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Parody in the Romanian animation theater

Abstract: The article refers to the presence of parody in the animation theater in Romania. In the introductory part, the author talks about Mihail Bahtin's concept of carnival culture, a category that also includes parody, a manifestation of the critical spirit, specific to animation theater of all times. The parody is inherent in the animation theater which, through its specific means, through the representation of the characters with puppets or marionets, makes a literary work written with "serious intentions" become ridiculous and funny. The parody ridicules both the "serious" themes and the mannerisms and ancient representation procedures in theater and opera, the grandiose style of play of some actors or opera soloists, etc. The article reviews some hypostases of parody in the drama of the genre, giving examples from the writings of Mihai Eminescu, George Călinescu, I.L. Caragiale, Vasile Alecsandri and some contemporary authors, as well as from the shows are based on the principle of parody.

Keywords: puppet theatre, parody, animation theatre, carnivals, Romanian animation theatre.

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Parodie în teatrul românesc de animație

Abstract: Articolul se referă la prezența parodiei în teatrul de animație din țara noastră. În partea introductivă, autorul vorbește despre conceptul de cultură carnavalescă al lui Mihail Bahtin, categorie din care face parte și parodia, manifestare a spiritului critic, specific teatrului de animație din toate timpurile. Parodia este inerentă teatrului de animație care, prin mijloacele sale specifice, prin reprezentarea cu marionete sau păpuși a personajelor, face ca o operă literară scrisă cu "intenții serioase" să devină ridicolă și amuzantă. Parodia ridiculizează atât temele "serioase" cât și manierismul și procedeele de reprezentare vetuste din teatru și operă, stilul de joc grandilocvent al unor actori sau soliști de operă etc. Articolul trece în revistă câteva ipostaze ale parodiei din dramaturgia genului, dând exemple din scrierile lui Mihai Eminescu, George Călinescu, I.L. Caragiale, Vasile Alecsandri și ale unor autori contemporani, precum și din spectacolele care au la bază principiul parodiei.

Cuvinte cheie: teatru de păpuși, parodie, teatru de animație, carnavalesc, teatrul de animație românesc.

Introduction

Parody is an inherent phenomenon of animated theater. Any theme considered serious reveals its parodic potential once it is approached with the specific means of animation theater.

The article aims to trace the tradition of parody in the cult animation theater in Romania. The present work highlights the important aspects of the parodic approach from a comparative point of view, highlighting both the similarities and differences of substance and form in the space of European animation theater and universal literature and its correspondence in the tradition of Romanian cult animation theater.

For this purpose, lesser-known texts, starting with those from the end of the 19th century (such as the parody written by Mihai Eminescu, which reveals the comic potential of the stage means specific to animation theater), detecting echoes of the expected parodic mode by Eminescu in George Călinescu's plays and in contemporary texts, were researched.

Apart from the plays themselves, the study of Mihail Bakhtin, François Rabelais and popular culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as well as Jean-Luc Impe's, *Opera baroque et la marionnette*, were of great help in clarifying the concept of parody, a vast presentation of parody in the marionette theater of France, from the Baroque period.

The results of the study

In his book, *François Rabelais and popular culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Mihail Bahtin, finds that the entire cultural history of humanity has two modes of manifestation: the official and the unofficial, popular, which he calls carnivalesque. Carnival assumes that, at a certain time, any restrictions are lifted, and people are free to laugh at the leaders of the state, the church, any officials, as was the case during Saturnalia in antiquity or Carnival in the Middle Ages. However, this freedom also manifests itself outside this framework, and the puppet theater has been for millennia a territory of freedom, of expressing critical opinions on society.

Our puppeteers used to wander the villages and satirically portray the authorities, the foreign occupier, the Turks or the Russians, and all those who behaved immorally. It is not surprising that for a while the authorities in the Romanian Lands decided to ban the puppet theater, and when they allowed the performances again, they forced the puppeteers to commit themselves not to represent certain people on stage and to play: "without costumes imitating the army or the clergy" (*Gâțză, 1963, p. 12*).

