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**CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN THEATRE:
ARTISTRY, HONESTY, AND ADAPTATION IN THE PLAYS OF
IOSIF NAGHIU, DUMITRU RADU POPESCU, AND MARIN SORESCU**

by

ERIC POURCHOT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 13, 1999 
Date Chair of Examining Committee

4-13-99 
Date Executive Officer

Daniel C. Gerould

Marvin Carlson

Judith Milhous

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary theatre of Romania is an interesting and special case for study. It is the least known and least studied of the major theatres of Eastern Europe. Far more material is available in English on the theatre of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia than that of Romania, despite its more accessible romance language.¹ Paradoxically, Romanian directors are very well-known in Western Europe and America. Dinu Cernescu, David Esrig, Lucian Giurchescu, Radu Penciulescu, Lucian Pintilie, Silviu Purcărete, and others have regularly worked throughout Europe.² Andrei Șerban and Liviu Ciulei are known for both their professional productions and academic programs in the United States.

The reasons for this paradox are complex and intertwined with political

¹ One can readily find play collections, for example, in major libraries and drama bookstores such as Daniel Gerould, Twentieth-Century Polish Avant-Garde Drama: Plays, Scenarios, Critical Documents (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Janusz Głowacki, Hunting Cockroaches, trans. Jadwiga Kosicka (New York: Samuel French, 1987); and the plays of Sławomir Mrożek; Barbara Day, ed., Czech Plays: Modern Czech Drama (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994); Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, ed., DramaContemporary: Czechoslovakia (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985); and the plays of Václav Havel; Eugene Brogyányi, ed., DramaContemporary: Hungary (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1991). No such collection is currently available of Romanian drama.

² Bogdan Mișchiu, "Rumania," in Martin Banham, ed. Cambridge Guide to World Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 851.

considerations. The cultural importance of a country often follows its strategic importance. Romania has repeatedly been relegated to a peripheral role in European affairs, as witnessed by the agreement by the United States and Great Britain at Yalta in 1945 to leave Romania in the “sphere of influence” of the Soviet Union, or the 1998 decision by NATO to exclude Romania from the first round of enlargement. The situation has not been helped by internal politics either. The Romanian plays published in English translation by the Stalinist Romanian government before 1965 were generally works adhering to the required socialist-realism and of little interest to Western audiences. After 1965, the increasingly repressive cultural and human rights policies under Ceaușescu led to the assumption by the English-speaking world that there was no theatre of international value to be found in Romania.³

In contrast, Romanian directors were rigorously trained in a five-year program, honed their skills by producing the many premieres needed annually for the forty-plus repertory companies located in cities across Romania, and were encouraged to strive for excellence by national competitions and awards. Censorship also played a constructive role in the development of directors: faced with a relatively small pool of classic plays deemed politically safe by the censors, directors learned to develop new interpretations, as well as the ability “to impart to the audience a great deal of political

³ Romania was labeled the most “uncompromisingly Stalinist” country in the region by Walter M. Bacon, Jr., “Romania,” in Communism in Eastern Europe, 2nd ed., ed. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 162. Censorship was felt by some critics to have crushed creativity. See, for example, J. R. Stephens, “Censorship,” in The Cambridge Guide to Theatre, new ed., ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 184.

meaning through their interpretation of such seemingly innocuous plays.”⁴ Romanian directors have overcome language barriers to work abroad, whether forced to do so by being banned from working within Romania, or by choice.

It was this paradox—an astounding quantity and quality of artistic creation but only scant materials available in English—which first led me to study the theatre of Romania. I discovered that, despite the tough restrictions on individual freedom, theatres fulfilled a special social role of resistance. In a number of interviews held in Romania after the 1989 collapse of the communist regime, it became apparent that theatres used to be extremely popular during the repressive rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, only to be abandoned by their audiences after the removal of the dictator.

Upon further examination of the phenomena, several points became clear: 1) under the dictatorship, the theatre was one of the few places where resistance could be expressed publicly, if only through allusion and metaphor; 2) the ingenuity of theatre artists and playwrights was honed to a fine edge as many balanced dangerously between the audience’s need for truth and the censor’s demand for political conformance; 3) the lifting of restrictions in 1989 moved political expression into the streets, the media, and the parliament, leaving the theatre in a temporary but severe vacuum in terms of its function. It also became abundantly clear that, despite the restrictions on content, social or political criticism, and even style, the Romanian theatre had been a vibrant, professional, and creative institution throughout the past thirty years, worthy of

⁴ Eugene K. Keefe and others, Area Handbook for Romania, The American University, Foreign Area Studies, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 102.

academic attention and praise. Ceaușescu's Romania, like Franco's Spain, Pinochet's Chile, or Europe under Nazi occupation, had not been a cultural desert.⁵

Contemporary Romanian theatre is an underappreciated area now opening up to the world for discovery.

In an attempt to bring to light some of the artistry of Romanian drama and theatre and to contribute to the intriguing questions of the function, shape, and consequences of artistic resistance, this study focuses on the careers of three prominent Romanian playwrights and their stories of artistic excellence, adaptation to censorship, integrity and social responsibility: Iosif Naghiu, Dumitru Radu Popescu, and Marin Sorescu. If Marin Sorescu is relatively familiar to Western culture for his poetry, and Dumitru Radu Popescu for his novels, few of their dramatic works have been published or staged abroad. In Romania, however, their plays became symbols of resistance and challenge to the regime. Iosif Naghiu, on the other hand, remains an undiscovered jewel of the Romanian theatre, one of many such unpublicized and unresearched dramatists.

In this study, I trace the development of the dramatic works, as published and produced, of Iosif Naghiu, Dumitru Radu Popescu and Marin Sorescu from 1968 to 1998. The three decades encompass major changes in cultural, social, and political life in Romania, including the relative freedom of artistic expression in the late 1960s, the increasingly draconian control over all aspects of society imposed by Nicolae

⁵ Zygmunt Hübner offers many such examples of outstanding theatre created under political repression in Theater and Politics, ed. and trans. Jadwiga Kosicka (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992).

Ceaușescu, the sudden freedom of speech regained by the revolution in December, 1989, and the subsequent political turmoil and economic hardships endured by the country. At the peak of communism's most strict and insidious invasion of personal lives, these three dramatists, along with many of their peers, survived and worked within the system, at times apparently writing about themes upon request, at times having plays "co-opted" for political purposes. Throughout these difficult transitions, the three authors demonstrated the ability to preserve their artistic dignity, adapt to changing circumstances, and uphold their integrity of vision, even under enormous personal and professional pressures. Despite the similarity of their circumstances, each author followed a distinct artistic vision and style. Their careers likewise show great divergence, from the "insider" status accorded to Dumitru Radu Popescu to the "dissident" label attached to Iosif Naghiu. Throughout the study I raise questions about adaptation to political, social, and economic changes, the relationship between censorship, freedom, and creativity, as well as the larger context of interaction between theaters, publishers, and writers. In so doing, it is my intention to document three stories of artistic survival in the face of acute censorship in the former communist bloc and to incite interest for further analytical research in the dramatic work of Romania and other countries in the region.

