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Othello the „Moor” and Răzvan the „Gypsy” or Human Condition as *Hybris*

Abstract: This article offers a comparative reading of William Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu’s *Răzvan and Vidra*, focusing on the tragic trajectories of two marginalized figures whose exceptional merit propels them into positions of centrality within exclusionary social systems. While critical interpretations have often emphasized racism, xenophobia, or individual psychological flaws as primary causes of their downfall, this study advances a different thesis: the tragedies of *Othello* and *Răzvan* are best understood through the concept of *hybris* as an ontological condition, rather than as a moral or ethical excess alone. Drawing on the Platonic notion of *thymos* as the human drive for recognition, the article argues that both protagonists suffer from a form of conditional recognition that destabilizes their identity. *Hybris*, as dramatized in these works, reveals a fundamental tension inherent in the human condition itself.

Keywords: *Hybris*; *Thymos*; Conditional Recognition; Marginality; Otherness; Comparative Tragedy; Shakespeare; Hasdeu; Identity.

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The drama of the marginalized individual, discriminated against yet nonetheless propelled, by exceptional personal merit, into the very center of a prejudice-ridden system, is a universal theme in literature. This form of “centrality,” however, never quite forgets the individual’s “peripheral” origins, which are gradually transformed into a genuine stigma. The motif can be traced across multiple historical periods and cultural contexts. In a comparative Anglo-Romanian exercise, it emerges with clarity in two iconic literary figures: the Venetian “Moor” *Othello*, imagined by William Shakespeare at the dawn of the seventeenth century, and the “Gypsy” *Răzvan*, conceived by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu in the mid-nineteenth century.

While the historical existence of the Egyptian *Othello* remains ambiguous¹ we know with certainty that the warrior *Răzvan* lived toward the end of the sixteenth century, his life being confirmed by historical records. By a striking coincidence, *Răzvan*² reached the peak of his biography in 1595, precisely when Shakespeare was likely already contemplating the tragedy of the Arab *Othello*, naturalized in Venice, a tragedy that would be staged only eight years later, in 1603. Let us therefore examine, in

chronological order, the fictional, historical, or hybrid sources from which the two authors drew inspiration for their heroes.

According to most literary historians, *Othello* was first performed in 1603 and belongs to Shakespeare's four great tragedies, alongside *Hamlet* (1602), *King Lear* (1606), and *Macbeth* (1611). The Egyptian Othello thus comes into being somewhere between the Dane Hamlet and the Celt Lear, earlier than the Scot Macbeth—each of them, like Othello, drawing upon prior cultural constructions from which Shakespeare, in his feverish pursuit of exotic characters, freely borrowed. In the cases of Hamlet, Lear, and Macbeth, one finds various historical ramifications, however literary they may be. By contrast, the origins of the Venetian protagonist appear to be almost exclusively artistic.

We know, for instance, that Prince Amleth (Hamlet) did in fact exist: a now-lost Scandinavian epic poem, stylistically related to the ancient Viking sagas and later adapted by the historian Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum* (c. 1200), was dedicated to him. Ancient Celtic texts likewise attest to the reign of a King Leir (Lear), whom Geoffrey of Monmouth credits in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1135), as does Raphael Holinshed later, in *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587). Even the usurping Scot Macbeth proves not to be a wholly imaginary creation, appearing prominently in Holinshed's already mentioned *Chronicles...* as a historical figure named Makbeth.

For the character of Othello, Shakespeare unquestionably relied on a tale entitled *Un Capitano Moro*, included among the "one hundred legends" (*Gli Hecatombithi*) published by Cinthio (Giovanni

Battista Giraldi) in 1565. Cinthio's volume imitates the masterpiece of his mentor Giovanni Boccaccio, the celebrated *Decameron*, without ever attaining its predecessor's aesthetic heights. The story of the "Moorish captain" is no exception, amounting rather to a mediocre narrative of passion. The Arab figure in the title³ is a medieval naval captain. His wife, named in this archetypal text Disdemona (clearly the prototype for Shakespeare's Desdemona), is a woman of ravishing beauty.

