



THE GENEALOGICAL AURA OF THE DAVILA FAMILY

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Abstract – One of the long-lasting narratives developed around a family involved in the establishment of Romanian modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries is that of the illustrious physician Carol Davila. Of uncertain descent, most likely abandoned at birth and adopted by an Italian family from which he takes his name with heraldic-ornithological resonance (d'Avila), the founder of the Romanian school of medicine invents a fantasy family genealogy, combining famous European biographies, memory lapses, and Romantic melodrama.

This illegitimate legacy will leave its mark on the activities of the next generation, on the one hand, enabling a calling to implement Western ideas in Romanian institutions and, on the other, stimulating a quasi-patriarchal cult for memory constructs, equivalent to the fabrication of what Paul Ricoeur called “a prior real”. This paper aims to look at the ways in which an identity complex remains engraved in public and private acts of memory.

Keywords: Memory, Paternity, Genealogy, Family Romance, Davila

The Romanticist imagination enables a poetics of shades, mirrorings, doublings, and identity quests towards occult destinations, to be recognized in literature, theatre, or painting. Especially in high and middle-class environments, aestheticized patterns pervade biographies and fabricate real-life protagonists endowed with artistic auras. The *chiaroscuro* enveloping their existence belongs, after all, to an ethics of intimacy, to a *comme-il-faut* of private life, for which energies are often wasted, and strong personal dramas set off. Letters, memoirs, and diaries are of great value, contributing their allusive and veiled rhetoric to

the mystery of everyday life. Most often, “undeniable” testimonies are, paradoxically, feeding the ambiguous character of personal histories.

Looking at the memorabilia preserved in the Davila archives, the lives of the family members who witnessed the turn of the 20th century are enveloped in a narrative spiced with Romantic ingredients, like troubled love affairs, adventurous journeys, ambitious endeavours to reform the belated country of adoption a.s.o. The fictitious identity surfacing from the collection of letters, diaries, engravings, and photo montages traverses Europe in time and space, from West to East, from the mythologized Italian-Hungarian artistic-aristocratic ancestry to the haloed “founding family” building modernity at the gates of the Orient.

Identity Narratives

To begin with, let us say the famous doctor Carol Davila¹ has an uncertain lineage, around which seductive legends have been constructed by his next of kin, with the intention of transforming him into a symbol of his era. Considered the founder of the Romanian medical school and the military emergency medical service, which played an essential role in the War of Independence of 1877, he was also a close acquaintance of the nation’s ruler at the time, King Carol. According to the testimonies of some contemporaries², the two, foreigners in a new land, were even companions on a documentary trip across the country.

An adventurer *par excellence*, a resident of several states, he spoke four languages fluently, three of which he considered native. He passed as the secret firstborn of French Countess Marie d’Agoult³ and Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, who were involved in a romantic relationship⁴. It is not known why the eccentric countess would have wanted to hide this first child of hers from the eyes of the world, giving him up for adoption to a family in Parma. Nor why Liszt, the alleged father, would not have claimed paternity after Carlo (Antonio Francesco) Davila became a notorious figure in Eastern Europe and after his supposed son died in 1884⁵. What is certain is that the future doctor grows up in an Italian family, from which he takes his name with heraldic and ornithological resonance (d’Avila). However, the genealogical tree of Davila’s family, later created by his descendants, does not even mention this connection.

Claiming these fictitious parents, Carol used to accompany his ascension into the high society with the emotional legend of his illusory descent, resorting to an elaborate identity construct⁶. The correspondence he maintained over time with his wife, Ana Racoviță, and especially with his first son, Alexandru, captures some of his representational obsessions: the concern for the strict education of a perfect man, of Western conduct⁷, which his firstborn must benefit from; the excessive preoccupation for calligraphy and signature⁸; the impeccable social conduct and the indispensable military outfit, which he adopted in all circumstances – all signs of a sought-after act of presence.

In the Romanian cultural space, this persistent narrative of his hidden descent and adventurous life relates to a local affinity for founding myths and heroes, predestined characters bearing heraldic arms, looking after high achievements, and building upon a most impressive spiritual legacy. The chroniclers of his time remember Carol Davila as a rather discreet presence, often humorously pointing out his atypical Romanian pronunciation and the non-Balkan rigor of his social appearance. A recurrent story, linked to the romanticized image of Doctor Davila and recycled over time in several versions, is that of his galloping in the middle of winter in search of a yellow rose, thus convincing Ana Racoviță, the descendant of an important family of Romanian rulers, to become his wife. His horse, having an Italian name – Citta, is a character often invoked in the family correspondence and memoirs. Another story, taken from the same fragmented epistolary collection and censored, in places, by the agile pen of the father, is also equestrian and comes to associate the image of the adolescent Alexander with a symbolic moment, this time for the history of France⁹.

Along with this romanticized diegesis, augmented with diary pages, evocations, testimonies left by family and close friends, the well-known doctor tenaciously carved his effigy throughout his life. He will have several notable portraits¹⁰ – the easel one signed by Nicolae Grigorescu, now displayed at the Romanian Art Museum, a watercolour signed by Émile François Dessaint in 1861, kept in the family collection – and many others with less famous signatures. Posterity will be even more generous in depicting him. In the pose of a founding hero of some important institutions in Bucharest, he is reproduced in the plaster bust made by Brâncuși in 1903 (restored and cast in bronze by the Storck family after

the sculptor left the country in 1912), the statue signed by Carol Storck also in 1903 and placed in front of the Faculty of Medicine, two portraits in oil on canvas signed by his good friend Theodor Aman et al. The latter, better known among contemporaries, projected in the collective memory the definitive image of Carol Davila as the founder. The first portrait reveals the semi-profile bust of the doctor, with his inflexible, severe features; the second, created in depth, envelops Carol's body in a deep blue light, outlining the same military posture, with an emphasis on the aristocratic elegance and thoughtful look. Both resort to a staging of a meticulously studied social pose, which the doctor has chosen to retain for posterity¹¹.