Parody is inherent in animation theater. The simple transposition on the small stage of the dolls of an ordinary piece makes its meanings completely diverted. The doll is fundamentally comic and that is why any character represented by the doll (if the representation is not grotesque or sublime) becomes comic. Animated theater is subversive from this point of view. What is exposed on his stage makes us immediately understand the ridiculousness of grandiosity, the stupidity of the authorities, the stupidity of the so-called scholars, and so on. The parody responds to a secret and repressed desire of people to laugh at something that claims to be serious, true, sacred, official. Obsolete artistic clichés, scientific ideas that no one understands, moral norms that no one respects, the authority that everyone hates, false ideologies, are objects of parody.

Dramatic theater itself has a strong parodic potential. Transposing a play on stage leads to a risky situation, in which there may be, e.g., a physical mismatch between what we imagine

should be the characters and the physical peculiarities of the actors. Gordon Craig was talking about the dilemma of the representation of a mythical character, a hero, a sublime character, by an actor. This dilemma led Gordon Craig to think of another type of physical representation, which he called a super-puppet. In fact, he did not intend to replace the actors with puppets, but dreamed of a theater like the classic Indian, *katakali*, in which the actor's physique is completely hidden by makeup-mask, costume, and his principle of acting on stage is not a realistic one, but an expressive one.

Thus, realism generates parodic comedy, if applied to "serious" texts. Gods, heroes, sublime characters, become funny if they are portrayed in situations related to our daily needs. Also, opera and operetta, by their artificial character, easily lead to parody. A naive character or a small stature always makes you laugh. And the emphatic or sentimentality mode are often parodied. This type of parody often appears in the Romanian animation theater.

Parody has appeared in animation theater since ancient times. In ancient Greece, the puppeteer *Potheinos* parodied Euripides' plays even after they were performed. There are mentions of the existence in antiquity and of some shows that parodied episodes from mythology. Thus, *Hercules* was ridiculed in puppet shows in which the comic character *Herculinus* appeared. During the Renaissance, when authors such as Cervantes parodied chivalric novels, numerous parodies of Elizabethan dramas appeared in England. This happens in other pieces for dolls, such as the one included by Ben Jonson in *St. Bartholomew's Fair*. Regarding the parody in the puppet and marionette theater, the baroque period is very well known and important studies have been dedicated to it, such as that of Jean-Luc Impe (*Opera baroque et la marionette*, 1994). During the Baroque period, there were a lot of parody shows that ridiculed the "official" representations of the French Comedy and the Comic Opera, protected by the king. These performances were performed in the fairgrounds, even in the days immediately following the premieres of the 'official' performances. The audience came to laugh not only at the 'official' art, boring and full of mythological references, which presented a world broken by reality, but also by the outdated style of play of the actors protected by the authorities, and especially to see the shows, for that they knew that they were threatened with a ban, due to the frequent denunciations, foundries and complaints against the artists in the fairs addressed to the actors, singers and writers protected by the king, their protector (*Impe, 1994*).

The bands of itinerant puppeteers had in their repertoire parodies of legends such as *Faust* or *Don Juan* in the 18th and 19th centuries. The main heroes were in fact the servants of the protagonists. The plays were rewritten from the perspective of the popular character (*Hans Würost, Polichinelle*) and not the central hero. Such texts were played in many countries (France, Germany, England, the Czech Republic, etc.), and preceded the plays of Marlowe and Goethe. In a French version of *Don Juan*, the play begins with the whipping of the servant by *Don Juan* and the final punishment of *Don Juan* was greeted with joy by the spectators. The same thing happens in many German versions of *Faust* in which *Hans Würost*, after the hero ends up in Hell, fools the devils by remaining the heir to his master's fortune. These shows often served as anti-papal propaganda for the Lutheran or Anglican churches.

