

FROM SATIRE TO HUMOUR IN COMMUNIST LITERATURE

ABSTRACT

This paper wants to identify and analyze the valences of satire and humour in the work of three representatives of post-war Romanian prose: Nicolae Velea, Ion Băieșu, Teodor Mazilu. The starting point is the belief that laughter has a social side, comicalness not being able to exist *outside what is really human*. We also have to mention laughter related insensibility, as it addresses to pure intelligences and “it is always the laughter of a group”. Laughter often has a curative purpose because of this reason.

The comicalness of forms is related to body, spirit and character roughness. The comicalness of gestures and motions is related to automatism, to what Bergson calls “*body mechanics*”. Also, on the same idea of *the living applied mechanics* there is “*the momentary transfiguration of a person into an object*”, or the ready-made automated language which causes laughter. The comicalness of circumstances and words is treated through an analysis that starts in childhood with the well-known children’s games: *arc devil*, based on the principle of repetition, leads to the idea of spring and controlled automatism; *strings doll* reflects the image of the marionette character; the *snow ball* is a pattern similar to lead soldiers or to the domino effect.

Bergson reduces the procedures of comicalness to three canonical principles: repetition, a technique mainly seen in theatre refers to circumstances and events, strange coincidences; inversion or “the reversed world”, because it is funny to see the world cross-patched for a moment; through the interference of series, the characters and the audience oscillate between a false and a real judgment, which causes laughter through the conflict of opinions that this procedure supposes.

Marian Popa, in “Comicology”, is interested in the various forms of comicalness types and on the comical contrast, highlighting its social nature in the transmitter – receiver context. Social correction factor, *ridendo castigat mores*, laughter is a completely human phenomenon and has various types of comical literary species.

After these conjectures upon the comicalness theory, the paper analyzes the work of three Romanian prose writers from the ‘60s: Nicolae Velea, Ion Băieșu, Teodor Mazilu from the approached point of view.

NICOLAE VELEA, the first of the writers commented upon in the paper was initially considered the most gifted prose writer of his generation. His debut volume, *The Gate* (1960), followed by *Eight Stories* (1963), was the top moment of his literary notoriety, after which his decline began, starting with *Guard for Harmonies* (1965) and *Flying Low* (1968). His prose, especially *In Passing* (1962), considered unusual in relation to the canons of the time, refuses literary and social convention, turned into a dogma.

In Nicolae Velea’s art, the revealing force prevails, the wakening of characters’ self-awareness and not the realist-mimetic reflection of social environments. His heroes, although belong to the traditional typology, mainly from peasants’ world, break all habits, live contradictory states of mind in an authentic way. Nicolae Velea’s characters never go beyond their contemplative condition, and only “*wake-up, change inside*”. The closeness to Marin Preda’s stories from *The Meeting between the Lands* is significant, but it does not have to be exaggerated. Other names can also be referred to (for instance, Fănuș Neagu), but this is not about influences anymore, but rather of resemblances or convergences in the broader frameworks of post-war “time spirit”.

Nicolae Velea proves, especially in his first stories, the sense of shade and imperceptible. In his short story called *Sounds*, a peasant still hears, even after years since the loss of his property, “the sounds” of the old tools that agitate his memory. In his volumes called *Harmonies Guardian* and *Flying Low*, the observation field moves to the city, but the epic method remains the same. *In war an Acre of Flowers* – the first attempt of a novel – he establishes a new character, Olina, of great moral purity, but the novel vision remains fragmentary, kaleidoscopic.

The epic matter of Nicolae Velea’s stories is mostly of autobiographic origin. In other cases, the author uses the sapiential experience of peasants’ tradition, concentrated in sayings and proverbs. Within this comicalness extension background, Nicolae Velea’s last writings are marked by the spectacle of colloquial speech expressed in paremiological formulas, like Creangă and Anton Pann, generating the linguistic feast from *Cornered and Round Sayings* – a collection of proverbs transposed in an epic manner. *Traveller among Wisdoms* – a profound and lovely book – reveals the same elevated and refined buffoonery of the word.