In the same restoration line, with his unusual appetite for the symbolic preservation of the personal past, Doctor Davila also invested in family portraits. A series of paintings on canvas under various signatures (paintings under eight different signatures could be recovered from this collection) really make up a memorial genealogy in images. Almost all of them depict Ana Racoviță in the folk mountain costume, next to her firstborn, Alexandru, or surrounded by all four children. Most notable are the canvases painted by Sava Hentia: *Ana Davila cu copilul* [Ana Davila with the child, 1876] and *Alexandru Davila cu mama* [Alexandru Davila with the mother, 1885]. Here the rhetoric of motherhood is transcribed in an accentuated gestural code, as well as the symbolic details of her noble descent. Dinicu Golescu's niece appears in all this rich iconography with her face haloed by a surreal light projected from the side, following the model of religious paintings. Some art critics have speculated the reasons for the sadness painted on Ana's face, either through biographical details (the doctor's choleric temper) or through an anticipation of her unhappy end. In both cases, the mother's image is religiously connotated.

The compositions in the manner of *The Virgin and Child* were created posthumously (the first one just two years after her premature death) and are symbolically supported by this event, which had a great emotional impact on city society¹². Recovered through her maternity image, Ana Racoviță becomes the subject of public adulation, symbolically projected onto her entire lineage.

In the family pictures, the children surrounding their mother also wear traditional clothes – Alexandru, dressed in tight rural trousers and flats, appears most often standing, while the girls, sitting as in a coun-

try-side get-together, display symbolic elements of the folk culture rural folk (wool wisps, kerchiefs or other traditional Romanian fabrics, field flowers, etc.). For the cosmopolitan Davila family, with uncertain paternal ancestors, the feeling of Romanian-ness is linked, symbolically, to the maternal spirit and to memories of the mansion in Golești, recovered as a space securing the deep connection to local tradition.

Going back to Carol Davila, the mysterious traveller who disembarked on March 13, 1853, at Giurgiu, to discover and civilize Wallachia, a country at the beginning of its modern era, he became a well-known public figure, enjoying the admiration of his contemporaries and posthumous recognition – as he wished. Two moments mark the young doctor's "adoption" and recognition by the Romanian state: in June 1864, the "foreigner" Davila is granted the legal act of "great naturalization" [naturalizațiunea cea mare], and, in May 1868, he receives Romanian citizenship as a reward for his "outstanding" service to the country, by a decree of law undersigned by the King Carol.

Sweetened over time, his image preserved in the cultural memory is linked not only to his objectively solid personal achievements but also to his fictional genealogy. In her essay analysing the Romanian 19th century, Ioana Pârvulescu summarizes the biography of the notorious doctor:

His story follows sentimental novel patterns: the child with *pater incertus*, who goes out into the world (he had to choose between Persia and Wallachia) and becomes famous. In his case, even the mother is "unattested", because, from all the biographies published after the death of Countess d'Agoult, Davila is missing, and some letters could leave room for discussion, if she is not only a spiritual mother, i.e., godmother. The young man arrives in the country on the 13th day of the month and has a talisman ring to protect him from misfortunes on this day¹³.

The Paradox of Otherness

In the wake of this laborious identity construction, with the enthusiasm of imposing the illegitimate paternal genealogy, the next generation, especially the firstborns of Ana and Carol – Alexandru and Elena – developed a quasi-patriarchal cult for the memory constructs and the factual hijacking of the present, towards the consolidation of "a prior real", as Paul Ricoeur called it, capable of sustaining the illusory lineage.

The younger Davilas are terrified by anonymity, they ardently adhere to the etiquette of the high society, especially that of the royal family, by which they allow themselves to be symbolically adopted, and they have a special appetite for setting up public projects. Apart from two controversial directorates of the National Theatre, during which he took concrete steps to change the law of theatres, Alexandru¹⁴ established several new institutions, companies, and publications throughout his short active life¹⁵, such as *Revista sportivă* [The Sports Magazine], *The Romanian Bibliophile Circle*, and *Rampa* [The Ramp].

The first publication pertaining to sporting topics in Romania, *Revista sportivă* (1896, no. 1-16, March 3 – June 23), included articles dedicated to the most fashionable competitions in Bucharest: horse, dog and automobile racing, cycling, etc. It approached, thus, in a new register, the narrative of connecting local worldliness to the demands of the European one.

The Romanian Bibliophile Circle (1914) aimed to print in luxury editions books that were representative of autochthonous values and the stimulation of national sentiment – *Cântarea României* [Praise to Romania] by Alecu Russo and *Cronica românilor* [Chronicle of the Romanians] by Gheorghe Șincai should have opened the collection, which enjoyed ornamental calligraphy, also pencilled by Alexandru Davila. An example of how he would have liked the typefaces of the bibliophile editions to look can be seen in the first volume of the testamentary-documentary writing *Din torsul zilelor* [From the Passage of Days]¹⁶. To strengthen its status as a national publishing house and to give more prominence to the new company, Davila appoints King Ferdinand as honorary president.

Upon his initiative, the first significant independent theatre company was set up in 1909. A valuable generation of interwar actors was established here (Tony and Lucia Sturdza Bulandra, Marioara Voiculescu, Ion Manolescu, the director Vasile Enescu et al.), and the foundations of the first modern directing school were also laid.

Together with N.D. Cocea, he started the famous daily newspaper *Rampa* (1911), signing its manifesto. He would be constantly providing this magazine with articles until the end of his life.

The list of pioneering projects could go on. Invalid, no longer “in the spotlight” he, launches in the media ideas to reform the artistic life

of Bucharest, recently freed from German occupation: he elaborates the detailed sketches of a new theatre building, perfectly adapted to the requirements of the modern-era directors (first in 1919, revised in 1925), proposes technical solutions for the construction of a bridge over the Danube, and conceives a new structure of the Romanian alphabet, with the intention of creating a vowel system capable of phonetically distinguishing quantity and accent, following the French model. In the period of national reconstruction after 1918, all these measures responded to real social needs.

Therefore, the son compulsively perpetuates the vocation of inceptions and dismounts, taking over from the father the mission of legitimizing his family in the local culture through unavoidable and long-lasting traces in the collective memory. Perhaps Alexandru's life reflects, the most clearly, the conflicting nature of this identity shift between the ascendant of the paternal culture (the Italian/French space from which Carol once descended to Giurgiu, in the pose of the civilizing hero) and the raw authenticity of the maternal one (from which originates the noblewoman Ana Racoviță, granddaughter of a royal ruler and descendant of a family with old Moldavian-Wallachian cultural traditions).