In our country, as we have already shown, satire and pamphlets predominated in the puppet theater. The first attempt to write a parody for puppet theater belongs to the genius *Eminescu*, apparently inspired by a text by *Achim von Arnim* known to him during the Berlin period. The

play called *Infamy, Cruelty and Despair*, or *The Black Cave and the Bad Puppies*, or *Elvira in Despair of Love*. The author ironizes both the sentimental pieces of his time and the historical or “sweet” poems of his contemporaries:

“... THE KING –
What innocence in expression, what naivete
I think I hear the shepherds
From the pastoral pastorals of our poets
Singing Hail Mary ...”

The king utters a tragic monologue in which he expresses his fears that an attack is being prepared:

“... What a worry the cursed parish priest is giving me today
How intriguing he plays him in this cruel play
And if I weren’t king ... really, I’d have a grudge.
From, the world, the label ... u! as I feel a bite ...
I would scratch myself and I don’t know, it would fit me well ...”

The ironic allusion to the fact that we are not dealing with real people, but with characters who play in a “cruel play”, is repeated later:

“... THE INTRIGUANT – (in secret)
I came here to kill the king
That’s what the blower tells me ...”
But the king is vigilant, and has the servants untie the intruder:
“... THE KING - You see the pale man, the monstrous figure
He wants to kill me ... I’ll have him uncovered.

(The servants appear who unseam him it out and Pepelea comes out of it) ...” (*Gâtză, 1963, pp. 93-95*).

The fragment is written by Eminescu in his own puppet style, and even the action of “detaching” the character indicates that the text was written for the puppet theater. As Perpessicius remarks: “... even the title of the text, the ridiculous grandiloquence of the characters and the disarticulated automatism of the lines, so in line with the artificial, superimposed and borrowed rhythm of this world of grotesque homunculi that is the figuration of a puppet theater ...” (*Perpessicius, 1949*).

The modernism of the Eminescu text was noticed by Edgar Papu, who compared the fragment of Mihai Eminescu with the play of Alfred Jarry *Ubu rege* (1896) (*Papu, 2005, p. 124*).

George Călinescu is the author of a parody for the puppet theater, written in 1960, obviously influenced by the parodic fragments of Mihai Eminescu. The play is entitled *The Tragedy of King Otakar and Prince Dalibor*. and was played with dolls in 1960 in the house of George Călinescu, who inaugurated with her a series of Christmas shows. The text was recorded on tape and performed by the author in his delicious style. The dolls had been purchased from Prague. I. Pipsi Marinescu and Ingrid Fischer (Țopa), artists at the Țândărică Theater, were handlers. The shows organized by Călinescu were carefully supervised by the security who had installed several microphones in his house. The reports often mentioned that Călinescu’s activity was “hostile”, the author’s subtle humor being of course incomprehensible to the Securitate, and therefore suspicious (*Oprîșan, 2014, p. 435*).

George Banu characterizes Călinescu's dramaturgy as follows: "... [in the puppet plays] joins the rational values, graceful ingenuities full of charm and fun, in which they live the gratuitousness and candor, almost childish, of the game. These works carry in them a mixture of relative and absolute, of immutability and becoming. The boundaries disappear, and the child is amused, pulling the slingshot at the statues and thinking that we can come to appreciate history from a human point of view" (*Banu, 1965*).

King Otakar is in love with Princess Dalibor:

"... OTAKAR – Bless you!

It's a miracle girl.

THE MASK – Radiantly beautiful

OTAKAR – Big eyes and small mouth.

THE MASK – Yellow, silky hair.

OTAKAR – That's falling down.

THE MASK – In dancing, skillfully,

OTAKAR – Rich, great.

THE MASK – But, alas, he has a beet-haired sister

Princess Tecla.

A little old-fashioned, lean;

Envious, sour

If you don't want to die

You should marry her ..." (*Călinescu, 1965, p. 96*).

The intriguer of the mask, however, wants the king to perish, and together with the evil Tecla he conspires to poison the king, Dalibor, and the princess. The poison is provided by the witch Celestina (a character inspired by Fernando de Rojas' novel). But, after, in the end, all the characters die poisoned, to the joy of the masked man who sees himself installed as a king instead of Otakar, Celestina reveals that she did not actually give them poison, but a sleeping pill.