Nicolae Velea’s writings reveal the paradisiacal age of the telling. Commentators analyze him as a “*comediograph of the word*”, due to the increased attention paid to fantasist epic processing of Romanian proverbs. The “philosophy” of Nicolae Velea’s characters is always placed between Creangă’s anecdote and Urmuz’ absurd combination. The humour of his characters is difficult to catch or predict, the prose writer revealing simple living events in order to banter daily occurrences. Nicolae Velea tries to explain *the strange things and caprices* of his characters in small words, irrespective of their social status, having the same age or education.

Nicolae Velea's comedies seem like occurring from Caragiale. Comedies of teaching, they belong to the naive people that have not experienced the sacrifices of civilisation yet. Loneliness makes all these shy teenagers – brigade members, drivers, tractor drivers, workers – resort to strange games. Through his heroes' games, Velea seeks to discover complexity and, if they are sometimes sad, this is because the author refuses circumstance *optimism* for himself. Seeking to show how complicated these people can be, although they seem simple at first sight, Velea writes prose that can be considered exemplary. A certain melancholy aureole floats around these characters, in the environment of their lonely games, but there are cases when the same loneliness can be the mobile of dramatic games with no turning back.

It has been said that Nicolae Velea is the prose writer of “*small feelings*” (V. Cristea). In fact, the psychic movements caught by Nicolae Velea have the character of events of the inner life. The characters seem, from social point of view, dull, unimportant, but feelings are consistent, deep. Andrei, the student from *Flying Low*, surprisingly discovers one day that thoughts are not noticed by people and that, consequently, he may think anything he wants. In *Gate*, a child, Sandu, unexpectedly realizes that his game of grown-ups is not longer funny, because he has become a grown-up himself.

Nicolae Velea is an ironist with a remarkable capacity of verbal invention, one of the finest that Romanian prose has given after 1960. His starting point is, due to the pleasure of the verbal show, Marin Preda in *A Quiet Encounter*, as well as Creangă through his language slyness and the taste for “stubborn”, twisted characters, like Dănilă Prepeleac. The humour of Nicolae Velea's characters is robust, noticeable at first sight, but difficult to catch. Characters' speech is innocent and this is why they acquire deep meanings if you search for it

deliberately and if you take the words and things out of the context, humour can be discretely noticed.

Nicolae Velea's work is not dominated by the creation of imaginary lives, but he is rather concerned with the description of real lives with their most hidden subtleties and shades, just like alive people live them. Velea is a realistic writer, who tries to *understand and explain* people's behaviour. His characters are described in their natural environment and their portraits are of great fineness.

Nicolae Velea's characters' language is not simple; their speech is intricate, with text and subtext, and phrases, rich in pleonasm, are full with subtle humour for the reader.

ION BĂIEȘU published the first volume of rural inspiration containing short stories, *Troubles and Joys* (1956), then the story *The Last Ones* (1959), like Marin Preda in *The Development*. The first narrative that recommends him as an authentic writer is *Slipper* (1962), written in the spirit of Marin Preda as well, like the one in the *Horse*. The epic style receives originality and is revealed through the volume *They Used to Suffer Together* (1965), after having practised with a book of short stories and portraits, *People with the Sense of Humour* (1964). Next, Ion Băieșu alternates "serious" literature with satiric and humoristic prose: *Love is a Great Thing*, stories about Tanța and Costel (1967), *Humour* (1970), *Football is a Game for Men*, sports comments (1971), *To the Blue Grass* (1973). Ion Băieșu's prose, completed by *The Fireman and the Opera* (1976), *Sick Love* (1980), *Humour at Home* (1981), requires a human typology and an agreeable way of telling. Ion Băieșu is a lucid fantasist, his observation goes beyond senses appearances, towards the individual's psychology, a pregnant literary attitude especially in the narratives that analyze alienation relations and forms – a frequent theme in the Romanian prose during the 50's and the 60's.

In the short story *They were suffering Together*, the depth theme was the Bovaryism of suffering. Genica and Benone want to suffer for something and dream of changing their destiny in a radical manner through a treatment of pain. The comicalness is still insinuating in this short story through the consciousnesses falsified by pain.