The correspondence with the father, from the period of his studies in Paris, will be in French, the same language his parents used in their letters during the long intervals when Carol was away from home. However, for his first verses, from the same period, Alexandru prefers Romanian rhymes and chooses the hills surrounding the Golești mansion as a source of inspiration. He would become both the conservative author of the historical drama, of romantic inspiration, *Vlaicu Vodă* [King Vlaicu, 1902], a play with strong nationalist accents, considered for a long time an artistic symbol of the struggle for national independence¹⁷, and the founder of the modern school of directing, inspired by the most radical tendencies of the French stage.

Although these two artistic interests in theatre claim relatively the same age of creation, paradoxically, the playwright and the director Al. Davila seem stylistically and ideologically separated by several decades. We recognize the playwright's appetite for historical themes with contemporary ideological impact. He had devised the subject and structure of an extensive trilogy, *Mirciada*, mirroring the congener *Trilogia*

Moldovei [Trilogy of Moldova] by Barbu Șt. Delavrancea. He intended to develop, around Mircea the Elder, a heroic epic¹⁸. The conflict of the first and only completed play (*Vlaicu Vodă*) involves, perhaps accidentally, some autobiographical aspects – the tense relationship with the Hungarian space (that of the fictional grandfather Franz Liszt) is symbolically brought into the fight for the unaltered Romanian spirituality (here the conflict between the drama's protagonists is consumed in the clash between supporters of Catholicism and Western values and defenders of local tradition). As anticipated, the play, written in verses of manufactured pathos, is built within the thematic and stylistic extension of late romanticism and requires, on stage, a declamatory approach.

Even in comedy, Al. Davila prefers autochthonous typologies, inspired by those created by Alecsandri, and ridicules, following in the footsteps of the same Alecsandri, their false cosmopolitanism¹⁹, the imitation of foreign forms without assimilation.

Totally opposed is however his approach when it comes to the art of directing. He embraces the discourse of stage modernism, fashionable in Western capitals, by popularizing the realist-naturalist formula practiced by André Antoine and his collaborators from the Théâtre Libre in Paris. He thus brings to the Romanian stage the new method of dramatic interpretation, in line with the European construct of authenticity.

However, no matter how relevant to its era, the interpretation method adopted in the Davila school proved inadequate when dealing with his own text, *Vlaicu Vodă* remaining to be performed in the older manner of tirades and declamation.

Also, with the repertory selected during the two turns as director of the National Theatre, Al. Davila proved to be equally progressive, importing contemporary texts that were successful abroad, from light comedies and boulevard dramas to significant plays developed around socio-political messages. The preference for foreign plays, as well as allowing performances in French on the National Theatre stage, even for charitable purposes, stirred up not just the antipathy of the traditionalists grouped around Nicolae Iorga, a politician with conservative views, but also led to public riots that ended with acts of violence in the Theatre Square²⁰ (1913) and which earned him the epithet of "anti-Romanian"²¹.

The “foreigner” Al. Davila confronts the boundary that is culturally separating subsequent spaces, experiencing the duality of “near-far”²² with uncertain status and problematic ethnic inclusion.

(Auto)biographical Constructions

From 1910 almost until the end of her life (1954), Elena Perticari Davila²³ devoted herself to the elaboration of an extensive family archive. We thus recover a collection of notes, documents, evidence and reconstituted letters, stamps and carefully assembled photographic collages. In her project, the author used a strategy of anachronism to transform historical fact into genealogical fiction, producing, for example, a series of documents that would attest to an earlier relationship between Franz Liszt and Countess Marie d’Agoult, certifying the mythologizing lineage of Carol Davila²⁴.

Însemnările zilnice [The Daily Notes] (nine thick notebooks, in some places illegible) make up rather a quotidian chronicle, combining scenes from the private life of the royal family with mundane personal events. Scattered over the hundreds of pages, we also find some precious testimonies from the life of the Davila family (scarce notes about the suspicion of plagiarism regarding the play written by her brother, Alexandru Davila – *Vlaicu Vodă*; the circumstances of the criminal attack on him, et al.). Along with this compulsive present of the diary she filled in almost daily, the archives of the Romanian Academy Library store two other files more carefully dated and scrupulously annotated by Elena. *Dosar referitor la corespondența Contesei D’Agoult* [File about the Correspondence of the Countess D’Agoult] and *Filiațiune arătată prin fotografiile și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D’Agoult* [Parentage Shown through Photographs and Completed by the Letters of the Countess D’Agoult] contribute to attest the notable descent of the family, in a perpetuation of a utopian imperative present – witnessing “now”, capable of redrawing and validating the quilted past of its ancestors.

The first file includes a series of written testimonies, offered by personalities with indisputable voices and carrying the weight of the given word (Marie de Mutius, one of the countess’ nieces, Maria Darvari, born Bibescu [noble family], Mrs. General Coandă, born Danet, in the family of an illustrious French doctor, etc.), which, following the

request of Elena Perticari Davila, confirm through a common phrase, with the symbolic value of a legal document, the correspondence between the Countess and Carol Davila, the “young traveller” who left for Wallachia in the spring of 1853. “I certify that I had in my hands and read on several occasions the personal correspondence addressed by Countess d’Agoult and Countess de Charnacé to Mr. Carol Davila between 1859 and 1862”²⁵, writes and signs, in a private letter, Jeanne Charlier, “professor at *École Centrale de Bucarest*”²⁶. Quasi-identical declarations of honour are submitted by other witnesses, called to confirm the evidence almost a century after the end of the tender correspondence between Carol and his alleged mother.

From the only letter found in the file²⁷, typed, dated, and unsigned, we recover the following words of the countess:

I always think of you, my very dear child, with a strong desire to see you again. It seems to me that you need to travel. On the 15th at the latest, I will be in Turin for at least a month, or for longer, if I could hope to see you there. [...] So try to come. Who knows? There might be something for you to do in this great reorganization of Italy, where medical science and organization are quite lacking. Few doctors in Italy, none in Nice, where the Emperor wants to create wonders. I have good friends around here. I have the thought that if the Orient tires you too much or you become too sad, you will find in these pleasant Florentine countries, or in new France, a useful and interesting employment of your acquired experience and your talent as an organizer. [...] I hug you... with the greatest tenderness²⁸.

