

# PROPER NAMES IN ALECSANDRI'S WORK. STYLISTIC VALUES OF THE PHONETIC EXPRESSION

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## Abstract

In this work, we shall try to present the expressive potential of sounds aiming at literary onomastics. Alecsandri's theatre includes 'eloquent' anthroponyms at the phonetic level, Moldavian scent impregnated proper names or names that are deformed in order to characterize the characters.

**Keywords:** *onomastics, proper names, comedy, character, stylistic values*

## Résumé

Dans cet article, nous tenterons de présenter le potentiel expressif des sons destinés à l'onomastique littéraire. Le théâtre d'Alecsandri comprend des anthroponymes « parlants » au niveau phonétique, des noms propres imprégnés de saveur moldave ou des noms déformés afin de caractériser les personnages.

**Mots-clés:** *onomastique, noms propres, comédie, personnages, valeurs stylistiques*

The stylistic values of sounds were intuited even from the Old Age and have been thoroughly exploited along the years by writers. Symbolism was the literary movement that mostly valorized the qualities that sounds have in order to generate associations of ideas or bring their contribution to creating a certain atmosphere.

The expressive potential of sounds is a matter that concerns literary onomastics, as one can also speak in this field about "deliberate name searches, phonic formulations as appropriate as possible to one or more meanings, phonic groups and pairs meant to break something of the being they define and truly represent the signs by which and through which we intuit the living, the appearance, the temper or everything that is loony and chaffing in the person destined to bear a certain name"<sup>1</sup>.

Speaking particularly about Alecsandri's theatre, we can distinguish three important aspects: the use of proper names that are impregnated with Moldavian scent, deformation of some names in order to characterize the characters and the creation of 'eloquent' anthroponyms at the phonetic level.

The local colour of the greatest part of Alecsandri's dramatic work is given by

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<sup>1</sup> N. Goga, *Valori conotative ale antroponimelor la nivelul expresiei fonetice*, in *Studii de onomastică*, I, p. 8.

some phonetic particularities specific to the Moldavian subdialects<sup>2</sup> reflected at the level of anthroponyms. Here are some of them:

Unstressed [ă] closes to [â/i] : *Nastasî, Pâcală, Tache Pâcălescu*;

Protonic [ă] goes to [a]: *Aglaița, Balașa* (see the toponym *Tatarășii*);

Final and medial unstressed [e] closes to [i]: *Anastasi, Cantimir, Gheorghii, Grigori, Iftimi, Moisi, Toadir, Timoftii*;

[e, i] and the diphthong [e̯a] turn into [ă, î] respectively [a], after the consonants [s, z, ș, j, t] sometimes [r]: *Cosânzana, Ferchezanca, Fespezanca, Târâță* (also see the toponyms *Cașân, Săcul*);

The utterance of final asyllabic [u]: *Păscariu, Ciubotariu*;

The initially or medially stressed diphthong [ja] is uttered [je]: *Ilieș* (also the toponym *Ieși*);

Palatalization of the labials: [f > h'], in *Gahița, Pohrița, Trohin*, [m > n] in (old man) *Niron*, see also the name of the celebration of *Saint Peter Sân-Chetru*, where [p > k']).

Regarding communication, the existence of several social levels presented in Alecsandri's dramatic work, involves a wide range of codes. Phonetic deformation is precisely the utilization of different codes, as they are produced within some communication situations which have as interlocutors individuals that have a different social status.

In this way, simple people (especially boyars' servants) deform foreign proper names, as they do not belong to their traditional code; for *Marin*, the gardener (SM), *Calipsica* becomes *The Cat*, *John Stork*, (the boy of the house in AF) turns *Hugues' Hotel* into *Hâc's Inn* and *Tendrils'* (Cârcei) servant (MC) pronounces *Regensturc* instead of *Regensburg*.

The crisis of communication between generations is clearly rendered in *Iorgu from Sadagura* where the comic is born not only from the situation, but also through language, as not only the old retrograde boyar, but also the snobs *Iorgu* and *Gahita Rosmarovici* deny the use of a common code. Therefore, the pretentious term used by *Gahita Rosmarovici* is perceived by *Enachi Damian* as a typical boyar name: *Vel Shovel*; the nouns mathematics and mythology are also deformed by the retrograde, becoming *Mantemadica* (through the epenthesis of [n] and dissimilation of [t]) and *Miftorloghia* (the [ft] form being explained through the analogy with a series of anthroponyms which underwent the same treatment and [r] through its epenthesis).