The theme is developed in *The Accelerator*, the widest and best narrative of Ion Băieșu. Two human types are present here that constantly appear in later prose: the dreaming young man and the volunteer woman, who wants to do good but causes only disasters. Lia Pogonat – a powerful, complex character, built in an ingenious manner – terrorizes her partners in the name of happiness, she lives only for making things better, sacrifices for others until she destroys them.

In the following prose writings (*The Fireman and the Opera, Sick Love, Humour at Home*), many of them turned into plays, Ion Băieșu comes back to the usual subjects, taken from the world of trade, small administration, small local power. The moral life of his heroes takes place under the sign of a disconcerting honesty. Just like in Teodor Mazilu's short stories, the vice needs the pride of honesty in order to establish itself. Băieșu's heroes suffer from a pathology of honesty and of suspicion at the same time.

The pathology of suspicion, that Ion Băieșu discusses in several epic variants of his successful plays (*The Carpet, The Neighbours, The Inventor*), is followed in the plans of relations between the work and the audience in the short story *The Fireman and the Opera*. An author writes a dense book of ideas full of problems and satisfied sends it to the publishing house. Over a few days, he is successively visited by ADAS, TAPL, Pronosport civil servants, sent by those institutions in order to ask the writer to remove the paragraphs related to their activity from the book. The writer defends himself, discusses the problem of fiction, of the artistic truth, but everything is useless, the suspicion grows and the

writer takes a gun into his hand. Even the fireman, come to save him, when his house is on fire, has something to object against the manuscript.

In the short story *The Sadness of the Empty Bottle Seller*, the comicalness results from the contrast between essence and appearance, in this case (Eustațiu Vasiliu-Muscel), between the intellectual snobbism of the individual and the miserable nature of his activities.

Ion Băieșu's originality results from the way in which he treats various absurd situations. In the story *Who Steals an Egg Today*, an individual comes to breach the laws in order not to contradict the fatality of the famous proverb of the popular learning. The absurd is complete in the presentation of another case (*At Hearing*), variation on the theme of bureaucracy where the character is given a 25-page form and is asked to come back, although everything is a frame-up of the secretary, whose husband died and she does not want to lose her job.

Ion Băieșu is the creator of an independent character, who comes back in his literature under various forms, in various hypostases. He is a kind of *Mitică*, a generous, innocent man, assaulted by relatives, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, made interfere with various administrative authorities in delicate matters; he is an individual that everybody abuses of and this is why he is always moving and naturally gets involved in comic troubles.

What in the case of Caragiale seems to address to an amusing archaeological pleasure, as a return in time and through language, in the case of Băieșu it is an immediate reality: characters live among us; we recognize them on the street, at markets or on the train. They are one of us. Laughing of them means a certain historic positioning, with a moralizing and healing purpose, laughter being the moralizing penalty. Tanța and Costel, Băieșu's heroes, are actually us, the ones stolen from the social flow. Looking at them, we may think of themselves as superior to them, in order to get closer to the *production – reception* scheme

proposed by Sigmund Freud, but especially because they critically place us in front of social realities that we have guiltily or astonishingly assisted.

Ion Băieșu proposes a slicing of reality, offering us a general critical image upon the society from the communist period, becoming a chronicler provided with talent and the penetrating spirit of the moralizing caricaturist. Ion Băieșu is a creator of *daily humour*, combining both common, trivial elements which appear from a power of inventiveness and careful improvisation at the level of spoken language, as well as precious, substances, chased and organized with the attention for fine details.

Băieșu's heroes are especially the naive people who think that they can be more than they are by showing that they are with not very big options and efforts. The author wants to prove that their existence of small, informer, rogue, adulterine, impostor, sly, intriguing, administrators, elevated, intellectual and artists individuals is worth being taken seriously by the rest of the people, also considering what they lose by being as they are.

These characters are not tragic, as many of the writers' contemporaries said, but seriously take the meaning of life, paying more attention to their own occurrences than to the notion of life.

TEODOR MAZILU is treated in our paper in his triple writer's hypostasis: short-story writer, novelist and dramatist.

Prose interferes in the case of Teodor Mazilu, with the essay. With a clear and rigorous construction, the work of Teodor Mazilu supposes paradoxes which claim their status of "real truths" by complying with the laws of symmetry.