The Context: Contemporary Theatre in Romania

Romania has made many contributions to world theatre over the years through its authors, actors, designers, and directors. Ion Luca Caragiale, Tristan Tzara,

Eugène Ionesco, Andrei Șerban, and Liviu Ciulei are just a few of the names familiar to the English-speaking world. Romania has maintained a very lively and creative theatre environment for the past 150 years. Because of political, geographical, and linguistic factors, however, very little has been written about Romanian theatre in more accessible languages, and extremely little has appeared in English.⁶

Theatre in Romania has been and still is a medium reaching millions of citizens. From before 1968 to the present, over forty professional theatres performing spoken drama have functioned in Romania, in addition to institutions devoted to dance, opera, puppetry, and performances for children. Productions are primarily in Romanian, but several stages are devoted to Hungarian, German, and Yiddish-language performances. Two theatre academies rigorously train actors, directors, and designers. This massive repertory system, supported by national and local governments, has produced thousands of Romanian plays, contemporary world drama, and classic works. To give some idea to the scale of activity, in the fall of 1971, 608 plays were either in preparation or in the repertory nation-wide.⁷ Annual attendance at drama and puppetry performances

⁶ Two abbreviated translations of Romanian theatre histories have been published: Simion Alterescu, ed., An Abridged History of Romanian Theatre (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România) and Medeea Ionescu, A Concise History of Theatre in Romania (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981), and Ruth Lamb published a short book in English of her experiences in The World of Romanian Theatre (Claremont, CA: Ocelot Press, 1976). A 1972 dissertation examined three playwrights during the thaw of 1969: Miles Warren Coiner, Jr., "After the Thaw: Three Playwrights and the Romanian Theatre in the Spring of 1969" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1972). The attached bibliography shows a similar paucity of translated plays or recent journal articles in English.

⁷ Coiner, 196.

during the 1980s was estimated at over six million.⁸

Even during the most severe periods of censorship, Romanian authors, directors, scenographers, and actors created theatre works of lasting worth and international merit. Although lacking an outright “dissident” theatre, Romanian audiences “came to feel that the theatre was one of few places, if not the only one, where people could experience a sense of resistance to political pressure and the decline in the standard of living.”⁹ Liviu Ciulei has likened the relationship between the Romanian government and the theatre since World War II to Constantin Brâncuși’s sculpture, “The Endless Column,” with its pattern of constriction and expansion.¹⁰ The most notable period of artistic freedom before 1989 came in the late 1960s. Buoyed by Romania’s condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and a cultural policy which encouraged interaction with the avant-garde of Europe as a reaction to Soviet-inspired socialist realism, many of today’s top playwrights established their reputations at that time. One western author, writing in 1968, spoke of the blossoming of Romanian theatre:

⁸ Mihai Vasiliu, Istoria teatrului românesc (Bucharest: Editura Didactica și Pedagogică, 1995), 60.

⁹ Marian Popescu, “The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Romania 1945-1989,” in The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Eastern and Central Europe 1945-1989, ed. Aktarina Pejovic (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland and DeBalie, 1995), 3.

¹⁰ Eric Pourchot, “Performing Arts of Romania at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts,” Slavic and East European Performance 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1996): 15. The metaphor was also used by Nina Cassian, interview by Lidia Vianu, Censorship in Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 41.

the theater has fared far better than most of Rumania's other arts . . . because the Bucharest stage is presenting all of contemporary Western drama—from Harold Pinter to Peter Weiss—Rumanian playwrights are forced to 'compete' with them. That is, the audiences will choose only those plays that are most relevant or most entertaining. This is another illustration of the expanding cultural horizon in Rumania. On stage everything is permitted except the portrayal of contemporary political truths.¹¹

Even during the 1970s and 1980s, the theatre landscape in Romania was not a desert. Romanian theatres toured abroad to great acclaim; Marin Sorescu's powerful historical dramas were staged; Liviu Ciulei, David Esrig, Lucian Pintilie and other Romanian directors became sought-after in Europe and the United States. As critic Eugen Simion stated, "we didn't live in a Siberia of the spirit, but in a harsh, very harsh epoch, during which we did everything [necessary to survive], but we also made culture."¹²

The events of December, 1989 abruptly changed the face of Romanian cultural activity. Following months of unrest and toppled governments throughout much of Eastern Europe, fighting erupted in the streets of Bucharest and other large cities of Romania. In the end, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife were executed and Ion Iliescu, a former high-ranking Communist Party member, assumed leadership. Although privatization and economic reforms have proceeded slowly, an immediate blossoming of freedom of expression accompanied the 1989 change of regime. The sudden release from the tight censorship of the pre-1989 years caught the theatres by surprise.

¹¹ Yorick Blumenfeld, Seesaw: Cultural Life in Eastern Europe (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 24.

¹² Eugen Simion, in "The Knights of the Round Table," Romanian Review, no. 6/7 (1993): 121.

Audiences left the theatres for the drama being played out in the streets. Political dissent could now be more openly expressed on stage, making the half-veiled allusions of the past scripts unnecessary. Even the National Theatres were freed from government dictates (or even accountability).¹³ Repertories developed over years had to be thrown out and rebuilt. Today, the theatres have found a new niche in the daily life of the country, and most are thriving again. They have survived economically through the continuation of heavy government subsidies, but the theatres have also ensured their artistic survival by exploring new production styles, emphasizing international touring, and introducing Romanian audiences to once-forbidden foreign authors.

Ironically, one of the casualties of freedom has been Romanian playwriting. Before 1989, the Ministry of Culture dictated that fifty percent of the repertory should be devoted to Romanian plays.¹⁴ The quota was met by a combination of new works, readings of poetry, and a selection of classics by I. L. Caragiale, B. P. Hașdeu, Vasile Alecsandri, Mihail Sebastian, George Zamfirescu, and others. Inevitably, some of the new works were heavy-handed propaganda pieces and some were poor plays by writers with political connections. After 1989, writers associated with the Ceaușescu regime were purged from many repertories, and theatre artists focused on productions which

¹³ The nationally-funded theatres were not required to submit financial or artistic reports to the Ministry of Culture after 1989. Nicolae Munteanu, Director General of the Institute of Performances and Concerts, Romanian Ministry of Culture, interview by author, Bucharest, 20 November 1996, tape recording.

¹⁴ Marian Popescu, "Dissident Muse," 3.

had formerly been forbidden. Despite efforts by UNITER (a union of Romanian theatres founded by actor Ion Caramitru, now Minister of Culture) and some theatres, such as the National Theatre in Bucharest, there had been relatively few stagings of new plays by Romanian authors, especially in Bucharest. A better balance between Romanian and foreign works has gradually evolved in the past few years.