Overcome by irrepressible emotions, the captain's ensign (the model for Iago) falls desperately in love with her. Shakespeare would later modify this detail, portraying Iago not as a man damned by erotic passion for his commander's wife, but rather as a frustrated and envious figure embittered by Cassio's appointment as lieutenant. Rejected by the loyal Disdemona and consumed by visceral humors, the malevolent subordinate resolves to take revenge, stirring, much like Shakespeare's Iago, the captain's insane and destructive jealousy.

It is worth noting that although Shakespeare undoubtedly used Cinthio's text to shape the intrigue of *Othello*, the myth of pathological jealousy – of the impulsive, easily manipulated individual – predates Cinthio himself, who likely drew on earlier sources. The motif can be found as early as *The Arabian Nights (One Thousand and One Nights)*, where, among the stories designed to soothe the wrath of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, one encounters *The Tale of the Three Apples*, which describes a strikingly similar case.

B. P. Hasdeu first published his play in 1867 under the title *Răzvan Vodă*, as a serialized feuilleton in the newspaper *Perseverența/Perseverance*. Only in 1869 did

he release it in book form, simultaneously changing its title to *Răzvan and Vidra*, the name under which it would later become canonical. Of particular interest is the author's fascination with an atypical Moldavian ruler from history: Ștefan Răzvan, who occupied the throne for only a few months in 1595. Despite the brevity of his reign, Răzvan Vodă captured the attention of historians due to the singularity of his biography.

He was the son of a Muslim Romani man and a Moldavian woman. Though free, Christianized, and reasonably educated – especially in the art of war – Răzvan would be perceived everywhere as a “Gypsy.” One must not forget that he bore this label in a country where Roma population were still enslaved. Like Shakespeare's Othello, he therefore embraced a military career. He would become, much like Othello, an elite mercenary, a “soldier of fortune”, employed by the most powerful and disciplined armies of Europe. Those stigmatized *ab origine* in their own homeland sought escape, and the soldier's path proved not only the most accessible but also, by its combative nature, the most liberating outlet for their inner tensions.

Here, then, we encounter the first robust connection between the typological profiles of the two heroes, a foundational, primordial bond from which their entire destinies would unfold. Răzvan, the historical figure transformed by Hasdeu into a dramatic character, pursued a remarkable military career in both the French and Polish armies of his time. Rising through the ranks from an ordinary soldier to a commander, he eventually returned to Moldavia, where he was taken into the leadership structures of the army by Aron Vodă (also known as “the Terrible,” for his tyrannical disposition).

Historical sources suggest that Răzvan played a role in driving the tyrant from the throne, and that, despite the discriminatory stereotypes of the age, he subsequently proclaimed himself ruler, being accepted, at least provisionally, by the boyar elite.

As a leader, Răzvan supported Michael the Brave in the autumn of 1595 during the anti-Ottoman campaign. This act of generosity, somewhat symptomatic of the voivode's inclination toward *hybris*, ultimately brings about his downfall. In his absence, the Poles imposed Ieremia Movilă on the Moldavian throne. When Ștefan Răzvan returned to the country in December, he confronted the new ruler's army at Areni. Defeated, captured, tortured, and impaled, he met a brutal end. Yet neither the people nor historians forgot him. Miron Costin portrayed him in *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei/ The Chronicle of the Land of Moldavia*, emphasizing his bravery. Years later, Nicolae Bălcescu would describe him in *Românii supt Mihai Voevod Viteazul/The Romanians under Michael the Brave* as follows:

Born a Gypsy, from a people condemned for centuries to bondage, Răzvan became yet another proof that, in the eyes of Providence, there are no chosen peoples and no damned peoples; that Providence spreads its mercies equally over all human beings, without distinction of nation or class, placing upon each the seal of divinity and declaring all equally entitled to liberty, equality, and virtue (Bălcescu 144).