The short-story writer obviously has the intelligence and irony of a prose writer placed between essence and appearance, psychoanalysis and sublimation,

the overwhelming and ambiguous daily occurrence. *Madam Voltaire* is expressive from this point of view.

Madam Voltaire, a denominative phrase, supposes the strategies of ironic connotations, in a bookish manner. The appellative “Madam”, next to the lexeme “Voltaire”, produces meaning for irony. The debut of the text, different from the narrative strategies of the 60’s prose, is written with irony, as well as the phrase “homo otiosus”. It is an apparent synthesising speech, in the structure of the dissipating text. It is a caricatural, grotesque, willingly schematic and mechanic, absurd vision. It is obviously a level of aspiration towards intellectualism, actually a form with no content. Aesthetically it is the beginning of a textual production with less substance. *Madam Voltaire* is close to caricature in an aesthetically approximate writing.

In the short story *Pilgrimage at the Ruins of an Old Love*, the text begins in behaviourist rhetoric. It could be the retro technique from the 80’s generation or the minimalism from the 2000’s generation. It is therefore a current reading between writing and meditating, a difference that can be generally noticed by substantiating the verb to meditate in the case of Teodor Mazilu. But the essential is the thematic complex according to which the verb lack of rest becomes the generality from the long infinitive *meditare*. What the writer proposes is not a diegesis that could intercept, but rather a story, without leading to soteriology, able to have the essence of the concept passed through the mist of unconsciousness in order to finally result in the meaning.

Teodor Mazilu’s **novels** are an *incipit* for the prose after 1970, getting rid of the inexpressive language rhetoric, used before the 60’s in the Romanian prose, remaining in general more a genotext rather than a fenotext.

The novel **The Barrier** describes the beginning period of the Second World War in workers’ world and in the incipient matrix of the bourgeoisie, reaching

towards the end the life of illegal communists from Romania. Complex, post-Morometian characters randomly collected at the outskirts of the town, are in a continuous struggle for survival and for becoming “rich”. The novel starts with humour with the dedication of a new church, “*great and tremendous on the Mărgeanului road, in a very good position, which had stirring the envy of all innkeepers.*” In this world of Bucharest outskirts, Maria Mareşal Antonescu comes to attend the dedication of the church. She makes a halt and unfolds her handkerchief with the ladies accompanying her and briefly talks to the women whose men were on the front or had become heroes. The scene is of an absurd comicalness, as the lady is not satisfied with the fact that her adjutant has chosen an orphan child, with his father an hero and his mother dead of tuberculosis, and not of a good death or still alive. Through the complex characters it creates, ***The Barrier*** is the reflection of a colourful and motley world, a worker’s world which gets out of the outskirts and moves downtown in the crude reality of the war.

The novel ***One Eternal Night*** is, at its first reading, according to Alex Ştefănescu, “excessively psychologising”, still having the legibility of ***Le plaisir du text*** and the narrative strategies of ***Plaque du rire***. The youthfulness of the erotic scenario development is not “tabular”, “explosive”, and if we refer to archetypes, in Jung’s meaning (which do not suppose ontology), Teodor Mazilu is closer to Mircea Eliade, (mutatis mutandis), where the archetype suppose polysemy in interaction with ontology. On the cover of the book, Teodor Mazilu says: “*The history of Ştefan and Valentina’s love is mainly the history of rebirth through love. Love is not only a source of joy, along with love; heroes win a high dimension of life. The novel **One Eternal Night** is a critic of early, superficial loves, and at the same time a praise brought to serious love, to its power of creation, joy and devotion.*” It is more denotative, closer to the 2000’s generation

through instrumentalization, saved by a certain innocence towards colloquial speech, included in the concept of *parole*.

The playwright Mazilu can be understood and assessed within the literary context of the age. In the 70's, the Romanian dramaturgy experienced a spectacular release through the plays of writers that had distinguished themselves in prose and poetry, which caused her exit from an over-demanding dull daily occurrence. Like no other contemporary, Teodor Mazilu, arriving from the field of prose, mainly used one string – that of satire. Both through his formula and through the atmosphere, the playwright proposes various states of the type: intelligent, merciless, sarcastic, ironic, and sometimes endearing.