Three Case Studies

The stories of Iosif Naghiu, Dumitru Radu Popescu, and Marin Sorescu are of three unflinching “survivors” of an extremely difficult period for Romanian authors. Their artistic merit is amply demonstrated by the publications, productions, and awards they have received over the three decades. Further, their lives and works demonstrate the various forms of resistance, adaptation, and challenge faced by dramatists in Romania. Other authors whose lives and works spanned this same period, such as Dumitru Solomon, Mihai Ispirescu, and George Genoiu, although certainly worthy of study, have not reached the prominence of Dumitru Radu Popescu or Marin Sorescu, and did not achieve as high of a profile as a “dissident” as did Iosif Naghiu.

Iosif Naghiu

Iosif Naghiu (b. 1932) is the least-known of the three playwrights. Although his plays have only rarely been performed outside of Romania, many compare favorably to those of Sławomir Mrożek or Eugène Ionesco.¹⁵ His relative obscurity has been due in large part to his continued opposition to authoritarianism and adherence

¹⁵ Irina Coroiu, “Iosif Naghiu,” Romanian Review, no. 11/12 (1994): 3.

to the techniques and world view of the theatre of the absurd, which kept him from receiving any significant official recognition in Romania before 1989. A poet and playwright, Naghiu is currently the Director of the Asociația Scriitorilor din București [Writers' Association of Bucharest]. He won success with a series of plays produced in Bucharest in the late 1960s and during the 1970s, beginning with Celuloid [Celluloid] in 1968. The scandal over his play, Gluga pe ochi [Hood Over the Eyes], produced at the Bulandra Theatre in 1972, contributed to the professional exile of director Lucian Pintilie, one of Romania's leading directors for film and stage. Although his plays were not often produced after those years, Naghiu continued to write and publish allegorical dramas which challenged the regime. Protected in part by Dumitru Radu Popescu, he survived with his reputation intact. His works were the first to be printed by both Teatrul azi and Luceafărul (a leading arts journal) in the winter of 1990 and he has gone on to win national prizes for his more recent plays. His plays have not changed significantly in style through twenty-five years of censorship but he has finally been applauded for his continued outspokenness.

Dumitru Radu Popescu

Dumitru Radu Popescu (b. 1935)¹⁶ is certainly the most prolific playwright of this period, with at least fifty published plays and seven produced screenplays. His

¹⁶ Popescu is a common name in Romania and he is normally referred to as either Dumitru Radu Popescu or D. R. Popescu to distinguish him from other writers, including Radu Popescu and Dumitru Popescu. Dumitru Popescu was the Propaganda Secretary for the Central Committee and a key figure associated with censorship during the Ceaușescu years. Marian Popescu, "Dissident Muse," 11, 26.

career has probably had the widest range of fortunes of the three, from having his works banned to serving on the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Despite his high political position, he is still respected, read, and performed to this day. He also had a reputation for circumventing censorship and assisting other writers (such as Iosif Naghiu and Marin Sorescu) with their problems with the government. In a recent interview, he said that he had always written what he believed.¹⁷ He felt he was protected somewhat by his visibility, although he did cite instances of heavy censorship of his novels and plays.

Dumitru Radu Popescu first made his literary mark in the late 1950s and 1960s with essays and novels. Although he also wrote several early plays, it was not until 1966 that his first dramatic work was produced. Chairman of the Writer's Union and a member of the Central Committee for several years, Dumitru Radu Popescu could be considered an "insider" in Romanian politics, but his works also demonstrate a constant critical and often satirical view of petty officials and managers and a deep distrust of any doctrine that is not firmly rooted in respect for daily human needs and material reality. This humanistic view, along with the international attention gained by translations of his novels, may account for the fact that Dumitru Radu Popescu has remained a respected novelist and playwright throughout his career.

The importance of Dumitru Radu Popescu in contemporary Romanian literature and drama can hardly be disputed. One theatre historian lists Popescu as one of the

¹⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 27 November 1996, tape recording.

four most-produced playwrights in Romania between 1944 and 1984.¹⁸ From 1959 to 1974, he published ten novels, marking him as “unul dintre prozatorii cei mai originali de azi” [one of the most original prose writers of today].¹⁹ One of the novels in his “F cycle,” Vinătoarea regală [The Royal Hunt], published in 1973, has been translated into at least eight languages, including English.²⁰ His plays have won several national prizes within Romania and have also been produced in France, China, Japan, Hungary, and Estonia.

Marin Sorescu

Marin Sorescu (b. 1936), died December 8, 1996. Undoubtedly the leading Romanian literary figure of recent years within Romania and abroad, he is known primarily as a poet, but also had a great deal of success as a playwright. At least five of his plays have appeared in English translations, and Iona [Jonah], an early monodrama, has been produced world-wide. That same play marked the beginnings of government suspicions about his political leanings, and he was followed by government agents throughout the 1970s and 1980s, even when traveling abroad. He was subject to government harassment during the Ceaușescu years, and was targeted for assassination

¹⁸ Vasiliu, 107.

¹⁹ Dimitrie Păcurariu, ed., Dictionar de literatura romăna scriitor, reviste, curente (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1979), 310.

²⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, The Royal Hunt, trans. J. E. Cottrell and M. Bogdan (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1985).

by the securitate (secret police) in 1988.²¹ He speculated that his international reputation prevented the government from taking overt action against him. The poetic and metaphorical quality of his works, which prevents any single “meaning” to be attributed to them, may have also aided him politically. He also consistently avoids assigning specific interpretations to his works in interviews.²² Sorescu’s plays range from the abstract monodramas of Iona and Paracliserul [The Verger] to poetic historical dramas such as A treia teapă [The Third Pale] and Răceala [A Cold], comedy, as in Casa evantai [The Fan House], and metatheatre, such as Vărul Shakespeare [Cousin Shakespeare].

Since 1989, Sorescu published several volumes of poetry, including older pieces which could not previously be released. From 1993 to 1995, he served as Minister of Culture and made new enemies because of his apparent support for the neo-communist government, desire to preserve the repertory system, desire to reinstate quotas if needed to sustain the works of native writers in the repertories, and unwillingness to give handouts to friends. Those duties and his failing health limited his artistic output, although he oversaw many new editions of his earlier works.

Methodology and Organization of the Study

The study is based on a combination of dramatic texts, critical reception, production histories, published comments by the authors, and interviews, along with

²¹ Virginia Sorescu, conversation with author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

²² Marin Sorescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

material on the political, social, and economic forces at work in the country. In this manner, an attempt is made to follow Vera Mowry Roberts's model of placing cultural phenomena into historical and social perspective.²³

A full discussion of the life and works of any one of these authors would require several volumes. Dumitru Radu Popescu alone, in addition to numerous essays and short fiction works, has written at least seven screenplays and published over thirty volumes of prose and fifty (often lengthy) dramatic works. As one editor stated, noting Dumitru Radu Popescu's wide diversity of genres and styles, "Ne îndreptăm spre opera lui D. R. Popescu cu teama pe care o avem de a intra într-un labirint." [We approach the work of D. R. Popescu with the same qualms we would have of entering a labyrinth.]²⁴ I have attempted, however, to include key works by each author covering four historic periods: 1968-1971 (the "thaw," when censorship was applied very lightly), 1971-1972 (the beginning of Romania's version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution), 1972-1989 (a period of fluctuations in official policy toward the theatre, but generally marked by increasingly restricted intellectual freedoms and severe economic hardships), and 1989-1998 (after the overthrow of Ceaușescu, the lifting of censorship, and adaptations to new social and economic forces). Plays discussed are

²³ Vera Mowry Roberts, On Stage: A History of Theatre, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), xi.