B. P. Hasdeu will immortalize him later in the five “cantos” of *Răzvan and Vidra*.

As becomes immediately apparent, both Othello and Răzvan seem to dismantle the prejudices of the worlds in which they live, appearing to reform systems ossified by discriminatory conventions.

They refuse victimhood, asserting destinies of free individuals who, through will and virtue, emerge from the condition of marginalized, eternally subjugated figures. Yet at this juncture a series of troubling questions arise. Does not the very expression of their manifest destinies, unfettered by prejudice, become a form of *hybris*, that is, the very cause of their abrupt collapse? Does not the "Moor" Othello (imprisoned within the universe of worldly stereotypes) wage war against "General" Othello (free to marry the most beautiful aristocratic woman in the Venetian dukedom), thereby annihilating the latter? Does not the "Gypsy" Răzvan (still, culturally speaking, a "serf" of the great Moldavian boyars) undermine "Voivode" Răzvan (who forcefully enters the space of the ruling aristocracy), leading him toward dissolution?

These are rhetorical questions, and they admit only affirmative answers. The art of Shakespeare – and, equally, of Hasdeu – lies in revealing through their paradoxical characters that the human condition itself constitutes, in essence, a form of *hybris*. To live out one's right to freedom in defiance of the retrograde mentalities of one's society becomes an unforgivable, suicidal provocation of the limits of human nature. Othello and Răzvan are "guilty" of precisely such an act, and their creators succeed in capturing the formidable tragic dimension of this gesture.

If classical tragedy describes an irreconcilable rupture between antinomies, a deadlock between the individual and fate, or between conflicting impulses within the same self, then, in the more sophisticated scenario of *hybris*, tragedy illustrates the disproportion between humanity's natural aspirations and its real capacity to fulfill

them. The pushing of will beyond the barrier of one's own condition generates downfall, a pattern equally valid for both Othello and Răzvan.

In Shakespeare's tragedy, this discrepancy takes shape from the very beginning. The play opens with a dialogue on the streets of Venice between the high-ranking officer Iago and his friend, the gentleman Roderigo. Iago is consumed by rage because General Othello, his commander and comrade-in-arms, with whom he has fought in many places and from whose victorious campaign in Cyprus they have just returned, has, contrary to all previous expectations, appointed one Cassio as his personal lieutenant. Cassio is a mere "theorist" of warfare, lacking any direct experience on the battlefield. Iago considers himself far more qualified for the position and thus nearly loses his mind with resentment, swearing revenge. Here the context must be deepened to grasp the subtlety of the situation. It becomes clear that Iago does, in fact, have a motive for his anger, even if it appears grossly amplified. He has been wronged. Compared to Cassio, he possesses extensive military experience and has repeatedly demonstrated his skill before Othello. Why, then, does the general deny him the deserved promotion?

At this point, we are compelled to observe that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the English Romantic poet, was only partially correct in his nineteenth-century lectures on Shakespeare – specifically in his analysis of Iago. Coleridge famously claimed that Iago embodies "motiveless malignity" (Coleridge 132), that is, a form of evil generated solely by a diseased soul rather than by any concrete situation. The idea of motiveless evil is therefore only fragmentarily

true. While Iago's desire for revenge certainly displays pathological traits, wildly exaggerated in relation to reality, it nonetheless has an identifiable trigger: the failure to recognize his professional value and merit. His reaction reveals psychological dimensions but also a powerful philosophical one, functioning as a serious argument for decompensation.

Socrates, speaking through Plato (both in the *Dialogues* and in *The Republic*), introduced a fundamental concept for understanding the human psyche: *thymos*. In short, according to Socrates/Plato, the human soul has three components: reason, instinct, and what he calls *thymos*, a "need for recognition" intrinsic to every individual, and in a certain sense the engine of life on earth. Human beings pursue recognition – by society, by others – driven forward by an impulse that proves creative and conducive to communal progress. The need for recognition is good, yet, like all aspects of life, it can develop pathologies: *isothymia* (a diminished desire for recognition, generating placidity and depression) or *megalothymia* (an excessive desire for recognition, generating narcissism and tyranny).