“The world” of Teodor Mazilu’s plays favoured the closeness that some literary critics made with I. L. Caragiale’s dramaturgy, although the author himself wanted to differentiate himself from his predecessor several times. The closeness is created first of all, by the *fauna* from which the two playwrights chose their characters. The closeness becomes even more striking when we relate to the expressive register: the languages of the two authors define not only a literary moment, but an age as well. In the case of Caragiale, passing from comedies to moments and short stories is marked by the perceptible change of another world, with its mentalities and values, along with a change of language. Beyond the circumstances comicalness, the reality of the 19th century end social life appears in subtext and is described progressively. Unlike the continuously moving world from Caragiale’s works, what surprises us with Mazilu is a certain inaction of the universe described. It is a world closed in clichés, representative for the second half of the 20th century in Romania. The colourful world is also present, but it hides a sick, one-dimensional structure inside, with a cardboard morality and striking features of subculture. Teodor Mazilu’s characters are in a permanent movement full of sentimentalisms, they abandon and come back in force, watch or appear

unexpectedly on the stage. At Caragiale, language cynicism came from the fast assimilation and closeness desire of a new vocabulary, mainly of French origin, a *bon ton*, modern vocabulary, while at Teodor Mazilu it finds its linguistic development through the inadequate use of the so-called *wooden language of the time*. The author's intelligence surprises his characters by using formulas from the official newspapers or from the party meetings in daily speech. False morality, indoctrination and the guilt of not complying with the party are frequently transposed in their speech. Teodor Mazilu's characters live the entire scale of moral void, being successively non-concessive of themselves up to cruelty, perverse, euphoric, illiterate, triumphalist, brainless, vainglorious and insatiable, aggressive in cheating. Mazilu's heroes built a fauna which cancels itself through the endless chuckling in front of their own imperfection.

Fools under the Moonlight is Teodor Mazilu's most representative play. The title itself suggests the antinomy of the two couples' states (Gogu – Clementina; Emilian – Ortansa). Teodor Mazilu's heroes are not intellectually *fools*, but rather at ontological level. *Fools under the Moonlight* is a play full of very dynamic substantiality, in which the exchange of couples is made almost instinctively, then retroactively, in the mirror. Genuine, authentic living does not occur, and everything is reduced to a mimesis of experience.

The Adventures of an Extremely Serious Man, a play staged under the name of *The Sleepy Adventure* contains numerous coincidences, just like *Fools under the Moonlight*. Characters speak a lot and in a sophisticated way, wanting to have a normal relationship, but any attempt of overcoming the laziness state in the commonplace of circumstances which proves to be hard to face in the end. The ridiculousness of the circumstances results from the characters' excessive prudence. The dialogue between Gherman and Cleo is full of false intellectual solemnity, which leads to the absence of any romanticism. The author comments

on the nature of his heroes as follows: “*Because they have a kind of ridiculous self-awareness, my characters feel the need to self characterize them and anytime the opportunity appears (...) due to its nature, stupidity is violent. But, if we vary it, we have to admit a certain complexity of stupidity. Stupidity is not only dull. It has an extraordinary power of miming anything: it can mime intelligence, stupidity can show itself indignant in front of mediocrity, and stupidity can even mime compulsion towards stupidity.*”(*An Aesthetic Adventure*, 1972)

The play *It Is Beautiful in Venice in September* looks like an answer from *Waiting for Godot* by Beckett. At Beckett, the waiting is endless. The crisis came from the failure to achieve his goals, but in the case of the Romanian playwright, the source is satiousness, which leads to demythisation. Characters – generically called *Madam* and *Sir* – differentiate themselves from Teodor Mazilu’s characters: a normal woman with a metaphysical inclination, and the man, “*about the same thing*”. Dialogue develops calmly “*on the terrace of a very modest Italian pension*”. Already thinking about coming back home, when they will be spinning their memories and bored of the town, the fulfilment of the dream retroactively becomes a burden. Characters refuse the present, refuse what is in front of them, the reality. They remain with a dull memory and with hope. Just like Caragiale, where moral laws are not abandoned but trivialised, Teodor Mazilu dynamites the idea of romanticism and replaces it with the caustic style, the best to describe a world full of abject prototypes. The play tenderly ends with that *Madam*’s nostalgic sadness: “*I feel like drinking a gin... I am in Venice, San Marco Market, it is inadmissibly close, the San Marco Market is only two steps away and still the same dream is tormenting me... If only I get to see Venice once ... just once. I have a feeling that I will never see it.*” The play *It Is Beautiful in Venice in September* is not a satire, but rather a bitter meditation about the vanity of aspirations and the

impossibility to reach perfection, to be Utopian to the disadvantage of reality and naturalness.