The same inability of the old generation to adapt to the new is satirized by Alecsandri in *The Milliner and the Yeoman (Modista și cinovnicul)*; the old dodderer *Tendrils* is ridiculous not because he rejects the new (see the case of *Enachi Damian*), but due to his failed attempt to adapt. This situation reflects also at the level of language:

<sup>2</sup> Vasile Frațiță, *Probleme de dialectologie română*, Timișoara, Tipografia Universității din Timișoara, p. 101-103.

therefore, great names of art are trivialized by the phonetic adaptations to the Romanian anthroponomastic system: “an (I) Italian *Mardona* of Răfăilă (Raphael) the painter” or *Stela* for a well-known literary work of the time, *Estella*.

Far from being simple examples of the characters' lack of knowledge, phonetic deforming occurs like expressions of irony, of the mocking attitude of some characters in relation with the others. This is the case of *Leonaș* (CI) who shows irony towards Chirița's son, obviously a minor character, modifying his name and mocking him by the proximity with the animal kingdom: *Gurluiță*, a onomatopoeic derivative from the word *gurlui* (referring to some birds, doves) to make species specific sounds (DEX, p. 439) and *Ladybug* (*Gărgăriță*).

Sometimes, under the pretext of a confusion due to popular etymology, the author expresses his own disapproving opinion towards his characters; in this way, the scene from *Chirița in Iasi* is memorable – where the servant from the barrier deforms pretentious names, bringing them closer to pejorative familiar terms: *Aristița* becomes *Răstița* (from the verb *to spit out*), *Calipsița* turns into *Lăpsița* (*lepșit* “crazy, cracked”, DEX, p. 568), *Guliță* is pronounced *Gurluiță* and *Chirița* becomes *Crița* (cf. the expression *beat criță*/ ‘blind drunk’). The same character, master of confusions instantly becomes denominator to the gipsy's line: “Chirița... you deaf man!” continuing with the words “Chirița *Stone Deaf?*”

The foreigners' *phonetic adaptations* – characters that materialize in Jews and especially Greeks – represent another aspect that has to be considered; when analyzing the names that appear in these characters' speech, one can distinguish the following phenomena:

Palatalization of velar consonants [k] and [g]: *Ghingos* (<*Gângu*), *Hagi Petichi* (<*Hagi Petcu*), *Măriuchi* (<*Măriuca*);

The substitution of [ă] with [a] and [î] with [i]: *Ionica* (<*Ionică*), *Mandica* (<*Mândica*), *Vintura-Țara* (<*Vântură-Țară*), *Braila* (<*Brăila*);

The reduction of the diphthong [ɔa] to [o]: *Ione* (<*Ioane*);

The addition of some specific suffixes, like *-os* or *-aki*: *Ghingos*, *Gavrilaki*;

The final [u] opens to [o]: *Lipițesco* (<*Lipicescu*), *Nițo* (<*Nițu*), *Dimnezeo* (<*Dumnezeu*);

Fricative [ș], otherwise non existent in the Greek phonemic system, is replaced with [s]: *Iasi* (<*Iași*), *Martinasi* (<*Martinaș*), *Gusganesti* (<*Guzgănești*), *Gavrilasi* (<*Gavrilaș*);

The transformation of the pre-palatal affricate [č] into the affricate palatal [tʃ]: *Brusturoviți* (<*Brusturovici*), *Lipițesco* (<*Lipicescu*).

When speaking about expressive words or ‘words with internal connotative forms’<sup>3</sup>, according to N. Goga, we mean both onomatopoeias and the phonetic symbol. Although practically the differences are not always clear, we chose this delineation,

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<sup>3</sup> N. Goga, *ibidem*, p.5

considering the arguments brought by Iorgu Iordan<sup>4</sup>: if in the case of onomatopoeias expressivity “comes from the strictly phonetic elements of the sounds that compose it and not from any affective content which is completely absent”, in the other case, “the sounds possess somehow a definite semantic value that comes from the meaning of the most or even from all the words where their emergence is a usual thing. [...] the sound becomes a real symbol, a sign with a special semantic tone”.