Iago unquestionably belongs to the latter scenario. He inflates his frustration and retaliation beyond measure; nevertheless, he does not act without cause. Within the framework of Socratic philosophy, his combative will is "winged" by the need for recognition within the system, by a belief in meritocracy that is annihilated through an opaque decision made by his commander, Othello. The metaphor of wings is by no means accidental. When discussing *thymos* in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates compares it to a white, winged horse that pulls the chariot in the right direction, obeying the

charioteer (reason) and distinguishing itself from the black horse (instinct, passion), which is irascible, unpredictable, and prone to deviating from the path. The white horse symbolizes courage, will, and the desire for constructive self-assertion (Plato 74-84). It is precisely this noble psychic drive that is cut short in the figure of Iago. The more complex question we must ask, however, is not whether Iago possesses a valid motive for his terrible revenge, but rather why Shakespeare introduces the problem of recognition so early in the play. Does this issue not pertain more fundamentally to someone other than Iago, thereby intensifying the tragedy that follows? Once again, the question is rhetorical. Of course, it does. That "someone else" is Othello himself.

In Othello's case, we encounter a truly shaken *thymos*. This becomes evident from the very dialogue between Roderigo and Iago. The latter, seething with anger, repeatedly refers to his commander, as he will throughout the play, albeit always in private, by two favored epithets: "the Moor" and "thick lips." These appellations crystallize the central paradox of the text. An "alien," despised by the aristocratic Venetian society of the time, rises to prominence within the system and appears, at least on the surface, to be respected. But what kind of "respect" does Othello receive? It is one of convenience, performed, strategic, hypocritical. The Egyptian is an elite mercenary hired by the Venetian dukedom to command its army. He performs this role exceptionally well, gaining public visibility and acclaim. Yet behind the scenes, he continues to be diminished because of his origins. Shakespeare makes us grasp this contradiction from the very opening of the play, which indicates that

he considered it central to the work's internal dynamics. The way the general is perceived thus becomes strikingly clear.

Events unfold rapidly. In the first scene, Roderigo and Iago ignite madness. Brabantio, the father of the beautiful Desdemona and a distinguished Venetian nobleman, learns from Roderigo that his daughter has secretly married General Othello. Ironically, Othello had been a close friend of Brabantio's. He had, in fact, met Desdemona as a guest in the aristocrat's home. Paradoxically, instead of rejoicing, Brabantio nearly loses his mind.

He rushes to the duke in the middle of the night, pleading for assistance in dissolving the marriage. The way he describes Othello, whom he had ostensibly esteemed until that moment, amounts to a recital of racist invectives. Particularly striking is his characterization of the mercenary as "a thing... to fear, not to delight" (Shakespeare *Othello* I, 3, 71). Before the duke, Brabantio emphasizes the "whiteness," and hence the civility, of his beautiful daughter in contrast to the "blackness" and, by implication, the savagery of the usurping outsider. He is convinced that Othello must have used black magic to seduce his daughter (yet another allusion to the mercenary's supposed "tribal" nature). Seeing no other solution, the Venetian leader orders the interracial couple to be brought immediately to the palace, wishing to interrogate them personally. After hearing Desdemona's eloquent defense of her sincere feelings and Othello's rational explanation of how they fell in love, the duke concludes that no wrongdoing has occurred and that Brabantio must accept reality.

Yet as the old aristocrat departs the palace in tears, he confesses to a counselor

that he does not know what he would have done had his own daughter been in Desdemona's place. From the outset, Shakespeare thus entrusts us with the insurmountable duality of his protagonist. Othello is a useful foreigner in a xenophobic society, one that is, nonetheless, highly pragmatic. He brings immense benefits to dukedom through his military competence and is rewarded accordingly, both financially and socially. The moment the "Moor" takes the decisive step of becoming one of them, by marrying Desdemona, the sophisticated aristocratic group reveals its racist humors and recoils.