²⁴ Valeriu Râpeanu, ed., O antologie a dramaturgiei românești 1944-1977: teatrul de inspirație contemporană (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1978), 420. This, and all other translations are mine except as otherwise noted. Because the source materials are generally difficult to locate, I have chosen to give both the original Romanian quotations and the English translations within the body of the text, an arrangement intended to be less awkward than lengthy footnotes or appendices.

selected to be representative of the particular periods, but also exemplify outstanding artistic achievements, as evidenced by publication, production, critical acclaim, and awards received. By necessity, examples from Dumitru Radu Popescu's works will outweigh those from the other authors, due partly to his prolific output but also because of the wide variety of styles and subjects he employs, which makes categorization much more difficult. Overall, the events and works included here are intended to illustrate how these three authors adapted, but never capitulated, to political, artistic, and economic changes over the years.

Sources

Despite the prominence of these three authors, relatively few studies have been published in Romanian touching upon them, and most of those few deal with their plays in literary terms rather than as performed works. No extended material on Iosif Naghiu has been published to date. At least three book-length studies have appeared on Dumitru Radu Popescu: Dumitru Radu Popescu by Mirela Roznoveanu, Marian Popescu's Chei pentru labirint, which also includes essays on Marin Sorescu, and Dumitru Radu Popescu interpretat de..., edited by Andreea Vlădescu Lupu.²⁵ Several works on Sorescu have been published, most notably Marin Sorescu, instantaneu critic

²⁵ Mirela Roznoveanu, Dumitru Radu Popescu (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1981); Marian Popescu, Chei pentru labirint (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1986); Andreea Vlădescu Lupu, ed., Dumitru Radu Popescu interpretat de..., (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1987).

by Mihaela Andreescu and Marin Sorescu și deconstructivismul by Maria-Ana Tupan.²⁶

Most recently, Fănuș Băileșteanu published Marin Sorescu: studiu monografic.²⁷

Works describing Romanian theatre since 1989 are even more scarce. The only significant work covering the 1989-1996 period which I have located is an unpublished dissertation from the Academy of Theatre and Film in Bucharest by Ludmila Patlanjoglu, “Continuități și discontinuități în teatrul românesc după Decembrie ‘89” [Continuities and Discontinuities in Romanian Theatre after 1989], completed in 1996. Patlanjoglu takes a theatre critic’s point of view toward the period and uses little documentation from the post-1989 period to support her generalizations. Her work does offer many intriguing opinions and insights to work from, however. Another useful, although limited, source is Mihai Vasiliu’s Istoria teatrului românesc, published in 1995. Inspector General of Theatre from 1973 to 1980, Vasiliu offers many statistics on theatre productions before 1989, including a breakdown of the most-produced foreign and native authors. Despite the publication date, material from after 1989 is scarce. A great deal of information on the pressures of censorship is contained in two works also previously cited: Lidia Vianu’s recent collection of interviews with Romanian authors and Marian Popescu’s contribution to The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Eastern and Central Europe 1945-1989.

²⁶ Mihaela Andreescu, Marin Sorescu, instantaneu critic (Bucharest: Editural Albatros, 1983); Maria-Ana Tupan, Marin Sorescu și deconstructivismul (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, 1995).

²⁷ Fănuș Băileșteanu, Marin Sorescu: studiu monografic (Bucharest: Editura Steaua Procion, 1998).

Even though most plays published in Romania appear without introductions or other explanatory notes, this study makes use of a few anthologies which do contain introductory remarks by the editor and playwright, critical commentaries, and production histories. Many interviews, essays, and reviews are cited from the journals Teatrul, Teatrul azi, Scena, Semnal teatral, Rampa și ecranul, and Curierul românesc. In addition, several translations and essays in English by and about these authors have appeared in Romanian Review. Lastly, interviews by the author with the three authors and other theatre artists are used to verify and amplify the uneven and sometimes contradictory documentation available from published sources.

Overview

Chapter two offers a description of theatre production in Romania during the “thaw” of 1965-1971 when the three authors first made their national reputations as playwrights and authors. Each author used allegory, abstraction, and the techniques of the theatre of the absurd during this period—strategies which opened up many possible levels of interpretation. Naghiu’s Absența [Absence], Popescu’s Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor [Caesar, the Pirate’s Fool], and Sorescu’s Iona are discussed at length as illustrations of this important, although short-lived, period. Chapter three deals with three plays by these authors which met varying fates under the Chinese-inspired cultural revolution of 1971. In chapter four, I explore various ways in which these authors attempted to work within the system by adapting their style to the more realistic mode demanded by censors or by writing about officially sanctioned topics. The

following chapter examines two important plays by Dumitru Radu Popescu which can be considered constructive criticism—not challenging the basic legitimacy of the regime, but pointing out flaws to be corrected. Chapter six focuses on history plays as a strategy for criticism, and chapter seven looks at the period of cultural liberation but economic and intellectual turmoil following the 1989 overthrow of Ceaușescu. Finally, in chapter eight, I connect the three cases to the larger context of Romanian theatre today, with a look at the repertory, audience expectations, and the future outlook for Romanian playwriting.

If successful, the study will leave the reader with a better sense of the artistic worth of the three selected playwrights and will encourage further study and performance of these talented and multi-faceted authors. The awareness that these case studies are just three among many others who deserve to be discovered may also encourage other researchers to continue the exploration of drama and performance in the region.

CHAPTER TWO
ABSTRACTION, ALLEGORY, AND THE ABSURD:
CONFOUNDING THE CENSORS

The “Thaw” of 1965-1971

The late 1960s saw a flowering of experimentation, foreign influences, and great creativity in Romanian drama. Although post-war Romanian culture suffered through many oscillations between tight censorship and a more relaxed attitude, this period was undoubtedly the most liberal for the performing arts until the revolution of 1989. Change occurred very quickly, especially from 1968 to 1971, spurred by external as well as internal politics. The causes and scope of this change and the new characteristics of drama written during the period, particularly as seen in the works of Marin Sorescu, Iosif Naghiu, and Dumitru Radu Popescu, are the focus of this chapter.

Many years of preparation preceded the “thaw.” When the Soviet Union occupied Romania following World War II, it established firm control over publication and performances. A formal office of censor was established to pre-approve any theatrical productions, and works were censored both for content as well as artistic style. The censors were, for many years, Russian.¹ Russian ballet and opera became

¹ Herbert C. Rand, “Pages from the Past: Liviu Ciulei’s Restoring Theatricality to the Art of the Theatre,” Slavic and East European Performance 14, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 32.

the norm for dance and opera companies, and Russian plays and the Stanislavski approach to acting were imposed on the Romanian theatre.² Although Romanian works quickly entered the repertory, socialist realism remained the expected norm.