The Flood is not an example of cultural mimetism, but rather an intellectual boredom which proliferates in a tyrannical way. It is the expression of vice in pure state. Olga and Emil, the two characters, both of them painters, of the same age, live an elevated monotonous life. They reproach themselves the inadequacy of a mediocre, domestic living. The two characters' mutual defiance grows due to a bitter search for shortcomings, human dissolution taking place systematically. The increased attention for details encourages looking at events with a satiric magnifying glass. Teodor Mazilu uses the paradox, counter phrase, illogical phrase and oxymoron in order to trace the lines of complex features. The dichotomy is between spirit and matter, but it is not described in trenchant terms but rather in the playwright's relativizing style. It is an Ionescian position, between objectual multiplication and aspiration towards art characterised by the neurotic hale of boredom. The accumulation of absurd situations makes the playwright describe his characters in an extreme manner: Emil is metaphysically violent, and Olga is vulgarly pragmatic. Both of them are under the influence of different motivations. *The Flood* has a metaphoric connotation: objects unlimited invasion under the massive water accumulation, by devitalizing sensitivity, where the entire characters' aberrant dispute takes place. Sarcasm bursts in its most violent forms. Caustic, mean sarcasm, the use of relativizing duplicity are only some of Teodor Mazilu's theatre characteristics.

Mazilu's characters know everything about them and are aware of it in a disturbing way. Such a character is Maximilian from *Wake-up Every Morning!* Also entitled "*tragicomedy in an act*", the play catches the last moments of a man's life, and under the manner of confession, the method from the writer's other plays is taken to the last consequences. Maximilian's *alter-ego* is Eugen, his

schizoid conscience, which in the end becomes “*the death angel*”, calling the past as a witness of a meaningless existence. In this small tragicomedy we can find the refusal of categorical truths, taboos and necessary habits, unique beliefs and opaque and annoying moralities, and on the other hand, their undermining is made through an usual procedure at the time, by taking over terms and ideas from the first pages of newspapers and party meetings, turning them into artistic substance. The refusal of personality is the character’s drama. Maximilian is not a moral model. Just like his other heroes, his structure has an alternation between tenderness and abjection. For Maximilian, tenderness is the part of light coming from inside, from an overwhelming honesty, through which the character rejects any rule meant to fence his personality. Maximilian was a caster and not one with “*stylistic mastership*”. He manages to perfectly hide this and paradoxically he feels that a crime is “*nothing compared to the most innocent deletion*”. This is the moment when the character’s crisis of conscience appears, the continuous restlessness of searching every corner of the past, expressing the need to get rid of an abject character: “*I am watching my character as an enemy.*” Just like in many of Teodor Mazilu’s plays, Maximilian dies, which means a logical end for a failed destiny. The feelings of purification, a desire of perfection are borne inside him. His thoughts go towards God: “*Why are you unlimited, God? Why aren’t you limited like me so we can talk like people? Why is it my fault that I am not a flame?*” the metaphysic thrill surprisingly appears in the end out of a common reality.

This feeling is extended in ***Who Saves Whom***. The subtitle “*comedy in an act*” seemed inadequate to certain critics. It is certain that the playwright used it for reasons of censure. The play appears as a tragic farce, reminding of an André Maurois’ play, ***Thanatos Hotel***, whose hero goes to an isolated sanatorium from the mountains, the last land for those bored of life and “aspirants” to a slow death.

