left on two occasions: when he went to Ţara Românească in order to visit some monasteries in the Vâlcea jurisdiction, and in the year 1862, in order to receive his official monastic tonsure at the Cheia skete (Vâlcea jurisdiction). In reality, the latter act was a mere formality, seeing as Picu had lived a harsh monastic life since youth, strictly observing the rules of monkhood life and even changing his name to that of Procopie. Taking the habit at a monastery and then returning to his village to live out his new life as a monk was in accordance with Picu's own personal concept of monkhood. Picu could never make the decision to live in a monastery, the contemplative life of which he deemed insufficient and the discipline of which he found overly weak as well as pointless. He did not feel any need for external constraint, but wished to master himself and life not only for himself and God, but for people; and not only in prayer, but above all in the love of his community and hard labour. Had he lived in another time and place, he might have been another Anthony of Padua or Francis of Assisi in the field of socio-religious endeavours, a Roland or a Greban in the field of poetry and mystery, a Ion Cucuzel in the field of religious chanting, a Fra Filippo or a Botticelli in the field of painting, a Pastalozi in the field of education, and so on.(Excerpt from the work: Onisifor Ghibu, A Rustic Representative of Romanian Spirituality from the Half of the 19th Century: Picu Pătruţ of Sălişte Graphical art and technique, XI,1940*).*

He has been called "a manifestation of the mysterious human energy" (Onisifor Ghibu), "a synthesis of popular genius" (Zoe Dumitrescu Bușulenga), an "encyclopaedist of the rural soul" (Răzvan Teodorescu), a "genius of Transylvania" (Ioan Alexandru), "the Romanian pearl of Transylvania" (Nicolae Iorga), "a Transylvanian Anton Pann" (N.Cartojan). These are not only laudatory, but very precise and pithy characterizations.

In recent years, Picu Pătruț has been brought back to public attention through a number of exhibitions: the *Picu Pătruţ* exhibition in 2012 at the

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Romanian Peasant's Museum in Bucharest and the *Europe's Last Great Miniaturist* exhibition in 2014 at the Astra Museum in Sibiu.

His fundamental work, begun in 1842, is called "Stihos or Verse..." and comprises the following in its 1400 pages: 474 chants and hymns, 577 miniatures and 112 vignettes, all in colour, 367 original verses, 107 copied with due credit to their source: Anton Pann, V. Aaron, I. Tâncovici. In 1976, Octavian Ghibu published a bibliography of the entire work, which includes additional original pieces, as well as compilations or merely copied works such as: Dimitrie Cantemir's "The Divan", Anton Pann's "Musical Verses", Gherasim Gorjan's "Christian Manual", S. Gessner' "The Death of Abel" as translated by Al. Beldiman, Eugene Sue's "The Silver Cross" as translated by I. Eliade etc.

By enumerating these copied works, we run the risk of portraying Pătruț as a mere copyist. However, this is not the case, and those who seek to discover his works will notice that, in addition to his natural efforts to correct or adapt the language, Picu Pătruț also provides illustrations, which entails that he provides his own interpretation of the text. We have followed intently Octavian Ghibu's analysis published in the magazine The Romanian Orthodox Church (CV, no. 5-6, 1987, p. 81-101) regarding the differences between original and copy with "The Divan" by Dimitrie Cantemir*.

We have introduced this data into the present study because an adequate approach to the works of Picu Pătruț – poems, adaptations, copies, popular theatre plays, miniatures – demands a discussion of the concepts of model and original creation, and an analysis of that which various scholars have deemed to be an adaptation of certain themes to fit local specifics.

Popular theatre, and more so religious popular theatre, developed in Romanian territories and across all of Europe based on certain models that, as much as one may try, cannot be made secular, since they are in fact dramatizations of biblical situations. A servant of the church, though he may add his own contributions to a text or a picture, cannot and may not overstep the boundaries of the canon. Picu Pătruț knew this.