Stalin's death in 1953 opened the door for new voices. In 1956, Liviu Ciulei, already a noted director, actor, and designer, published the landmark article, "Despre teatralizarea picturii de scenă" [On the Theatricality of Scenery] in Teatrul, Romania's leading theatre journal.³ Ciulei, spurred to speak out after witnessing the experimentation in scenic design practiced in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other Eastern European countries, called for a move away from decorative naturalism in scene design and toward a selective, theatrical simplicity which communicates a poetic or artistic reality and fulfills a dramatic, rather than merely pictorial, function. Such efforts by Ciulei and others prior to 1956 were initially labeled as "formalism," but ultimately prevailed.⁴

In the same manner as Romanian scenography had changed in response to practices in other European countries, exposure to the plays of the French avant-garde and other contemporary foreign authors began to change Romanian playwriting and

² Marian Popescu, "The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Romania 1945-1989," in The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Eastern and Central Europe 1945-1989, ed. Aktarina Pejovic (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland and DeBalie, 1995), 3.

³ Liviu Ciulei, "Despre teatralizarea picturii de scenă," Teatrul, no. 2 (1956): 52-56; Liviu Ciulei, "On the Theatricality of Scenery," trans. Herbert Rand, Slavic and East European Performance 14, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 34-41.

⁴ Ciulei, "Theatricality," 35.

audience tastes during the 1960s. Plays by authors such as Sławomir Mrożek, Albert Camus, Jean Genêt, Luigi Pirandello, and Harold Pinter were performed in Romania during the 1960s.⁵ The Theatre of Comedy produced a series of Eugène Ionesco's plays in Bucharest, translated from the French: Rhinocéros (with Radu Beligan as Berenger), Les Chaises, La Cantatrice chauve, and Victimes du devoir.⁶

In 1965, film critic Ecaterina Oproiu's stage debut, Nu sînt Turnul Eiffel [I am not the Eiffel Tower] broke the socialist realism mold completely. Her two young characters, "He" and "She," conduct a conversation that develops through a montage effect, and are "placed in a double situation of actual and seeming reality" as their opinions and feelings diverge over time.⁷ The play was called "a shock comedy, with shock-situations and the alert rhythm of the time; it expresses synthetically, in a cinematographic language, in mottos, cues and programmic ideas . . . a part of the contradictory and dynamic spirit of the epoch."⁸ Oproiu's expressionistic, non-linear drama opened doors for other experiments with dramatic structure.⁹ In 1966, the official ban on avant garde forms was belatedly lifted and official censorship of

⁵ Simion Alterescu, ed., An Abridged History of the Romanian Theatre (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1983), 151, 157, 169.

⁶ Ibid., 169-70.

⁷ Ruth S. Lamb, The World of Romanian Theatre (Claremont, CA: Ocelot Press, 1976), 37.

⁸ Alterescu, 145.

⁹ Bogdan Mişchiu, "Rumania," in Cambridge Guide to World Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 851.

publications ended.

Performances, however, were still subject to censorship and had to be approved by the State Committee on Culture and Art before public performances could be given.¹⁰ The Romanian government had an important reason to keep close control over theatre production. Not only were all theatres funded by the government but theatre in Romania was, and to a large extent still is, a popular medium rather than an art form for the elite. A survey during the 1969-1970 theatre season in Bucharest found that 35% of the population attended at least one theatre performance that year.¹¹ Thus, as one author stated in comparing Romanian theatre attendance with patterns in the United States, "in Romania the theatre not only upholds high standards in production but is a truly powerful voice within the country."¹² Artistic freedom did not necessarily generate larger audiences, however. A review of attendance records showed that, although attendance averaged 4.2 million people per year, the 1969-1972 period had the lowest national theatre attendance figures in the period of 1948 to 1972.¹³

In the mid-1960s, political divergence from the Soviet line further encouraged

¹⁰ Miles Warren Coiner, Jr., "After the Thaw: Three Playwrights and the Romanian Theatre in the Spring of 1969," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1972), 5.

¹¹ Pavel Câmpeanu, "Stagiunea bucureșteană 1969-1970 și publicul său," Contemporanul, 28 August 1970, 4.

¹² Coiner, 11.

¹³ Pavel Câmpeanu, in Teatrul românesc contemporan 1944-1974, ed. Simion Alterescu and Ion Zamfirescu (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1975), quoted in Marian Popescu, "Muse," 19.

artistic divergence. Following the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, Nicolae Ceaușescu became secretary general of the Communist Party and built a popular following with his liberalization of cultural activities and anti-Soviet foreign policies. In 1967, Romania was the only country in the Soviet bloc not to condemn Israel during the Arab-Israeli War. A year later, Romania was the only active Warsaw Pact country to refuse to intervene militarily in Czechoslovakia, and Ceaușescu publicly condemned the invasion which ended the “Prague Spring.”¹⁴

Within the brief six-year window of the thaw, many authors who are now considered among the best post-war dramatists blossomed: Dumitru Solomon, George Genoiu, Iosif Naghiu, Marin Sorescu, Dumitru Radu Popescu, Ion Băieșu, Teodor Mazilu, and others.¹⁵ It was not only a period when experimentation in form was allowed but also a period of hope. The move away from the Soviet Union and the end of the dictatorship of Gheorghiu-Dej created the possibility of a more open and participatory form of communism, as expressed in the new constitution adopted in 1965.¹⁶

¹⁴ Kurt W. Treptow, ed., A History of Romania, 3d ed. (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1997), 616-617. Albania was not an active participant in the Warsaw Pact after 1960. For an example of how vulnerable Romanians felt to Soviet retaliation, see the account concerning the panic caused in 1968 by posters for the play by George Astalos, The Soldiers are Coming, in George Astalos, Contestatory Visions: Five Plays, trans. Ronald Bogue (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 11.

¹⁵ Mihai Vasiliu, Istoria teatrului românesc (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1995), 104-123.

¹⁶ Eugene K. Keefe and others, Area Handbook for Romania (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 113.

Miles Warren Coiner, Jr. postulated that several factors made the unprecedented blossoming of artistic talent and experimentation of the late 1960s possible: 1) the country was united behind Ceaușescu as the man who stood up to the Soviets (and thus dissent became less of a threat), 2) in the general rejection of Soviet influences, western aesthetics were seen to be replacements for Soviet-mandated aesthetics, 3) official discouragement of experimental forms was lifted, 4) strong training programs and highly experienced personnel enabled the theatres to handle new and complex works, 5) the State Committee on Culture and Art, which still had censorship powers over film and theatre productions, had been successfully challenged by a strengthened Writers' Union .¹⁷

Although the artistic climate was considerably freer from 1965 to 1971, the continued screening of productions by censors meant that political and social criticism found in drama was veiled rather than overt. The newly-allowed use of abstraction and allegory, often drawn from the theatre of the absurd, frequently cloaked a philosophical or social content that would not otherwise be allowed. Examples of this artifice can be seen in the early plays of Marin Sorescu, Iosif Naghiu, and Dumitru Radu Popescu. In this chapter, I look at key works of the period by the three authors, with special focus on seven representative plays: Sorescu's poetic monologues, Iona [Jonah] and Paracliserul [The Verger]; Naghiu's short abstract works, as seen in Week-end and Celuloid [Celluloid], along with the more naturalistic but allegorical Absenta

¹⁷ Coiner, 14.