A few envelopes with the postmark and the names of the recipients carefully handwritten resist the passage of time and complete the collection of evidence, opening spaces for imagination and stimulating the appetite to fill the gap with compensatory narratives along the lines of those already drawn by the anachronistic collage of facts. In the era of phenomenological “re-readings”, browsing documents is interrogative²⁹ and involves an act of intrusion, considers Paul Ricoeur, assuming a transgressive approach to traumatic memory. Through contact with the residues of the past, personal history melts into emotional narratives, inseparable from fiction.

Elena Perticari Davila prefaces the presentation of the documents with the following confession³⁰:

Din nenorocire s-au pierdut mai multe scrisori în incendiul care a mistuit casa noastră de la Izvor, în care ne retrăsesem definitiv în urma demisiei soțului meu din armată. Scrisorile rămase după incendiu mi-au fost furate ulterior cu ciornele răspunsurilor tatălui meu, din fericire însă, după ce fuseseră publicate. Nu mai posed ca amintire decât aceste plicuri pe care le dau Academiei Române.

[Unfortunately, several letters were lost in the fire that consumed our house in Izvor, where we had permanently retired following my husband's resignation from the army. The letters left after the fire were later stolen from me, together with the drafts of my father's replies, fortunately, however, only after they had been published. I have only these envelopes left as a souvenir that I give to the Romanian Academy.]

The documentary evidence that was “searched, found, saved”³¹ creates its own history, as a metatext of the facts it comes to attest – a micro-history of the trace left, to paraphrase the French theoretician, through the prism of which probable and distant facts get configured *ad hoc* in the “visitor's” imagination.

More spectacular is the second file, in which Elena assembles a photo album, containing graphological samples that mirror the writing of Franz Liszt and Carol Davila (fig. 1), portrait or semi-profile photogravures of the two, and, in an attempt to validate them through association, an official document – the marriage certificate between Carol and Ana Racoviță; other mirrored profiles are framed to prove eloquent physiognomic similarities passed down over several generations, claiming hereditary heritage on both lineages. Zoe, the third daughter of the family, seems, for Elena, to match closest the facial features of the countess (fig. 2), while in the semi-profile of Alexandru we find, like for the father, but as if now, in the second generation, more refined, those of the illustrious grandfather, Franz Liszt (fig. 3). Photos taken at different ages are called to attest to the evolution of little Alexandru in the spirit of the claimed family. The confrontation of the “proofs”, bust photogravures of the two at ten and fourteen years old, should illustrate the stages of a shared destiny through its exemplarity. The circle of physiognomic similarity symbolically closes with the two death masks of the protagonists – that of Franz Liszt, who died in Weimar at the age of 75, and that of Alexandru Davila, who died in Bucharest at the age of 67 (fig. 4). Hardened rictuses on their faces affected by disease are

meant to fix, in a common ultimate expression, the image of a genotype. Elena annotates the album page as follows: “to observe the wart that was beginning to grow on his (Alexandru Davila’s – Ed.) forehead, just like Liszt”³². In the context of autobiographical rewriting, the random slide from one image to another, from inscriptions to faces and finally to masks, produces a “duration of persistence”³³ that suspends the diachrony of facts. From the perspective of the restorative present, reduced to a single representation, the Liszt-Davila filiation, with its emotional and redeeming load, now seems definitively clarified.

The illustrated family tree branches out for three generations – the profile of the romantic composer is projected backwards on the branch of descent in various associations with his probable grandchildren and great-grandchildren; the dark look of Anna Cutarida, Zoe’s daughter, seems to evoke Liszt’s gloomy face from a photogravure made after the oil canvas signed by the French-Danish romantic painter Ary Sheffer in 1837 (fig. 5). From the original painting, we recover the visual discourse of the era – the dark touches of the background highlight the pallor of a long face, the lost gaze with its incurable nostalgia captures the frame; in echo, from the photograph of her youth, Anna seems to look at us the same way, posing with distinction in a feminine manner that was very passable in the days of the Countess d’Agoult’s youth.

Elena insists on finding the fine features made in pencil in two unsigned portraits of the composer on the stern face of Citta, Alexander’s eldest son. Here, the mirroring needs a slightly sandblasted lens to blur the obvious differences between the two portraits. But the display she created exerts a particular fascination. “Images can decide on the viewer’s freedom”³⁴, they create the most unexpected emotional connections. There is, in this collage of faces, with their intimidating frontality, a power of seduction superior to any speech act (autobiographical narratives, documents, testimonies). As the German theoretician Horst Bredekamp describes it, the image has the ability to (re)generate uncontrollable, de-contextualized, and, more often than not, detached from the flow of history (in this case, personal) narratives, seductive by their autonomy³⁵.

In the age of photography, with more awareness of the image-time concept, Alexandru Davila will continue this recovering journey, allowing himself to be portrayed a few times. From the childhood portrait in sheepskin cloak and tight rural trousers, signed by Nicolae Grigorescu,

to those of maturity, signed by Iser or Camil Ressu and giving us the image of a fashionable person from the Belle Époque, as well as from family photos in which the folk Romanian costume appears side by side with the frock coat to those that surprise him, disguised, on stage or in the foyer, Al. Davila therefore shares, as we have seen, the precipitates of an identity-split existence between two antagonistic poses. The “Frenchman”³⁶, as he was maliciously called by a part of the contemporary press, a follower of cosmopolitan modernism, a promoter of some imported cultural forms (stage performances in French, *Bonjour*-ist clothing, Western high lifestyle), and the Romanian tormented to open paths for the progress of his nation, the author of a powerful historical drama with nationalist accents, paradoxically fit into the same fragile existence. As in the case of the father, the unpredictable oscillation between two cultures and mentalities emerges, for him as well, from the need to project the individual destiny against the moving background of an identity construction imprinted in the collective memory.