At this level of "integrating the stranger," nothing else matters. Not Othello's virtues, not his descent from an Egyptian royal family, not even the fact that he has been Christianized. (In Sir Laurence Olivier's 1965 film portrayal of Othello, the actor constantly wears a large cross on his chest, suggesting his spiritual belonging to the Venetian and European world.) "Blackness," and therefore "savagery," prevails, rendering the hero worthy of rejection. Despite his social and professional triumph, Othello thus remains trapped in a state of ambiguity – between what he can do, possess, and receive in civilized Venice, and what he cannot do, possess, or receive in the world he clearly longs to join. Any step beyond these demarcation lines constitutes hybris. By marrying Desdemona, he commits precisely this act of *hybris*, that is, the sacrilege of "crossing the limit." The dogs of war, now a war impossible to win, inevitably appear. Othello enters, involuntarily, an acute process of identity disintegration.

On this psychologically unstable terrain, the "Moor" becomes the perfect victim of Iago's diabolical game. Following Brabantio's violent reaction, the general understands

more clearly his precarious position within the system. His merits will never earn him full recognition from xenophobic Europeans. He senses that he has only two lifelines. One is authentic: Desdemona, in whose love his “blackness” dissolves and ceases to fuel inferiority complexes. The other is false: Iago, in whose scenarios Othello perceives not malice but the rationality of the educated European, a rationality he believes he himself, as a “savage,” lacks.

The fictitious lifeline, Iago, gradually becomes dominant, and Othello begins to resemble the so-called primitives of distant territories, once deftly manipulated by explorers of ancient civilizations. Iago activates Othello’s atavistic impulses, jealousy foremost among them. Convinced that the white woman Desdemona can only despise an ignorant man like himself, betraying him with someone of her rank (namely Cassio), Othello goes mad and brutally murders her in the end. The bitter irony of his words upon discovering the truth, that he has been the victim of a tragic ruse, is particularly telling: “I was like a base Indian, who threw a pearl away / richer than all his tribe (Shakespeare *Othello* V, 2, 47-8). The “Moor,” never truly accepted yet fully exploited by the great civilization, meets a tragic end by fatally embracing the very condition he had attempted to transcend through *hybris*. He ultimately commits suicide.

A strikingly similar situation unfolds in the case of the “Gypsy” Răzvan, elevated to the throne of Moldavia. He is placed by Hasdeu in an identical context saturated with *hybris*. Like the great English dramatist, Hasdeu foregrounds the true tension of his play from the very first scene. On the streets of medieval Iași, we witness a common episode for the period. A petty boyar named Sbierea is implored by the beggar

Tănase to show mercy and toss him a coin. Sbierea claims he has no money and accuses Tănase of lying anyway, suggesting that he is not truly the pauper he pretends to be. After dismissing the wretch decisively, the wealthy man nonetheless pauses to cross himself devoutly before a church. Through carelessness, however, a pouch stuffed with gold coins slips from his pocket and falls into the dust of the street. The entire scene is observed by a young Roma man (his ethnic identity is immediately highlighted by the other characters) named Răzvan. He picks up the money and runs after the loser, attempting to return it.

Upon noticing Răzvan’s dark complexion, Sbierea grows even more enraged, suspecting that beggars are now banding together to harass him. He shouts to be left alone, insisting that he has lost nothing and wants no discussion. Wisely, Răzvan concludes that if there is no loser, according to the boyar’s own declaration, the money may rightfully be given to the destitute man lamenting by the roadside.