[Absence]; and two allegorical works by Dumitru Radu Popescu—the expressionistic Damen-vals [Ladies' Waltz] and the absurdist Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor [Caesar, the Pirates' Fool]. Most of these works would be removed from the repertoires in 1971 (as will be discussed in chapter three), but their influence can be traced into the post-1989 era.

The Poetic Ambiguity of Marin Sorescu

Marin Sorescu, already a popular poet and a maker of animated cartoons, burst onto Romanian stages in the spring of 1969 with two striking dramas: Iona [Jonah], a monodrama in a symbolic/poetic style, and Există nervi [Nerves Exist] which seemed to draw upon the theatre of the absurd, but with overt political connotations.¹⁸ In 1970, Sorescu published Paracliserul, demonstrating a continuation of the stylistic innovation of Iona as well as dealing sympathetically with religious mysticism.

Există nervi was published in the literary journal Luceafărul in 1968 and received a student production at I.T.A.C. (The Institute of Theatre and Film Art).¹⁹ The production was reviewed by a censor before opening but, surprisingly, no revisions or cuts were demanded.²⁰ However, Există nervi was not produced again until 1981.

¹⁸ Marin Sorescu was born in the province of Dolj in 1936 and received his Diploma from the Faculty of Philology, History, and Pedagogy in Iași, 1960. He then moved to Bucharest and served as editor for Viata studentească and Luceafărul from 1960 to 1966. He made his debut in 1964 with a volume of parodies, Singur printre poeți (Alone Among Poets), which earned him a reputation as an “ironist.”

¹⁹ Marin Sorescu, Există nervi, in Luceafărul, 22 September 1968, 4-6.

²⁰ Coiner, 64.

The circumstances behind this gap will be explored more fully in chapter three.

Iona: Poetry in the Belly of the Beast

Iona received a much-discussed production at Teatrul Mic in 1969 by the young director Andrei Șerban. Although the production received mixed reviews and was not retained in the repertory the following year, the script itself received a great deal of praise from critics and aroused great interest internationally. It has been performed in Switzerland, France, Poland, the United States, and other countries.²¹ Translations have been made into several languages, including an excellent English version.²² Iona could not be staged again in Romania until 1990 due to renewed censorship, but continued to be read, analyzed, and included in theatre histories throughout the Ceaușescu period and after.²³

What made Iona so notable was its lyricism and deliberate ambiguity. Marin Sorescu rarely spoke about “the meaning” of his poetry or plays. As with good poetry, any attempt to find a one-to-one correlation between image and meaning diminishes

²¹ Ileana Berlogea, “Contemporary Plays, as a Means of Knowledge and Human Communion,” Romanian Review, no. 2 (1974): 132.

²² Marin Sorescu, Jonah, trans. Andrea Deletant and Brenda Walker, in The Thirst of the Salt Mountain (London: Forest Books, 1985), 1-28.

²³ Although Sorescu’s plays could not be performed in Romania, foreign performances were held up as proof of the vitality of Romanian culture. See, for example, Ana Maria Popescu, “Romanian Playwrights on the World’s Stages,” Romanian Review, no. 1 (1976): 84-86. Sorescu’s stature was nevertheless deserved; one study guide on dramatic writing includes three of his plays, including Iona, in the fourteen dramas examined. Augustin and Dorina Macarie, Dramaturgia (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1995).

rather than illuminates the play. Sorescu writes in a deliberately obscure manner, inviting discussion, thought, and a multiplicity of responses. Such ambiguity was in itself a challenge to the rationality underpinning Marxist-Leninist thought. The excitement and controversy surrounding Iona, therefore, did not center on political content but on the apparent success of a truly poetic and ambiguous drama.

Briefly, the main action of the play involves Jonah's encounter with loneliness, with the whale, and with himself. Jonah cuts himself out of one whale only to find himself in another. In the end, he turns his knife on his own stomach in what seems to be more an act of self-discovery than of suicide. Other than two encounters with two silent men from his village who do not recognize or acknowledge him, Jonah remains alone on stage, speaking to himself, the sea, and the fish. An excerpt from the opening scene conveys a sense of the style of the piece:

(Calling) Jonah!

Nothing.

(Calling) I don't want to catch you here. Do you hear me, Jonah? Stop following me about. **(He pauses)**

Actually I'm Jonah. Shhh! Don't let the fishes find out. That's why I call, to mislead them, because you see, Jonah's unlucky and that's all there is to it. The fish have to think he's fishing somewhere else. Anywhere, God knows where!

(Laughing) I think he ought to fish in another sea. Maybe there...

But do you really think you can change your sea?

Ah, no way.²⁴

By directing the speeches at various real and imaginary audiences, asking questions and then answering them, and speaking of himself in the third person, Sorescu's Jonah

²⁴ Sorescu, Jonah, 4.

develops a varied and intriguing verbal fugue, despite the limitations of a soliloquy. There is little in the way of traditional dramatic structure to the piece. One critic outlined this explicitly: “Iona este un dialog despre raportul dintre conștiință și existență, din care orice urmă de echilibru socratic a dispărut . . . Conflictul teatral se dezvoltă între tendința de împăcare, de resemnare blajină și impulsul faustic al cunoașterii.” [Jonah is a dialogue about the relationship between consciousness and existence, from which any trace of Socratic equilibrium has disappeared . . . The theatrical conflict develops between the tendency toward reconciliation, of meek resignation, and the Faustian impulse for knowledge.]²⁵

Compared to works produced in the late 1960s in Western Europe and the United States, the play, although mysteriously powerful and layered with imagery, appears rather harmless. Sorescu’s interest seems to lie in the existential and metaphysical rather than political. However, this same detachment from politics, history, and economics was a sharp break from the didactic, class-conscious works advocated by the communist regime. The play, along with most of Sorescu’s poetry and drama, hinted at aestheticism and was not “optimistic.” Andrei Șerban explained the ban on Iona in an interview after 1989: “Piesa a fost interzisă după câteva reprezentații sub pretextul că sala era goală, adevărul fiind că biletele au fost oprite să vândă, iar la spectacole oamenii nu erau lăsați să intre.” [The play was forbidden after a few performances on the pretext that the theatre was empty, but the truth was that the

²⁵ Vicu Mîndra, review of Iona, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Mic, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 6 (1969): 18-19.

tickets were banned from sale, and at the performances, people were not allowed to enter.]²⁶ Its theme of freedom and lack of a clear ideological, didactic function made the play difficult to stage again in Romania for many years.²⁷

Although reviewers wrote that the original production was weakened by the undeveloped characterization of Jonah and overwhelmed by the scenery, the script was recognized as a powerful and original work.²⁸ At least three critics hailed the work as one of the “most significant literary dramatic events”²⁹ Another reviewer echoed the importance of the play: “Nu ne îndoim că piesa lui Marin Sorescu deschide un capitol tulburător în istoria dramaturgiei noastre și că data primei sale reprezentări nu va rămîne indiferentă viitorului.” [We do not doubt that Marin Sorescu’s play opens an exciting chapter in the history of our dramaturgy and that its first production will not remain unknown to future generations.]³⁰

Despite this hope and the large resources devoted to the production,³¹ the play

²⁶ Andrei Șerban, interview by Ludmila Patlanjoglu, “Continuități și discontinuități în teatrul românesc după decembrie ‘89” (Ph.D. diss., I.A.T.C., Bucharest, 1996), appendix, 16-17.