Furthermore, we shall try to present some of these expressive words from the onomastic inventory created by Alecsandri:

*Babebibobuŧte* is one of the most interesting anthroponyms created by Alecsandri, belonging to a rich man from *Liberation of the Gypsies (Dezrobirea ŧiganilor)*. The presumed majesty (due to the material position) and his body weight are suggested by the repetition of the sonorous occlusive consonant [b] which gives the impression of spelling and by the vowels (more and more closed) which alternating with [b], produce the sensation of coup, crash. These impressions are sustained by the emergence in the end of the onomatopoeia *buŧ*, that imitates the noise produced by the fall of a hard object or a coup. At the same time, the last two syllables of the name is an appellation that creates in the reader’s mind the image of a stocky solid man.

*Bursuflescu*, the presumed poet, who – isolated at his ranch – cannot fructify his talent because of his neighbor, Harŧă (Skirmish) (HR), owes his name to a French character; without this information, the simple reader associates the name with the figurative meaning of the word badger ‘a stocky and slow man or kid; an isolated, secluded and sullen man’. (DEX, p.120). If the gloomy nature is underlined by the frequency of the serious sound [u] (see above, too), decrepitude, lack of consistence of his ideas and the facility to manipulate him are suggested by the consonantal group [fl]<sup>5</sup> mostly due to the fluid one; this idea is even better sustained by the feminine version where the vowel a emerges, *Bursufleasca*, as the reader imagines a crushed and wasted object on a large surface.

*Brustur and Cociurlă*, the names of the potential husbands of Chiriŧa’s daughters, from *Chiriŧa in Iasi*, “thick down their neck and are grouchy”, also represent two important boyars from the tragedy *Liberation of the Gypsies (Dezrobirea ŧiganilor)*, just as badly looked at, “severe masters” about whom the servants say that “they have got two souls, one for the devil and the other for his father” (O,VII, p.593). The closed/low baritone vowels [o] and [u] suggest the sullen nature, a permanent state of indisposition of some people who mumble incessantly; apart from the impression about the size produced by the meaning of the appellation burdock; the combination between the initial explosive and the vibrant [r], determines us to imagine a slow man who imposes his presence willy-nilly shaking up<sup>6</sup> at every step and provoking panic among

<sup>4</sup> I. Iordan, *Stilistica limbii române*, Bucureŧti, Editura ŧtiinŧifică, 1975, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Iorgu Iordan, *ibidem*, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Iorgu Iordan, *ibidem*, p. 81.

his servants. Regarding the second name, the final sounds are very similar to those which compose some augmentatives, with a pejorative connotation (cf. *rude*, *bumpkin*, *clodhopper*<sup>7</sup> which contain all the group [rl] – *ghiorlan*, *modârlan*, *țopârlan* – as well as the liquid consonant followed by [ă], that are both found in suffixes like *-ală*, *-ălău*<sup>8</sup>).

*Chichișă Clevetici* (CUD, ZR) is a good phonetic representation of the name of the authentic demagogue through the agglomeration of the palatal consonants *c* and *k* that suggest the idea of little by the repetition of the acute vowel *i* which can be linked to the shrill political discourses and the superficial nature of a person that deals with trifles and insignificant things and also to the onomatopoeic expressivity of the consonantal group [cl] that makes one think of noise and jibber-jabber; cf. *clanță*/ 'doorknob' in the expressions *tacă-ți clanța*/ 'shut your knob' meaning "stop talking!", *bun de clanță*/ 'good chatter' – who talks a lot and nonsense, *a clămpăni*/ 'to clatter' – to ramble even more, to babble, to munch - to speak quickly, *a clănțani* – to talk a lot and continuously, *a clefăi* - to speak indistinctly (DEX, p.184-185).

*Cocus Mocus* is a nickname created by Iorgu (IS) for himself, respectively for *Kleine Schwabe*. Iorgu calls himself *Cocus Mocus* imperator (emperor) hoping he will create a strange atmosphere through the low, serious vowels ([o] and [u]) and by the repetition of the Latin suffix *-us* that gives a note of solemnity and besides that it extends the articulation version through the sibilant [s]. The name created by the role model of the fair scammers' 'stage name' aims at captivating and surprising the spectators through their special phonetism.

*Didică* (DT) is an anthroponym whose expressivity becomes more obvious when we compare it with *Nedelcu* version, for which Alecsandri had opted initially. Firstly, it dominates the vowel [i] (sharper than [e]) that suggests, apart from the unimportant social condition, the jovial nature, due to the fact that the character that bears that name is a fiddler (most probably, a gypsy), always available for strong people to whom he has to create a state physical comfort. An acoustic resemblance could be established between the sounds of a violin or rather a fiddle and the first two vowels of the name that we are talking about, that actually represents a rerun of the combination between the occlusive sound [d] and the sonorous vowel [i].