As in Eminescu's play, the author alternates solemn and chosen speech in the manner of historical plays, with prosaic expressions:

".... OTAKAR - Today, wisely everything has been set up

I, the cursed one, will be your sister's husband.

I break the cursed deed.

Come on, let me kiss you ..."

Călinescu's charming parody was staged in several puppet theaters in the country (Brasov – directed by Aristotle Apostol, Bacau – directed by Radu Popovici, Iasi – directed by Constantin Brehnescu, etc.).

During the same period, another parody was written, *The Hand with Five Fingers*, by Mircea Crișan, and it was staged at the Țândărică Theater by Margareta Niculescu (Stefan Hablinski sets, Ioana Constantinescu dolls). The show was wordless, based solely on image and action, and was a parody of the police action movie. Letitia Gâțză characterized him as an outburst of verve and humour. "... Built on the idea of satirizing the detective novel, the show dilates to the absurd the ponchos of the genre, and, because dialogue itself does not exist, the satire maintained continuously at the subtext level, bursts into the stage image ..." (*Gâțză, 1963, p. 62*). Grand Prize at the International Festival in Bucharest in 1960.

Another remarkable show, also based on a parody, was *The Beautiful Electric Passions* by Simon Vladimir (at the Țândărică Theater, directed by Irina Niculescu, set design by Mioara Buescu). Valeria Ducea characterizes the show as follows: "... Spiritual foray into the life of society at the beginning of the century, with funny references to history, politics, morals, economics, grotesque vaudeville poison, betrayals accompanied by revolver shots, spectacular adventures, backstage intrigues, etc. – the ridiculous masquerade of the feelings enslaved to the accumulation of capital ...” (*Ducea, 1984*).

The same game of “theater in theater” appears here, of intelligent interweaving between narrative and self-ironic commentary, as in the previous parodies. In fact, the author of the play, Vladimir Simon, theorizes this type of playful theater as follows: “... if the drama accredits in time the thesis” of the world as theater “... the play for puppets is claimed from the idea of the world as a game”, accessing the playful value of philosophical principle” (*Simon, 1983*).

In 1986, Cristian Pepino staged another parody, on his own text, at the Țândărică Theater: *Adventures with Little Red Riding Hood* (set design by Mircea Nicolau). The text is a parody in four episodes that transpose in various eras and literary manners the story of Little Red Riding Hood: in the first part is the well-known story but in it evolves an emancipated protagonist, aware of the problems of today’s society: The wolf asks her if she goes to pick mushrooms forest, and Little Red Riding Hood replies that she does not do that, because it would upset the ecological balance. The second part is a parody of the cape and sword movie. Little Red Riding Hood becomes the niece of the Countess Little White Hood (Grandma), and is about to fall victim to the Cardinal’s man’s plots (Wolf), but is saved by a valiant musketeer (the Hunter) in a spectacular dual scene. In the third episode, the gangster movie is parodied. Lupo Lupone wants to steal from the heroine the bottle of rum that she takes to her grandmother who is cold and has to drink a tea with rum, and is saved by the Hunter Eliot Ness after a car chase and one on the endless stairs of the skyscraper where Grandma lives. The last episode is SF, and the Martians who came to earth with a flying saucer cause a lot of trouble due to their personality transfer technology, but Little Red Riding Hood is saved by the Spider-Man. Irina Coroiu characterized this show as follows: “... this scenario [...] offers in parodic terms, but from a psycho-sociological perspective, a sketch of a latent phenomenon: the degradation of the fairy tale in the story and the story in the anecdote. ... another in the heyday of the cape and sword novel, the third in the 1930s and the last in the uncertain area of SF. ...” (*Coroiu, 1986*).

The show has received numerous awards and has been presented with great success in Japan.

At the Puppet Theater in Târgu-Mureș, director Pal Antal made a frothy parody without words in 1993, starting from the Shakespearean tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (Oh, Romeo, oh, Juliet), in which the characters were represented by objects.