²⁷ In a report issued by the State Committee for Culture and Art, Sorescu was specifically asked to consider the effect of his works on the public and to avoid ambiguity. Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, “Despre stagiunea 1970-1971 și unele probleme privind pregătirea stagiunii 1971-1972,” *Teatrul*, no. 8 (1971): 17.

²⁸ Coiner, 104.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁰ Mîndra, 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*

was not produced in Romania again until after 1989. It became one of the best-known Romanian plays abroad, however, with the result that the play retained a prominent place in theatre history and criticism. Film versions were produced in Denmark and Hungary; stage versions in Finland, Poland, Switzerland, France, West Germany, the U.S., Italy, the Netherlands, India, and other countries.³² The ambiguity of the work kept it from being restaged in Romania, however. The problems were clearly acknowledged in 1969:

Marin Sorescu's tragedy Jonah is perhaps the best illustration of what modern criticism calls "opera aperta" (open work). This is indeed a symbolical play, open to all interpretations, the construction of which, though of exceptional rigour and unity, leaves free numberless valencies of its elements. This is a modern structure because it does not agree to the world being univocal, it also organically incorporates the principle of things being relative: the absolute as such does not exist, it is the outcome of relativity, and motion, development, the sense of life are to be found by this means alone.³³

The structure of the play was thus fundamentally incompatible with a regime led by an absolute dictator who "was depicted as both the interpreter and a source of Marxism-Leninism, which manifested itself in a practical type of ideology known as Ceau[s]escuism, which, however, became increasingly divorced from reality."³⁴

Several productions after 1989 restored Iona to its rightful place in the

³² Marin Sorescu, "Something Like a Preface," in The Thirst of the Salt Mountain, trans. Andrea Deletant and Brenda Walker (London: Forest Books, 1985), xi; Virginia Sorescu, "Marin Sorescu: nota biobibliografica," TMs [photocopy] provided to the author, June, 1998.

³³ Ion Pascadi, "A New Dramatist: Marin Sorescu," Romanian Review 23, no. 4 (1969): 118.

³⁴ Robert Weiner, "Democratization in Romania," in Romania in Transition, ed. Lavinia Stan (Aldershot, England: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1996), 6.

Romanian repertory. The play was produced for radio in 1990 and at the National Theatre in Bucharest in 1992.³⁵ Both the National Theatres of Craiova and Timișoara staged the work in 1995 and two critics nominated Iona as the best production of a contemporary Romanian play for that season.³⁶

Paracliserul: Mysticism Meets Materialism

Iona was by no means an isolated experiment. Sorescu subsequently wrote two additional plays to create a trilogy which he called Setea muntelui de sare [The Thirst of the Salt Mountain]. Paracliserul [The Verger], written in 1970, is a monodrama set in a cathedral. Its obscure symbolism and religious nature made it very difficult to produce at the time but it was successfully staged in 1997. Matca [The Source or The Matrix], composed in 1973 in response to the disastrous floods of 1970, uses a larger cast to create a sense of family and community, even though all the action revolves around the single character of the young mother trapped in the flood. More transparent in meaning and viewed as an ode to the strength of the Romanian people in overcoming the natural calamity, Matca received less criticism than the earlier plays. In style and content, as well as chronology, it belongs to a later period of Romanian playwriting and will be discussed in chapter four.

Paracliserul was originally to be directed and performed by Liviu Ciulei at the

³⁵ "Spectacolele în festival," Teatrul azi, no. 9/10 (1991): 22; Alice Georgescu, review of Iona, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 1 (1992): 9.

³⁶ "Cel mai bun... cea mai bună," Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1996): 32-33.

Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest. Caught in the change of cultural ideology in 1971, the production never materialized.³⁷ In the end, the play received its first performance in Yugoslavia in 1973³⁸ and did not receive its Romanian premiere until the summer of 1981 in the small mining town of Petroșani. A second production followed in 1982, but the play was not staged again until the winter of 1997 at the National Theatre in Bucharest, except for a 1990 performance for radio.

Paracliserul, like Iona, is a play of internal, rather than external, events. The action of the play centers on the Verger (a lay employee of the church) and his attempts to blacken the walls of the church with candle soot, since no one comes to light candles anymore. He is daunted by the immensity of his task, the cost of candles, and the deaf watchman, who keeps removing his scaffolding. Sorescu explained the situation as belonging to what he perceived as a new age: “People function less and less with pure spirit, holiness now belonging, as in ancient times, to the realm of wilderness. This doesn’t stop the Verger from climbing the walls in search of himself.”³⁹ At the end of the play, he floats, then rises into the dome of the church. Beyond life now, he sets fire to his clothes to bathe the church in light.

When Paracliserul was finally performed in Romania in 1981, the play was still

³⁷ Sorescu, “Something Like a Preface,” x.

³⁸ Virginia Sorescu, “Marin Sorescu: Curriculum Vitae,” TMs [photocopy] provided to the author, June, 1998, confirming general information in Irina Coroiu, review of Paracliserul, by Marin Sorescu (National Theatre, Bucharest), Curierul românesc 9, no. 2 (Feb 1997): 10.

³⁹ Sorescu, “Something Like a Preface,” ix.

seen as “originală parabolă filozofică a drumului spre adevăr” [an original philosophical parable of the journey toward truth].⁴⁰ The studio production used three actors for the role of the Verger, as well as a silent female character. A 1982 production by director/designer/actor George Custeră demonstrated the difficulty of truly decoding the text rather than merely establishing moods.⁴¹

The National Theatre of Bucharest began previews of Paracliserul in 1996 but the play did not officially open until 1997, shortly after Sorescu’s death. The opening was delayed due to a fall taken by the lead actor, Damian Crășmaru. This physical danger in performing the play was alluded to by Sorescu in his preface to the British edition of the play as a metaphor for the artistic risks involved.⁴² The layers of meanings still had power, twenty-five years later. Irina Coroiu called it “o tragedie parodică. În spatele aparentei simplități a conflictului–lupta omului cu sine însuși, mai exact, lupta cu abstracțiunea cunoașterii și credinței, a creației–se ascunde o încărcătură simbolică având dublă semnificație filosofică.” [a parodic tragedy. Behind an apparently simple conflict–man’s struggle with himself, or more exactly, the struggle with abstract knowledge and beliefs, with creation itself–there lies a symbolic load with double philosophical meanings.]⁴³ The actor, however, was criticized for not

⁴⁰ Constantin Paraschivescu, review of Paracliserul, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul de Stat “Valea Jiului,” Petroșani), Teatrul, no. 10 (1981): 32.