The manager makes their days better, by recommending a joyful and full of life companion. When they fall in love, the manager releases a lethal gas. At Teodor Mazilu, the *story* is replaced by a heavy cynicism dialogue, which pushes the characters in the world of the absurd. The candidate for suicide is healthy, while his Saviour is on the verge of dying. The saviour feels that this “*stupid, crowded, unfair, life is worth living*”. After much deliberate insistency from the Candidate, the Saviour tenaciously resists: “*You are destroying me [...], you reduce me to beggary. I could not find a job anywhere else.*” Life has to be beautiful through “arguments” and the Saviour has to convince the Candidate to commit suicide, by ruing the “statistics” for the first. The saviour is not convinced by this argument, because someone’s death is the birth of somebody else, just like calumny is balanced with praise, so that “*they recover on the whole*”. The play ***Who saves Whom*** proves to be a parable in the persuasive style, very often used by the propagandists of the former regime, as a reaction to the attempt of establishing an infallible dogma.

The Hat from the Night stand, also subtitled “*tragicomedy in an act*”, based on the novel with the same title, includes, just like other la Teodor Mazilu’s plays, a crisis of identity. Demeter, author of insignificant scientific papers spent his entire life posing as Don Juan. He leaves the hat that made him famous on the night stand, a hat that he wears conventionally and repetitively. It is, as a matter of fact, the convention he uses to appear in front of the world. His relatives asked him immediately where he had left his hat, which was at sight on the night stand. The refusal to wear a hat breaks up his entire world: his mother does not recognize him as her son, his friend leaves him alone, Otilia, the ballerina, feels offended. Everybody is interested in the hat: “*It concerns us all where you have hidden your hat. Nobody stays unaffected of the place the other one has hidden his hat. It is a matter that concerns us all equally; one’s hat is everybody’s hat. Ask me anything*

and I will tell you exactly. I have nothing to hide.” Teodor Mazilu subtly attacks the existence of collectivism itself, of the political and social system, asking for individuality, assets and personal life. We understand that the playwright was against classic well-known myths, with a long literary career and against modern mythology as well, which was closer to the immediate reality. *The Hat from the Night Stand* can be analyzed from this point of view.

The artists populating Teodor Mazilu’s theatre belong to modern mythology as well. In the play *Stuff your Lovers!* Valentina is an actress, Valentin is a stage manager, and both are successful artists in their jobs. Valentin is a well-known, famous stage manager. The playwright reveals a world full of snobbism, histrionic, crazy about success, sensitive and vainglorious, proud and fragile. The tendency for generalization is though universally valid in the case of Teodor Mazilu, his characters being recognized in the plan of reality.

In *Don Juan Dies like Everybody Else*, the register changes: it is a grave, profound and problematizing register. Although demythization occurs here, the myth of Don Juan has definitely stimulated an extensive literature, but Teodor Mazilu does not allow himself to be caught in a complex of antecedents. The playwright does not transpose myth in an idyllic note; he tries to put his hero in a contemporary framework, and in an intelligent manner of real craftsmanship. In his view, Don Juan wants to break free from the tyranny of the myth; he wants a human, peaceful life. For Maria Magdalena, the situation is opposite, as she wants to get rid of life’s frivolity, without “*driving hundred of men crazy*”, to stop melting with pleasure when hearing love statements. She has to act according to the Bible, which implies many meanings she is tired of.

The tragedy *A Princely Holiday* is the only historic play in Teodor Mazilu’s theatre but the historic background is vaguely outlined around the uprising of Horea, Cloșca and Crișan. During some rebellions, the daughter of a nobleman is

raped by serfs and, in order to defend the honour of her family, Apolonia announces that she will commit suicide. In subtext, we understand that this is a premeditated murder. Apolonia's suicide creates an abject state of euphoria in her family – Varga și Iuliana. The daughter's death is the ultimate clue of sacrifice and unconditioned obedience to the emperor. At the same time, as a demonstration of force, terror and revenge, several hundreds of serfs are killed. Through Varga, the nobility itself teaches a lesson of brutal severity, when principles of caste are at stake. No doubt, no remorse stops their way towards murder. Teodor Mazilu brings the satire weapons in the historic theatre as well, with the mention that in this thematic complex everything is heavy, programmatically. In comedies there were stupidity and ignorance in state of freedom, we were facing greed, servilism and cultural mymetism. In historical plays, meanness and abjection appear in their entire nudity. Hideousness and macabre things are not suggested they are rather the marks to which not even bestiality tells them anything.