At this point, Hasdeu effectively sets the tragic mechanism of his play in motion. When he sees Răzvan approaching, the beggar Tănase asks harshly, “What do you want?” (Hasdeu I, 96). Convinced he is about to produce immense joy (“Get up, old man, and sing!”/ Hasdeu I, 96), the young man offers him the pouch. Completely unpredictably, Tănase, though utterly impoverished (we later learn he has lost his house and that his family is starving), indignantly refuses the gift: “Charity from a Gypsy?” (Hasdeu I, 96). Hunger, it seems, is for him more luminous than help offered by a “subhuman.”

What becomes ethically and artistically compelling is Răzvan’s effort to persuade

his interlocutor that he is not an ordinary Roma man. Discriminatory culture has instilled in the marginalized "Gypsy" the same inferiority complex that afflicts Shakespeare's Othello, who repeatedly invokes his Christianity as proof of belonging. Răzvan insists that he is not enslaved (like most members of his ethnic group), that he comes from a family of modest but respectable standing, and above all that his origins are "mixed": "My mother was Moldavian" (Hasdeu I, 97).

Upon hearing of this "double" identity, Tănase's racism intensifies rather than softens. In a sequence of brutal metaphors, Hasdeu lays bare the full drama of his character, a drama that mirrors that of Shakespeare's Moor in early seventeenth-century Venice. Personal merit pales before origins deemed corrupt by public prejudice. A generous Gypsy constitutes an oxymoron for this world. The Roma man cannot and must not be a hero. Poverty, for Tănase, thus remains a more honorable option than the humiliation of receiving alms from someone considered inferior. Răzvan's rational argument – that the same money would have been accepted without hesitation had it come directly from the boyar Sbierea – collides with an impenetrable wall of atavistic logic: "He is Romanian, after all" (Hasdeu I, 97). Race, it seems, overrides even the instinct for self-preservation.

The young man's persistence in doing good softens not only the spectator's heart but eventually even the beggar's soul, petrified by stereotypes. Răzvan emphasizes his literacy and thus his social status, superior to that of enslaved Roma; he identifies himself as a scrivener. Yet he is met with further humiliations. Hasdeu's dramatic art is remarkable in its ability to preserve

a necessary dose of humor within an otherwise tragic scene. Against this backdrop, Tănase's ultimate "capitulation" must be understood. When he finally accepts a single coin – convinced less by Răzvan's generosity than by the gleam of gold – he cannot refrain from launching yet another racist tirade, echoing Brabantio's invective against Othello.

To witness "a beast with such a noble soul" (Hasdeu I, 97) astonishes him; had Răzvan been Romanian, it would have been acceptable, but as a Gypsy it is a "shame." Even his final words of gratitude remain infected by prejudice: "God help you as you have helped me... What a pity that you are a Gypsy" (Hasdeu I, 98). Virtue, then, cannot transcend ethnicity. The ancient law of xenophobia prevails inexorably, regardless of context. Venice and medieval Iași thus resemble one another through their retrograde mentalities. Medieval man preserves racial and social hierarchies as if engraved in his very DNA. To step outside them means, by the cultural standards of the time, to generate anarchy, not only in personal life but in society as well. It means to unleash chaos, the prelude to apocalypse.

Consequently, a figure like Răzvan can never truly integrate. According to the logic of an old Stoic maxim, that no good deed goes unpunished, the young man, given his "unfortunate" identity, is deemed *a priori* guilty for Sbierea's loss and sentenced to death by hanging. He finds salvation only by becoming an outlaw, thus exiting the natural order of discriminatory society altogether. Tănase will later join him, discovering in turn his own latent vocation for rebellion. Like the "Moor," the "Gypsy" distinguishes himself through courage and principle, paradoxically becoming both

feared and respected. Tănase, once again, summarizes the situation in words heavy with astonishment and prejudice: some praise Răzvan, he says, as a brilliant warrior; others, the boyars, revile him; while the Roma proclaim him their prophet, destined to free them from chains and even to become ruler. This idea however strikes the traditional mind as monstrous: who could rule but a Romanian noble? A “Gypsy” would be an abomination (Hasdeu II, 135).