A fairy tale parody written by Caragiale, *Lungul nasului*, was dramatized by Nella Stroescu in 1985. The play was also played under the title *Red Tail Cotton*, and is a delicious parody of oriental fairy tales. The text has had many successful productions in our animation theaters (in Țândărică, directed by Stefan Lenkisch, in Constanța, directed by Cristian Pepino, in Târgu-Mureș, directed by Mimi Mierluț, at the Colibri Theater in Craiova – directed by Horia Davidescu, set design by Eustațiu Gregorian etc.).

A parody of the way Shakespeare is interpreted in ballet and cinematography is the play *Play Shakespeare*, directed by Cristian Pepino, set design by Cristina Pepino (Țândărică Theater, 2010). The show is non-verbal and has two parts: the first is a parody of the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* to music by Tchaikovsky, in which the Balcony also becomes a character. The second part is a parody of a blockbuster film made after the play *Hamlet*, in which the actors from the famous Shakespearean scene are dolls representing Hollywood stars: Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Silvester Stallone, while Ofelia resembles Lady Gaga. Video comments enhance the comic of situations.

Cristina Rusiecki characterizes the show as follows: "... The ironic nuance is implied. The creator of the show builds humor with fine means ... [...] The small and large dolls, life-size bodies of actors and a mixtum compositum from the performer plus the doll infinitely increase the comic. Small bodies of puppets glued to the actors, from under the head to the waist, whip the normal perceptions and arouse laughter ... [...] Full of points, the show plays uninterruptedly with cultural references ..." (*Rusiecki, 2011*).

Faust Reloaded directed by Cristian Pepino, set design by Raluca Aionițoiaie and Remus Gabor (Țândărică Theater, 2017) is also a non-verbal show, a parody of the Faustian myth, with the means of animation theater. Faust is an old man who fears death and has various nightmares in which Mephistopheles appears and tempts him to sign the pact by making a sensual and full-bodied Margaret appear. Faust accepts, though he is warned by a tiny angel. Faust, who has become young again and becomes the master of the contemporary world, taking the place of Donald Trump, is offered a parade of sins, represented with large grotesque dolls, ending with a dance of witches that evokes Walpurgie Night. However, Faust's happiness is interrupted by the vision of Margaret's ascension to heaven and by the mocking gestures of the spirit of her brother killed in a duel by the main hero. Mephisto shows him the contract he made with him and is ready to take his soul, but Faust breaks the contract and wakes up from his dream, being old again.

Vasile Alecsandri *Sânziana* and *Pepelea*'s play was not written for puppet theater, but many genre theaters in our country staged it (Țândărică – directed by Margareta Niculescu, set design by Mioara Buescu – 1975, Galați – directed by Cristian Pepino, set design by Mircea Nicolau – 1981, Alba Iulia – directed by Cristian Pepino, set design by Raluca Aionițoiaie and Remus Gabor – 2017, Țândărică – directed by Cristian Pepino, set design by Delia Ioaniu – 1994, etc. The delicious humor of this play is based on and on contemporary allusions and the use of anachronisms. The timeliness of this play is surprising, even though more than a hundred years have passed since its writing.

These are some of the actual parodies made in the animation theater in our country. However, the parodic spirit is manifested in many texts and genre montages. It seems that the transposition in the animation theater of stories and myths inevitably leads to ironic commentary, to humour based on contemporary allusions.

Conclusion

In the Romanian animation theater, parody is an important comic source. It has been manifested since ancient times. One reason was the deeply comic character of animation theater itself, which, through plastic representations, induces a certain perception, a certain style of

approach and play. Even tragic or dramatic themes can be converted into new stage proposals, and the situation in another time or space outlines new approaches and opens up new perspectives.

Along with social satire, which consists in approaching the background of the subject, parody completes the concept through form, style, manner. The most important results are the expansion of addressability (age group), for seemingly difficult topics, the opening of new interpretation perspectives and permanent updating of the proposed topics, according to the new social, temporal or spatial coordinates. In this context, parody makes an important creative contribution.

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