His copies of the secular texts by Eugene Sue, Gessner, and Alexandre Dumas the Father, were made for personal use. In his rich correspondence with various monks and nuns, there are very many references to these transcriptions, to his work as a copyist and illustrator of religious books, but not to the secular ones. *Picu did not live through the*

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church, but for the church and its moral ideals, devoting every moment of his life to the service of God, through chanting, writing verses, painting holy scenes, reading religious and theological books of the church, and through his labours of love toward his fellow man. He added to the St. Petersburg copy of the Bible 400 pages written with his own hand, in admirable Cyrillic calligraphy, comprising the prefaces to all the previous Bibles and moral lessons from the Church Fathers, and in addition to this, 139 illustrations, true masterpieces of great artistic inspiration and accomplishment. (Excerpt from the work*:* 'Onisifor Ghibu, A Rustic Representative of Romanian Spirituality from the Half of the 19th Century: Picu Pătruţ of Sălişte', in *Graphical Art and Technique*, XI, 1940*).*

We have provided this preamble because, considering what we wish to show in our study, it is useful to pinpoint and clarify the biographical and bibliographical coordinates of Picu Pătruț. We have not referred to him as an *author* precisely so that we may introduce the idea of an "autochtonization" of foreign models, for what Picu Pătruț has accomplished is not, at least when it comes to religious drama, a syncretic process, as it has often been pointed out (Dan Simionescu, Viorel Cosma), but rather a local adaptation of certain themes.

The Academy Library possesses a significant number of texts of varying lengths dating back to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 20th century, generically titled VICLEI. In terms of structure, they can be divided into two categories: with characters and without. The short texts have no characters and are, in fact, compositions specific to religious ritual, also known as *doxologies* . Picu Pătruț's versions cannot be divided into these two categories, even though three of his texts are somewhat short. We encounter the doxology model in other writings of his like the Star Chants, but not in these dramatic structures out of which one was published by Elisabeta Nanu and dated 1838 and one was published by Mihai Moraru and dated 1841, May 13th.

Picu Pătruț's *Nativity Plays* were published rather late by Elisabeta Nanu as *A Manuscript of Nativity Plays by Picu Petruţiu*, in the Annual of the Folklore Archive, VI (1942), p. 301 and next. In 1986, Mihai Moraru published, in *Art History Studies and Research, segment Drama, Music, Cinematography*, T. 33, p. 58- 67, two more previously unpublished texts belonging to the *Nativity Plays*, so that we find ourselves in the situation of

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taking into account 5 versions, as opposed to the 3 which have been analyzed and commented upon.

The first mention of the two unedited texts commented upon by Mihai Moraru is made in O. Ghibu's, *Bibliography of the Works of Picu Pătruţ of Săliştea Sibiului, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, XC.IV, 1976, no. 3-4, p. 414-428.* As such, neither Elisabeta Nanu nor N. Cartojan was able to analyze these versions. There are no major differences between these and the others, but they do offer valuable insight in a possible and necessary comparison with the versions published by Ioan Tomici in *Brief Teachings for the Rearing and Good Conduct of Romanian Youths, as well as Various Exquisite Churchly Songs and Some Pious and Delightful Worldly Ones*, Buda, the University Typography, 1827, or those published by Anton Pann. In his analysis of them, Mihai Moraru reaches the conclusion, which we second, that *"they must be regarded as two different plays, having their own dramatic development, and possibly even different sources. Version 1 (Herod's Dispute with the Three Kings) is represented in Picu Pătruţ's manuscripts by the first two edits in ms. misc. I din 1837–1838 published by E. Nanu and the second text in ms. misc. III din 1841. A comparison between the dramatic development of these three texts with that of the one printed by Ioan Tomici in 1827 clearly shows that we are dealing with the same version within which the older text (1827) is in prose form, and the following three (1837, 1838, 1841) are in verse form. The other version (2), more ample, is represented by the third Nativity Play text in ms. misc. I (1838) and by the first one of the texts in ms. mise. III (1841). Neither of these two versions warrants us to assume an influence from Anton Pan's version, because, even if we were to admit the existence of an 1822 edition of Anton Pann's Star Chants, we still could not conceive that a presumptive text of a Nativity Play in this even more presumptive edition would not have also been included in the 1830 edition, but only published as late as the 1846 and 1848 editions, in a very short fragment with no dramatic unity."* Art History Studies and Research, segment Drama, Music, Cinematography, T. 33, p. 58- 67

The last remark is important seeing as numerous scholars were convinced that the *Nativity Plays* were lifted in the 19th century from Anton Pann's selection and not, much more plausibly, that these versions had circulated the entire Romanian territory in the form of local adaptations.