Although written between considerable periods of time, the plays *These Hypocritical Madmen* and *Furniture and Pain* can be correlated, because they are a synthesis of Mazilu's characters and a globalizing vision of the playwright's ideas about the purpose of satire and characters in his plays. The characters in these plays express the quintessence of Teodor Mazilu's views about his theatre related conception. This is what the author said about his heroes: *"They have a sort of pride of their meanness, and this is why they are not shy to confess it. They do not have the conscience of death and transitoriness; this is why they reveal themselves with so much unconstraint. They also have, frankly speaking, a real love for life, a frenzy, meaning that all of them are defending the right to a more consistent living based on others, because work is the ultimate nightmare for them. [...] My characters speak with what is hidden in their subconscious, but they have a sincere*

subconscious, with the cards on the table and this gives an aura of naturalness to their abjection.” (Teodor Mazilu, *From the Last Testimony of Creation*, 1980)

The commentators of Teodor Mazilu’s theatre have appreciated that, due to his concentrated, apodictic style, where the speech has a special cut, the playwright had success especially with short plays. Still, *These Hypocritical Madmen* is the comedy with the most characters and with a wide plot. Ambiguity becomes a performant method here. *The Hypocritical Madmen* frequently quote famous names with an unconscious unconstraint: Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Napoleon Bonaparte, Thomas Mann, Camus and others. They are ready to reproduce famous lines, truncated of course or in ridicule paraphrases. “Madmen” do not have significant social or political functions; they are not on high hierarchic steps. In the case of theatre, unlike the prose, it was a problem to approach such a typology. But, it is clear that, from the fauna of small errand boys with megalomaniac and absurd claims, high and mighties are recruited. During the second half of the century, the lack of education, bluntness and rapaciousness characterized not only marginal environments, but they rather populated the occult layers of power. Activists also spoke of education, but they felt fear and contempt towards it. At Teodor Mazilu, such expressions reach atrocious forms. Teodor Mazilu’s heroes hide in the absolute that they are seeking with so much ardour, in a kind of Paradise. But, once there, immortality bores them terribly, because they miss vices which are the engine of their lives. The four of them – Camelia, Silvia, Iordache, Dobrișor – are now living the burden of “depersonalization”: “*If I am not a hypocrite, it means that I do not exist*”, says Iordache, grotesquely reversing the motto of the French philosopher.

In Teodor Mazilu’s theatre, *These Hypocritical Madmen* is the play in which automatism and flunkeyism is abused with an energy that had not been seen in his other works. At the same time, through the characters’ apparently

meaningless chatter, this play gets closer to the Western theatre of the absurd. The style of the play, at the level of expression is a way of “seeing” things. Expression identifies itself with thinking and both of them disappear along with the broadcasting “heroes”, that is Mazilu’s heroes. This is not a natural death, or a murder in the juridical meaning of the word, but rather extinction at formal level: Mazilu’s heroes, failing to resist to their own *modus vivendi*, disappear through depletion. In this way, Teodor Mazilu’s theatre has visible resemblances with Eugen Ionescu’s theatre, with that verbal delirium from *The Bald Female Singer*, where lying is accepted though a mutual agreement.

Furniture and Pain, the last play left from Teodor Mazilu, symmetrically closes the author’s dramaturgy, marking what Eugen Simion used to call “*the plenitude of sham*”, because the protagonists have overcome the period of small “till milking”, rattles, ordinary robberies, and have reached the stage of material satiety. Between the two protagonists, Sile and Paul, the managers of two cooperatives that were making the same products, there is a sharp competition in order to climb the social ladder, by applying the fight between inverses. Both sides, being at an (un)respectable wealth level, are now focusing on conquering a honour coat of arms and dream of living by the refined standards of trendiness.

Teodor Mazilu can be considered a postmodern writer if we consider that postmodernists focus less on the symbolic capacity of the language and turn it into something illogical, that lack coherence, outside the normal borders of society. Despite the obvious mannerism, ignoring the classical patterns of the traditional theatre and building a special world that lives through a special meaning, Teodor Mazilu chose a completely original destiny in post-war dramaturgy.