*Gurluișă* (CI), a form resulted from a misunderstanding of the famous name *Gulișă*, is an onomatopoeic creation; the irony of the author is so sharp that the auditive image produced implies a detrimental visual image to the character that is simply reduced to the condition of an incoherent being.

*Flaimuc* is very suggestive through its meaning (see *flaimoc* = goofy, noodle; DEX, p. 384), but expressive both through the placement in the beginning of the consonantal group [fl] and through the association of ideas, if we care about the meaning

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<sup>7</sup> Idem, *ibidem*, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Zorela Creta, *Sufixele peiorative*, in *Studii și materiale privitoare la formarea cuvintelor în limba română*, vol. al IV-lea, [București], Editura Academiei, 1967, p. 186.

of the last syllable.

The form *Frofodita* (SD, p 396) is a phonetic modification of the metonym *Afrodita*; it is a proof of the character's lack of knowledge and old age, of his inability to articulate the sounds correctly; the great expressivity is given especially by the consonant [f], placed at the beginning of the first two syllables. This phenomenon is argued by Iordan who shows that this fricative "due to its pronunciation manner, awakens the image of the hardly breathed out air by a toothless old man".<sup>9</sup> Combining it with the vibrant [r], the image created becomes ridiculous as it renders an embarrassing trembling of the lips, the baritone timbre and the low degree of vocal opening, in case of vowel [o], emphasizes the lack of clarity of the message that a social unadapted decrepit as Imergold wants to transmit.

*Harță* (*Skirmish*) is much more plastic than its synonym quarrel, argument or the regional feud precisely due to its phonetic structure. The tenacity and aggressive attitude of the character that fights to retrieve his belongings are suggested by the anthroponym almost onomatopoeic, rough, noisy; *harț* refers to an unexpected movement, made in order to grasp something that is furthermore broken or torn apart.

*Răzvrătescu* (Rus) and *Jăvrescu* (Cred.) are harsh names; their harshness is, of course, based on the meaning of their basic words, but it is enhanced by the agglomeration of the sonorous consonants, situated in the proximity of a 'somber' vowel.

*Țifne* (NC) is the nickname given to an immature character with a childish behavior; it is possible that the base of the name be represented by the verb to snort, meaning "snorting in rage, speaking with anger". (DEX, p. 1124). The variants *taf* and especially the sonorous *tif* seem like pure imitations of some sounds that express anger as they awaken in the reader's mind the image of a person who clenches his teeth, hardly ever squeezing his words.

We can also talk about a special type of phonetic symbolism when we deal with rhymed constructions, based on the resumption and, implicitly, extension of the sensations stirred by certain expressive phonetic groups; see the pejorative connotations of the sounds repeated at the end of every element of the compounds: *Lică-Panglică* (CCB), *Tingerică-Rumenică*, *Balamucea-Percea*, or *Curculets-Istets*, as well as the irony of the lines ended with the augmentative deprecatory suffix *-oaie* (O,V, p. 437): "Leave, leave, *Chirițoaie!* Hill Witch bad *poltergeist*".

In conclusion, the stylistic valences of the phonetic expressions regarding the proper names in Alecsandri's work have a special meaning. Therefore, the phonetic deformations, rhymed constructions and the confusions made due to popular etymology have the role to bring their contribution to the characterization of the characters.

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<sup>9</sup> Zorela Creta, *ibidem*, p. 80.

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## **Abbreviations**

- CCB = *Cucoana Chirița în balon*, in *Opere*, VII  
CI = *Chirița în Iași sau Două fete ș-o nineacă*, in *Opere*, V  
Cred = *Creditorii*, in *Opere*, VI  
DȚ = *Dezrobirea țiganilor*, in *Opere*, VII  
CUD = *Clevetici ultrademagogul*, in *Opere*, V  
IS = *Iorgu de la Sadagura sau Nepotu-i salba dracului*, in *Opere*, VI  
Rus = *Rusaliile*, in *Opere*, V  
SD = *Sfredelul dracului*, in *Opere*, VII  
ZR = *Zgârcitul risipitor*, in *Opere*, VI