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The first version published by Elisabeta Nanu is short and introduces, along with Herod, the Magi, and the Angel – the Philosopher, a character that comes from Western models: the Star Bearer. The second version does not differ from the first. The third version is completely different with regard to the number of characters, instructions for direction, scenography, and costumes, as well as with regard to its treatment of the theme. The Germanic and Hungarian models call for the introduction of scenes involving Mary and Joseph and their dialogue with Herod about sheltering the Holy Family, the king's hatred and malice, and their eventual banishment. This prologue brings to mind a classical approach to constructing a play, where the beginning serves to present the context, the dialogue serves to describe the characters, and the villain is introduced, so that by the time the Magi arrive, we have established the conflict, the climax, and the final oration.

The version published by Mihai Moraru in *1841, May 13th* brings about still more new elements, a sign that the theme has further matured and developed.

In a comparative analysis of Picu Pătruț and Anton Pann, we note major differences as well. Firstly, there is the difference regarding staging. The talent of the miniaturist Picu Pătruț brings to his directorial instructions a pictorial quality that is lacking with Anton Pann. His staging and costume instructions are completed with instructions regarding the entering and exiting of the stage: *"Herod must be dressed as an emperor, with a purple robe and a crown, and girded with a sword. The [Magi] Kings of the East must like be dressed and girded with swords, bearing slightly platters in their hands, whereon they have laid their gifts for Christ, that is, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And in their right hands – sceptres. Herod's pageboy, standing by the emperor, must also be well dressed. And a small, beautiful child, dressed in the way of angels, with a white garment, with a glittering halo crown, and pretty wings, and holding in his right hand something like a broadsword and in his left hand a bell with which he beckons the Kings. Then, Joseph, Mary's betrothed, dressed like a carpenter, carrying a few tools on his back, such as a saw, a hatchet, a chip axe, and others. The Virgin Mary must be dressed prettily, like a pure maiden; and walk behind Joseph. After them, the three shepherds, dressed in their coats, and wearing shepherd's hats on their heads, and holding shepherd's staffs in their hands. And in their right hands, holding some*

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gifts, that is to say, one of them – two lambs, another – a ram, and the third – a handsome loaf of cheese. With all this in order, let them walk forth and recite the following words. Questions and answers, as I will show below."

This kind of instructions, which occur at various points throughout the play, seem to be more than clarifications regarding the context of the performance. They also act as a precise establishing of the ritual. Picu Pătruț, as we notice in some of his other writings as well, is a devoted servant and preserver of churchly lore. An overstepping, through language or instructions, of the bounds of what is accredited by churchly teachings and rites, may be permitted through the "autochtonization" of language, as correctly noted by Mihai Moraru: "Considering that Picu Pătruţ's main reading materials were writings that existed in Romanian literature around 1700, the vocabulary of the *Nativity Plays* contains a greater number of regional terms than that which his readings would have warranted. The forms in which some religious terms occur, such as *azidenţie* (sheltering; unattested in other texts; probably from the Latin *assidere*: to stop, to stay in one place), *păradie* (German, *die Parade:* parade), *armadie* (Serbian, *armada* and Hungarian, *armada), desputuluire, a desputului* (Hungarian *disputálni:* to have a confrontation, to hold a dispute), *gratulaţie* (German, *die Gratulation*: congratulation) indicate, on the one hand, that we are dealing with elements of scholarly origins, existing especially in Transylvania and the Banat, but on the other hand, that these elements had already been naturalized, some even becoming vulgar terms (which is the case with *armadie*, which, phonetically speaking, is not satisfactorily accounted for by the etyma proposed by the Academy Dictionary, *sub voce).* For two literary terms, attestations half a century prior to their occurrences in Picu Pătruţ's manuscripts *(gratulaţie*, 1772 and *despotaţie,* ms. BAR 2507 from 1797) prove that these terms of literary origins denoted two literary genres well known and cultivated as early as the beginnings of the Illuminist movement. Although, considering their origins, both genres of congratulation and dramatic dispute are linked to disciple performances, in Picu Pătruţ's plays we do not encounter the dialogic opposition between the literary and vulgar element, specific to collegium theatre".

There is, however, no allowance for the crossing of rite and ritual bounds into parody, like in certain Moldavian or Wallachian texts; the tone

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always remains always, if not grave, assured and serious. Perhaps a single moment has strayed into the comical, namely the scene with the Shepherds:

Then, the Angel goes to the shepherds, and one of the them rises and, rubbing his eyes, says:

I don't know what I dreamt,
that startled me so,
the angel came to me and I awoke.
But rather than speak of what I did see,
I'd best turn around and go back to sleep.