As with Othello – admired as a general yet despised as a Moor – Răzvan becomes a symbol of honesty and bravery in a corrupt world that nevertheless never forgets, even for a moment, that he is a “Gypsy.” Tănase himself embodies this collective voice. Though he directly experiences Răzvan’s worth and admires him, he cannot escape the vise-like grip of racial stereotype. Under the combined pressure of popular enthusiasm and of his aristocratic wife Vidra (her real historical name was Maria), the niece of the great Moldavian boyar Moțoc, far closer in temperament to Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth than to Desdemona, Răzvan enters the political game and accepts the throne of Moldavia. This gesture perfectly exemplifies classical *hybris*. He hopes that personal merit and individual value will outweigh “unlucky birth” in the eyes of “white civilization,” and thus boldly attempts to reform the pyramid from its very summit.

Like Othello, he fails to grasp that this is precisely where his downfall lies: in the ultimate provocation of his own limit. Though he hesitates, his doubts are brutally swept aside by Vidra’s relentless ambition. Her words echo unmistakably to those of Lady Macbeth. She mocks his compassion, denounces his “smallness,” and urges him

to transcend himself. In the terminology articulated by Gabriel Liiceanu, Răzvan both *provokes* and *trespasses* the *limit* of his condition (Liiceanu 39), an act that defines *hybris*. Tragedy thus arises, as in *Othello*, from the collision of irreconcilable realities: the irrepressible brilliance of an individual and a conservative society that, while recognizing his merit, cannot accept him at its helm because tradition has relegated his condition to the margins. From this vicious circle, society has no escape.

Răzvan’s brief reign is marked by this exhausting tension. Hasdeu suggests this masterfully, especially through the character of Tănase, as already emphasized, a metaphor for the traditional Romanian people, caught in the convulsions of devastating mentalities. On the one hand, Tănase loves and esteems Răzvan, to whom he owes his escape from humiliating beggary and the awakening of higher aspirations. On the other hand, as an irreducible product of his culture, he remains perpetually disturbed by his benefactor’s “unhealthy origin.” Even when the “Gypsy” becomes ruler, Tănase cannot suppress his ingrained judgments. His voice resembles that of the Sophoclean oracle, foretelling the damned hero’s tragic fate. His remarks fall like irrevocable sentences upon the destiny of a voivode torn between personal brilliance and the darkness to which racist stereotypes have consigned him without mercy, and, more tragically, without escape (Hasdeu V, 170).

Vidra herself ultimately articulates the metaphysical nature of this tragedy. In her lament, the disproportion between promise and fulfillment is revealed as a shocking peculiarity of the human condition. Giants are created only to be destroyed alongside

dwarfs; eagles live for centuries while flies for a single season; yet great men are condemned to perish like all the rest (Hasdeu V, 175). In such figures, the human condition itself appears as a somber form of *hybris*.

With Shakespeare’s Othello and Hasdeu’s Răzvan, both consumed by their irreparably divided condition, we thus enter the paradigm of perfect tragedy, defined by a contradiction that admits no resolution. Johannes Volkelt termed this type of antinomy a “tragic–dangerous situation” (Volkelt 448), that is one in which every possible course of action leads to

destruction. Action itself becomes the rupture of level, the transgression of limit, and hence self-annihilation. *Hybris*, therefore, seems to adhere not merely to the characters’ choices but to their very nature or, more broadly, to human nature itself. This insight has been shared by major theorists of tragedy, such as Richard B. Sewall, who observed the impossibility of separating human nature from the unwinnable war at the heart of all tragedy (Sewall 32). For the “Moor” Othello and the “Gypsy” Răzvan, the observation fits with devastating precision.

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NOTES

1. Othello appears more as a fictional projection of ancient ethnic and mental encounters across the globe.
2. His full name was Ștefan Răzvan.
3. The future Othello of the Bard of Avon.