In the end, in the same area of quasi-totalitarian retention of a past with a legitimizing and recovering role, the volume *Amintiri din copilărie* [Memories from Childhood] signed by Elena General Perticari Davila, with illustrations by Maria C. Davila, Șt. Constantinescu and Al. Moscu and published in 1940 at *Casa Școalelor*, is not without some documentary value. In the manner of the more famous *Memories* written by Ion Creangă, in other words drawing us into the museum-like biography of the characters, outlined in etching and placed in the atmosphere of the 19th century, the author reconstructs, with a nostalgic tone and a sought-after rural mood, scenes from her and *Lica's* childhood (“that’s how his parents caressed him, even though he was called Alexandru”³⁷). *Mutatis mutandis*, the “universal child”, growing between the Golești mansion and the Cotroceni hills, “always dressed like a countryman”, with a “rustic hat”, “white shirt” and “red wool belt”, “was boisterous like a colt”, pulling his sister rich and black tails, looking forward to the winter holidays, inventing crazy games etc.

Thus, anchored in a recognizable literary model, the spirited children of the Davila family – Lilică, Elenuca, Pia – are, in retrospect, fully absorbed by the local space and culture, which they elevate through their noble parentage. In this last compensatory fiction, assimilable to a “tomb-text”³⁸, meant to embalm what is about to disappear, the central

figures of the family epic detach themselves once again from the dense frame of their bookish life for a last reverence.

The characters descended from the incongruous narratives of the epistles, memoirs, and *avant la lettre*, auto-fictions, become, at least in the rich “museum” of images, objects, and voices they create, the owners of a trans-generational purpose – that of anchoring, through the exemplarity of their destiny, acts and civilizing values in the socio-cultural space of Romania at a time when the nation was still unsettled.

The ingenious identity reconstruction, as a collective family act, has been questioned, either zealously accepted or ironically discarded, by biographers and historians along the decades. A couple of years after Carol’s death, *Buletinul Societății de Științe din București-România*³⁹ [The Bulletin of the Society of Sciences in Bucharest, Romania] hosts an ample demonstration of his maternal ancestry, supporting the fictitious narrative of the family descent from the branch of Countess D’Agoult. The same idea is held, almost a century later, by the biographer Gheorghe Brătescu, a reputed physician and medical researcher⁴⁰. Both sources remain discrete in what regards Carol’s father. Liszt’s silence, the lack of archival evidence attesting to Davila’s alleged affiliation, and the obvious anachronisms embedded in the family story indicate the precariousness of the biographical narrative. Paul Ștefănescu, a *dilettante* in occult (hi)stories, weighs, in his book *Enigme ale istoriei românilor* [Enigmas of the History of Romanians (1994)], the arguments for and against this affiliation, only to conclude its impossibility. The historian Lidia Trăușan-Matu (2017) reaches the same conclusion while leaving the question concerning the family origin open.

The biographers of the second generation of Davila’s family (including Alexandru, Elena, Zoe, and Pia) tend to overlook the genealogic issue. When dealing with this issue, however, the studies dedicated to Alexandru Davila (a prominent playwright and stage director, manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest) admit his “confusing ancestry” or briefly invoke the irretrievable family past⁴¹. The few, less academic, articles concerning Elena Peticari-Davila (the main artisan and keeper of the family myth) focus on her activity as a writer and philanthropist, keeping their distance from her biographical fantasies. Carol Davila’s other two children, Zoe and Pia, were less visible in the public sphere and therefore were given less attention by historians and biographers.

- ¹ Carlo Antonio Francesco d'Avila (as he liked to sign in Italian), Charles d'Avila (in French), or Carol Davila (in Romanian) was born in Parma in 1828, studied medicine in Paris, and settled in Wallachia in 1853, invited by Prince Barbu Stirbey, where he laid the foundations of the local health system and medical education.
- ² George Costescu, *Bucureștiul Vechiului Regat*, Universul, Bucharest 1944, p. 194.
- ³ Countess D'Agoult (Marie Catherine Sophie de Flavigny, 1805-1876), signing with the penname Daniel Stern, is known as one of the most rebellious female figures of her epoch. Called in her intimate *milieux* "an Amazon of thought", the countess is now remembered mostly for her love affairs with George Sand and Franz Liszt.
- ⁴ The couple will have three officially recognized children.
- ⁵ Liszt passed away in 1886 (two years after Carol Davila), after enduring the loss of two of his known children.
- ⁶ The legend of Carol Davila's ancestry is also fuelled by some of the leading political and cultural families in Romania, such as the Brătianus. The public attention given to the Davila family romance is partly due to Sabina Brătianu Cantacuzino.
- ⁷ Marian Manu Bădescu, *Corespondență inedită*, Dacia, Cluj 1973, pp. 259-262.
- ⁸ He will also pass it on to his son, whom he asks, at the age of eight, "to write a page of calligraphy a day" and to send him the Marseillaise "in his handwriting" (ivi, p. 260).
- ⁹ In his correspondence with his father and, later, in his memoirs (*Din torsul zilelor I*), Alexandru recounts the escapade in which he had the chance to ride the old horse Pompier, hero of the Franco-Prussian war at Reichschoffen. V Marin Manu Bădescu, *Alexandru Davila. Corespondență inedită*, Dacia, Cluj 1973, pp. 66-68.
- ¹⁰ Lidia Trăușan-Matu, *Incursiune în colecția de portrete a doctorului Carol Davila*, in *Revista medicală română*, LXV, 1, 2018, pp. 65-70.
- ¹¹ Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *Cum se savurează un tablou și alte studii de istorie a artei*, Humanitas, București 2015, pp. 114-115 et passim.
- ¹² For the death context of Anei Racoviță, see Alexandru Macedonski, *Despre Davila*, in *Scena*, II, 140, May 31st 1918, or George Costescu, *Bucureștiul Vechiului Regat*, Universul, București 1944, p. 165.
- ¹³ Ioana Părvulescu, *În intimitatea secolului XIX*, Humanitas, București 2005, pp. 165-155.
- ¹⁴ Alexandru Davila (1862-1929) is the firstborn of Ana Racoviță and Carol Davila. In Romanian culture, he is mostly remembered as the author of the historical drama *Vlaicu Vodă* ("Prince Vlaicu", 1902), present in all the repertoires of the local public companies in the epoch. A controversial leading figure of the theatrical life in the early 20th century, he was twice the manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest (1905-1908, 1912-1914),

championing significant institutional reforms, at the levels of theatre production and legal administration. A supporter of Realism, Al. Davila replaced the painted, bidimensional set design of the mid-19th century with elaborated three-dimensional props, in line with Émile Zola's theory developed in *Le Naturalisme au théâtre* (1880). He also authored a massive series of journal articles, letters, theatre reviews, and essays before and after World War I.