Then, the shepherds go back to sleep switching sides, but while they sleep a while longer, the magi sing "„O, What Glad Tidings!" (list). And when the magi are done singing, the angel returns to the shepherds and sings:

Rise up, rise up, you shepherd men,
and quickly do awaken,
so you may find the Lord Christ! (twice)

Now, the first shepherd wakes up again and brandishes his staff at the others, saying:

Rise up, my dear brothers,
and quickly do awaken,
so we may go to Bethlehem
and see our Lord Christ then!

Even this scene will later return to a serious tone and reenter the realm of ritual. We also notice, in Picu Pătruț's text, the addition of a new character: the PAGEBOY, which means servant or slave, often utilized in Transylvanian texts with both its Hungarian meanings: disciple or servant. Hungarian words are, in fact, used in these texts quite often (*csapódni:* to strike violently, *hunsfut:* shrewd) and indicate a regionalization and contextualization characteristic to the time.

In a miniature by Picu Pătruț, we notice that, unlike in other geographical areas, and for the sake of remaining in accordance with the information provided by the Bible, the magus Caspar is black*.

What surprises us, however, beyond versification and language, is the spoken character of the text, with expressions of an exclamatory nature: "O, you, Herod", or the interrogative formulation that generates the dialogue, a mark of primary theatricality:

Hey, you, are you afraid of him,

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a man so cowardly and dim?

Although the *Nativities* are, with Picu Pătruț, *MUSICAL VERSES at the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ Gathered from Various Books and from Various Teachers. And Questions with Answers, between King Herod of Judaea and the Magus Kings from the East* **or, with Anton Pann** *Songs from Nativity Plays Sung at the Birth of the Lord*, it is surprising that in the former's versions do not make much use of the word Bethlehem, the Saviour's place of birth. This is another way of bringing the play's setting closer to the place of performance and the actors involved. The costumes are given general descriptions and the props are a part of the daily lives of the players and the public. Thus, Joseph is clothed in traditional garments and carries tools specific to his trade: *Joseph, Mary's betrothed, dressed like a carpenter, carrying a few tools on his back, such as a saw, a hatchet, a chip axe, and others.* ***Mary, Mother of Jesus*** *The Virgin Mary must be dressed prettily, like a pure maiden; and walk behind Joseph.* (This is in accordance with the Transylvanian custom of women walking behind men).

This version, dated March 1841, is essentially a theatrical play. If the versions published by Elisabeta Nanu displayed an overwrought style and seemed to be influenced by or loosely adapted from Hungarian texts, in the case of this adaptation, as proven by the writing style as well as the accompanying illustrations, we are dealing with an original work which Picu Pătruț even signed:

The end.

Sălişte, May 13th, 1841. Vicar Picu Pătruț.

Another genre of drama that Picu Pătruț brought to the Romanian territories is the liturgical drama of the Passions. Thus, after the celebration of Christ's Birth, another important Christian celebration is that of the Resurrection.

During the Western Middle Ages, it became widespread as the well-known "La Résurrection", or in German speaking territories, "Die Pasionsspiele", "Die Marien am Grabe" (The Marys at the Tomb), while in Romanian territories it was performed and passed down as "Mironosițele" (The Myrrh-Bringers).

It is clearly influenced by and adapted from a Catholic model, even with its narrow area of circulation. *The Myrrh-Bringers* was performed, starting the 19th century, particularly in the Transylvanian area. The text was

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published for the first time by D. St. Petruţiu, as *The Myrrh-Bringers – a Religious Play from the Land of Săliştei, in the Annual of the Folklore Archive, IV, p. 13 and next* in 1937, and in 1938 Victor Ion Popa would rework it into a play that would keep the original title.

Picu Pătruț's work observes the structure of liturgical plays in the Catholic style almost entirely, but adapts and "autochtonizes" itself through text and side notes, in order to remain in keeping with the celebratory character of its occasion. Its structure brings to mind a theatre poem made out of questions and answers, containing lamentations and biblical references.

This work too brings us to the conclusion that the multiple ethnical intersections in the area of Mărginimea Sibiului and the burning desire of this lay monk called Procopie to educate his community on moral and above all religious values have determined him to adopt and introduce into the existential space theatrical models taken from Romanian or foreign areas (Hungarian or Saxon). The result is not only an oeuvre that is functional in nature, serving a practical purpose twice a year, but above all a literary creation, cohesive and impressive in its theatrical quality.

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