¹⁵ Since the age of 52, following a murderous attack, he remains immobilized in a wheelchair, thus leaving public life prematurely.

¹⁶ Alexandru Davila, *Din torsul zilelor I*, Oltenia, București 1928, pp. 127-132.

¹⁷ The play will be in the repertory of the National Theatre in Bucharest for several decades, spanning the turbulent period of debate on the repertoire and educational role of the National Theatre at the beginning of the 20th century; in June 1929, he receives the National Theatre Award. In the last anthumous edition (1929), Davila dedicates the text to the memory of his mother, who raised him "in the piety of the Romanian nation".

¹⁸ Alexandru Davila, *Din torsul zilelor II*, Oltenia, București 1929, pp. 185-192.

¹⁹ Ivi, pp. 166-172.

²⁰ In March 1913, a large protest took place in the Theatre Square, on the occasion of a charity show given in French for Bucharest's high society. The funds obtained from the performance were to be donated to a charity organization from Găiești, but the nearly ten thousand protesters led to the event's cancellation and, ultimately, to the dismissal of Al. Davila, for the second time, from the theatre head manager position.

²¹ Ion C. Bacalbașa, *Cronica teatrală*, in *Epoca*, III, 15, February 14th 1909.

²² Jean Baudrillard - Marc Guillaume, *Figuri ale Alterității*, Paralela 45, Pitești 2008, p. 14.

²³ Elena Peticari Davila (1865-1954), the second child of Ana Racoviță and Carol Davila, preserved and structured the Davila archive, comprising legal acts, photos, studies, and other texts documenting the public and private life of her family. She is also known as a memoir writer, concerned with the same subject (*Amintiri din copilărie, Înmormări zilnice, Din viața și corespondența lui Carol Davila*). She was close to the Romanian Royal House (as one of Queen Mary's maids of honour), featuring more than once as a character in the Queen's autobiography. She translated some of the Queen's writings from French to Romanian (*Crinul vieții, Regina cea rea*) and followed her behind the front line as a medical nurse during World War I. In 1882, she married General Ioan Peticari, adjutant of King Carol.

²⁴ One of the purposes of the reconstruction Elena Peticari Davila resorts to is to show under what circumstances Liszt would have met the countess before the historically certified date, thus making it possible for Carol to be the firstborn of this couple. Carol's birth year is 1828, while the supposed love affair between the countess and the Hungarian composer was dated

- between 1835 and 1839. See Lidia Trăușan-Matu, *Incursiune în colecția de tablouri a doctorului Carol Davila*, in *Revista de istorie a artei*, LXV, 1, 2018, pp. 120-121.
- ²⁵ «J'atteste avoir en entre les mains et lu à plusieurs reprises la correspondance intime adressée par la Comtesse D'Agout et la Comtesse de Charnacé à M. Carol Davila entre les années 1859 et 1862», «Jeanne Charlier, professeur à l'École Centrale de Bucarest».
- ²⁶ Arhiva Peticari-Davila (B.A.R.), *Dosar referitor la corespondența Contesei D'Agout*, II varia 1.
- ²⁷ Ibidem.
- ²⁸ «Je pense toujours à vous, mon bien cher enfant et avec un vif désir de vos revoir. Il me semble que vous devez avoir besoin de changer d'horizon. Le 15 au plus tard je serai à Turin et pour un mois au moins, pour plus longtemps, si j'avais l'espoir de vous y voir. [...] Tâchez donc de venir. Qui sait ? Il y aurait peut-être quelque chose pour vous à faire dans ce grand remaniement de l'Italie où la science et l'organisation médicale font assez défaut. Peu de médecins en Italie, aucun à Nice où l'Empereur veut créer des merveilles. J'ai par ici de bons amis. J'ai la pensée que si l'Orient vous fatiguait trop ou vous devenez trop triste, vous trouverez dans ces douces contrées florentines ou France nouvelle, un emploi utile et intéressant de vous expérience acquise et de votre talent d'organisateur. [...] Je vous serre ... avec la plus vive tendresse».
- ²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, Amarcord, Timișoara 2001, p. 216.
- ³⁰ Arhiva Peticari-Davila (B.A.R.), *Dosar referitor la corespondența Contesei D'Agout*, II varia 1.
- ³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, Amarcord, Timișoara 2001, p. 216.
- ³² Arhiva Peticari-Davila (B.A.R.), *Filiația Liszt-Davila dovedită prin fotografii și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D'Agout*, II varia 2.
- ³³ Gérard Genette, *Imanență și transcendență*, Univers, București 1999, p. 85.
- ³⁴ Horst Bredekamp, *Actul de imagine*, Tact, Cluj-Napoca 2018, p. 25.
- ³⁵ Ibidem.
- ³⁶ *Voința națională*, XXIII, 6254, March 15th 1906.
- ³⁷ Elena General Peticari Davila, *Amintiri din copilărie*, Casa Școalelor, București 1940, p. 4 et passim.
- ³⁸ Jean Baudrillard - Marc Guillaume, *Figuri ale Alterității*, Paralela 45, Pitești 2008, p. 6.
- ³⁹ Vol. 6, 4 (July-August 1897), pp. 301-308.
- ⁴⁰ V. *Tinerețea lui Carol Davila*, Albatros, București 1979.
- ⁴¹ "Carol Davila, who was thought to be Liszt and Countess D'Agout's son", Marin Manu Bădescu, *Al. Davila. Corespondență inedită*, Dacia, Cluj 1973, p. 7.

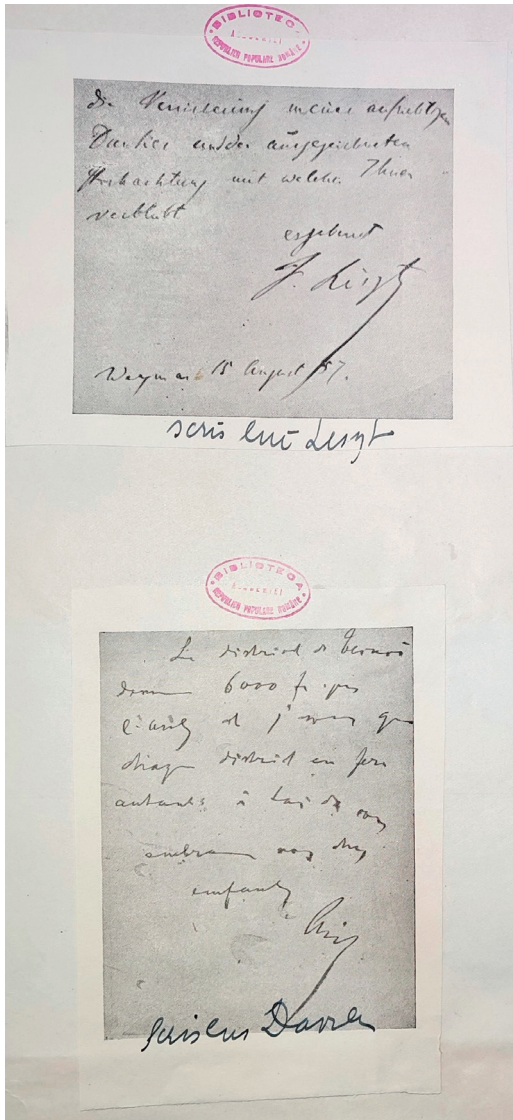


Fig 1. Graphological samples showing the handwriting of Franz Liszt and Carol Davila (Arhiva Perticari-Davila (B.A.R.), Filația Liszt-Davila dovedită prin fotografii și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D'Agout, II varia 2).

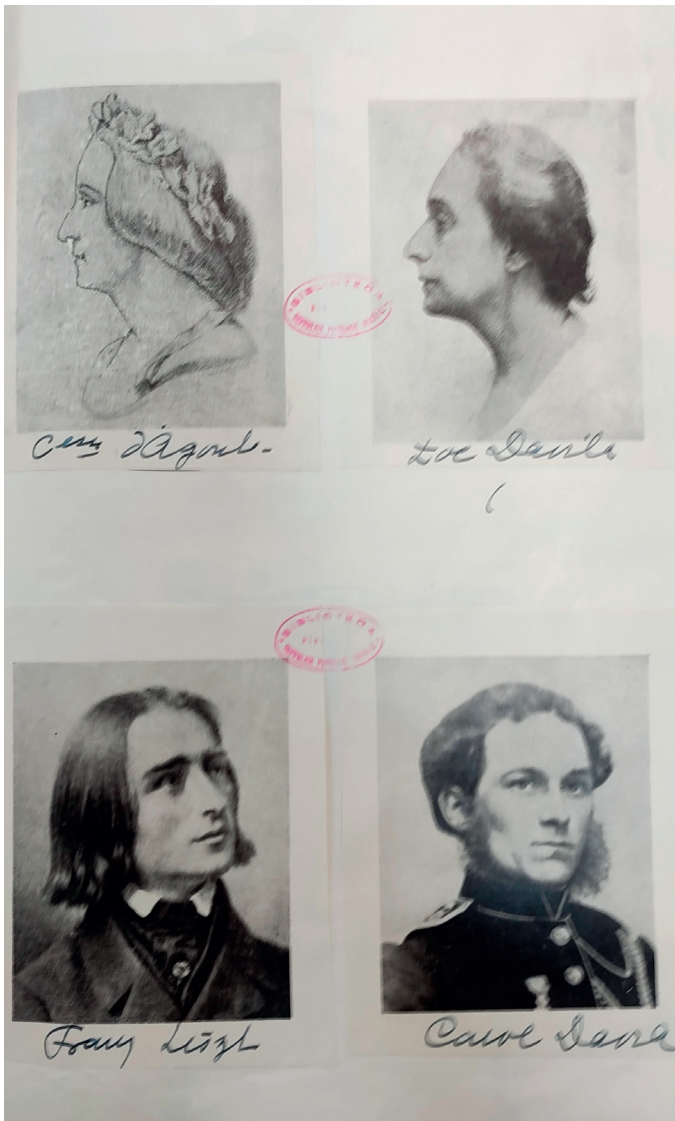


Fig 2. Mirrored Portraits: Contesa d'Agout vs. Zoe Davila; Franz Liszt vs. Carol Davila (Arhiva Perticari-Davila (B.A.R.), *Filiația Liszt-Davila dovedită prin fotografii și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D'Agout, II varia 2*).

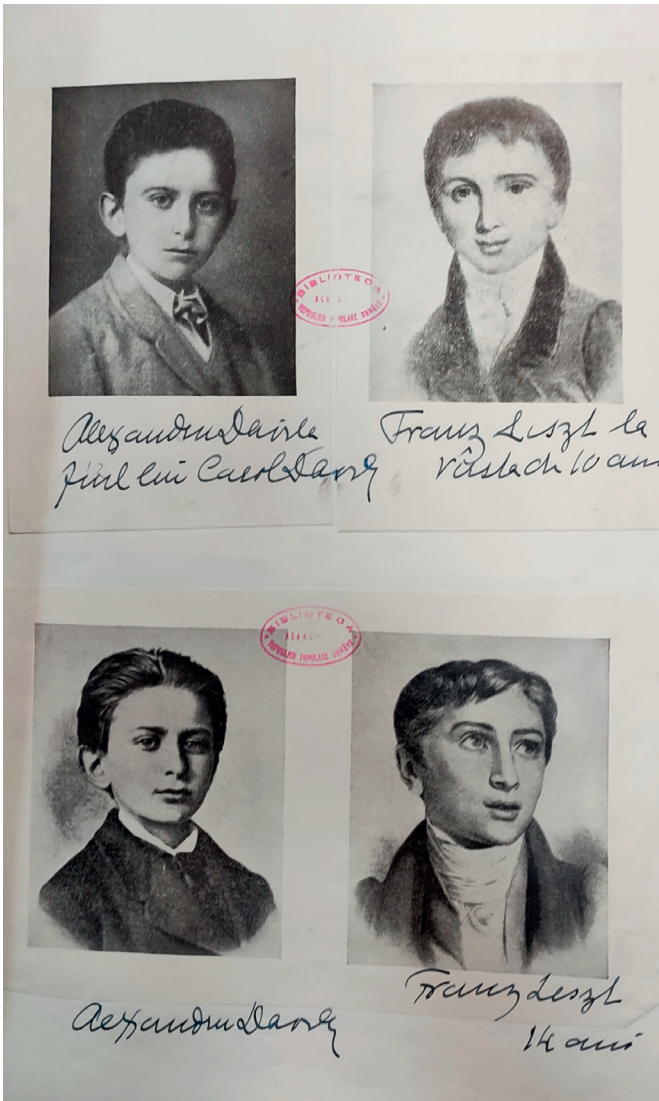


Fig 3. Photos of Franz Liszt and Alexandru Davila at various ages (Arhiva Peticari-Davila (B.A.R.), *Filiația Liszt-Davila dovedită prin fotografiile și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D'Agout, II varia 2*).

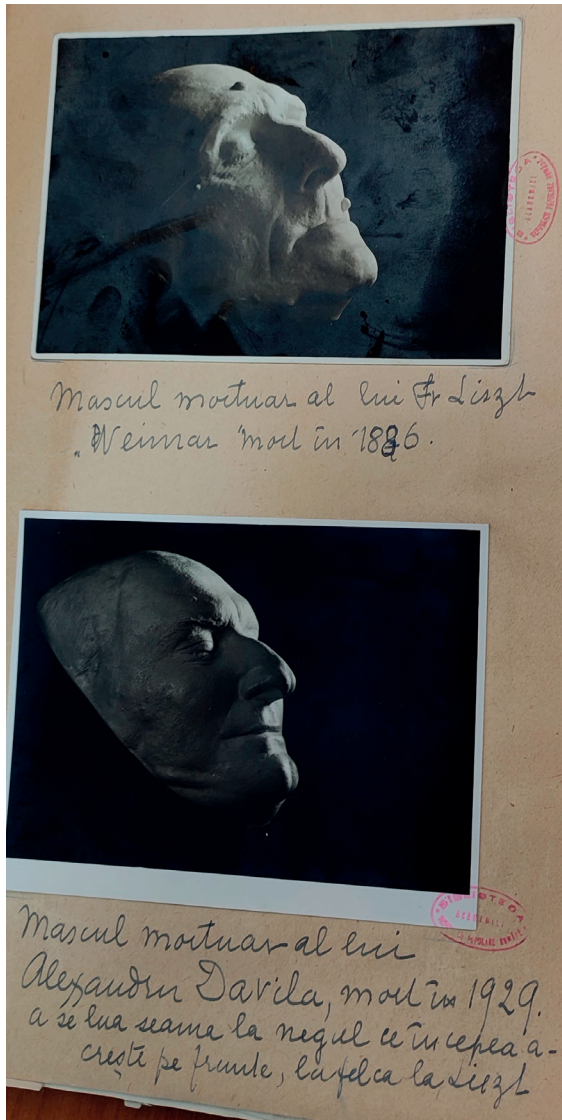


Fig 4. Death masks of Franz Liszt and Alexandru Davila (Arhiva Peticari-Davila (B.A.R.), Filiația Liszt-Davila dovedită prin fotografii și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D'Agout, II varia 2).

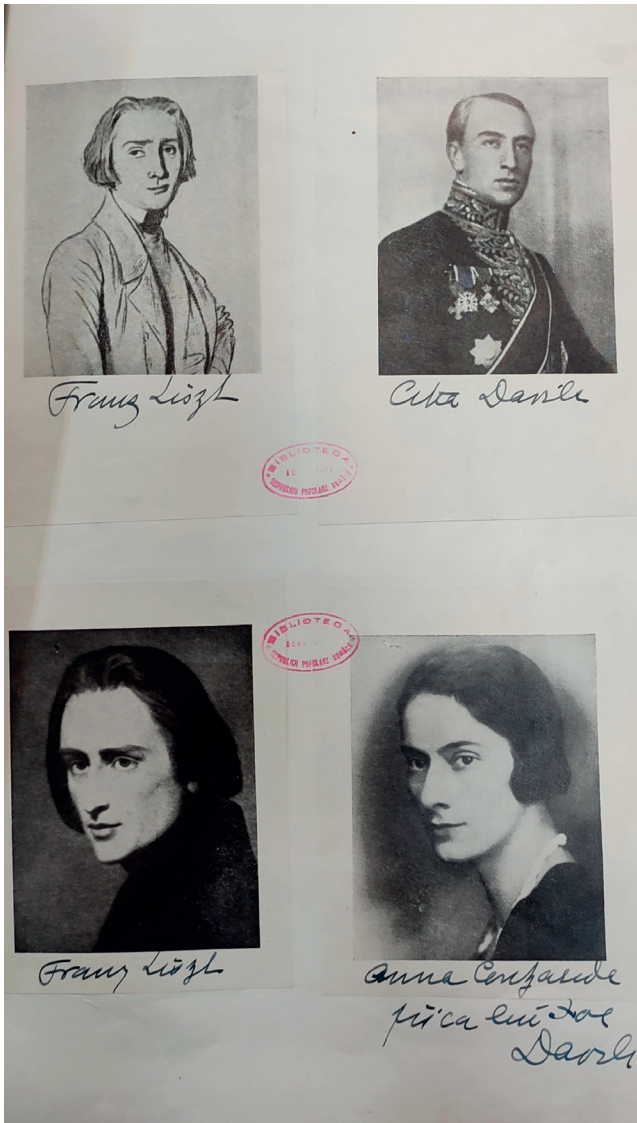


Fig. 5. Mirrored Portraits: Franz Liszt vs. Citta Davila; Franz Liszt vs. Anna Cuțarida (Arhiva Peticari-Davila (B.A.R.), *Filiația Liszt-Davila dovedită prin fotografii și completată prin scrisorile Contesei D'Agout, II varia 2*).