⁴¹ Dinu Kivu, review of Paracliserul, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul de Stat, Reșița), Teatrul, no. 12 (1982): 31.

⁴² Sorescu, “Something of a Preface,” x.

⁴³ Irina Coroiu, review of Paracliserul, 10.

capturing the irony of the play.⁴⁴ Twenty-five years after the fact, the question of whether the play drew from the theatre of the absurd seemed irrelevant. As another reviewer remarked, “Paracliserul este însă, deopotrivă un poem, și atunci putem vorbi despre un imago liric în care absurdul nu-și mai găsește loc.” [The Verger is also a poem, and as such, we can speak of a lyric image in which the absurd does not find a place anymore.]⁴⁵

Sorescu did not abandon the “ambiguity” seen in Iona and Paracliserul but continued to have difficulties getting his works produced in Romania. Plays written in a more “concrete” style, such as his history plays (to be discussed in chapter six) met with less resistance from censors and theatre managers.

Iosif Naghiu and the Theatre of the Absurd

Iosif Naghiu began his playwriting career in the late 1960s with a series of poetic plays combining naturalistic dialogue with disturbing situations and abstract settings, in a manner reminiscent of Sławomir Mrożek and Eugène Ionesco. Many of his early plays are very short, including Celuloid [Celluloid], first produced in 1968, and Week-end, but several of his full-length works also received productions, beginning with Absența [Absence] in 1969 at Teatrul Giulești. Although his early plays met with some of the same censorship problems faced by those of Marin Sorescu, Naghiu did not have Sorescu’s popularity and international prestige to protect him.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Sebastian-Vlad Popa, review of Paracliserul, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 3 (1997): 20.

Iosif Naghiu's dramatic works can be roughly divided between short plays which can be read primarily as allegories, with little character development and absurd situations, and longer dramas with more fully developed characters in which the dramatic action is primarily psychological. Both trends can be seen in Naghiu's earliest plays. Despite the stylistic variations, Naghiu is consistently critical of human flaws such as fear and jealousy which he views as leading to both the self-destructive act of denying basic human needs and the socially destructive act of war. The following discussion concentrates on a prize-winning short work, Week-end, and Naghiu's first two plays to be produced: Celuloid and Absenta.

Week-end: A Parable of Pacificism

Week-end is a short anti-war parable, very much in the tradition of many other plays written during the Vietnam War era, such as the short black comedies of Terrence McNally. The four-scene play won an award in 1968 from the State Committee for Culture and the Arts and was published in the collection, Autostop, in 1969.⁴⁶ The play is set in a clearing in the woods, where a family of three is about to have a picnic and camp for the night. Their escape from everyday worries is marred, however, by the presence of a young soldier. Although he makes no motion, the family members are disturbed by his presence. Birds fall dead from the sky at the Soldier's glance. Max, the father, tries unsuccessfully to drive the soldier off, which

⁴⁶ Iosif Naghiu, Week-end, in Autostop (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1969), 33-40.

only arouses the Mother's sympathies for the young soldier. The Soldier is revealed to be blind and is unaware that he has killed anything.

In the second scene, noises are heard from a nearby woods which, although described in the stage directions as "merry voices," alarm the Mother.⁴⁷ Max at first dismisses her fears but the Mother attacks him for his suggestion to appease the "robbers": "They'll want more and they'll take more because you're an idler who is going to get himself strangled if he doesn't do the same as this well-trained young man who is fortunately here and can defend our spiritual and material freedom."⁴⁸ Max becomes more concerned when the people in the other wood step forward at the same time as the Mother steps toward them, but continues to quote Erasmus concerning the evils of war.

The third scene shows an escalation of preparedness, with the Mother up in a tree watching the other woods through binoculars. She berates Max for philosophizing and reading while she stands guard. She refuses to come down from the tree, saying "what would be the point in sacrificing oneself if one were seated too comfortably... (Shrieking) We want to fight and die for our beloved week-end..."⁴⁹ Max timidly tries to argue with her, but is interrupted by a loudspeaker announcement from the neighboring wood, which asks for beautification of the landscape. The scene ends with

⁴⁷ Iosif Naghiu, Week-End, trans. Anda Teodorescu, in Romanian Review, no. 1 (1971): 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

a call to arms:

A VOICE. In conclusion, let us open wide new windows towards nature
(cheers).

THE MOTHER. Did you hear that? To open wide new windows... Not only
the surrounding space. We will not allow that.

THE SOLDIER. No... no... We will fight... (loads his gun) against fascism.

MAX. What fascists? They are horticulturists... It's an obsession with you...

THE MOTHER (to the Soldier). Did you hear that? He called us obsessed.
And he calls himself a learned man.

THE SOLDIER. Down with... down with... culture (grips Max by the hands).

THE MOTHER (stirring in the tree). Death to... culture (the branch cracks and
she falls down on the pile of books).

MAX. How lucky you fell on the books... otherwise you could have broken
your legs.⁵⁰

In the final scene, Ben, the son, is marching up and down in uniform, gun in hand. A statue has been erected for the Soldier who “went, book in hand, to the skirt of the wood, read two lines, then gasped, rolled his eyes and dropped dead.”⁵¹ Max is tied to a tree and his books have been burnt, although he protests that it wasn't his fault the Soldier “couldn't digest a book that wasn't even a cookery book”.⁵² The noises from the neighboring wood have increased but consist of shouts and the whistle of a referee, as if a soccer match is in progress. Ben and the Mother are about to execute Max as a traitor when a ball rolls on stage with “BOOM” written on it. Ben and the Mother run away, leaving Max tied and blindfolded. Unaware that he is now alone with a masked messenger from the other woods, Max begins to repudiate his pacifism. The Messenger finally makes Max understand that he wants him to sign “a little

⁵⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 39.

subscription for the protection of flowers.” The accompanying stage direction indicates that “One cannot know if he is sincere or pretending because there is something gay but at the same time threatening in his voice.”⁵³ Max, now freed but still wearing the blindfold, tries to leave. The Messenger tries to stop him and Max stabs the Messenger. The mask falls off, revealing “the face of a puzzled child.”⁵⁴ The Mother reappears, saying, “That’s fine, Max... You’re yourself again. I hope next Sunday you’ll fight much better still.” Max replies, “He is to blame. Why did he want to spoil my week-end?” as the curtain falls.⁵⁵

Week-end could be read as a cautionary allegory for nations in the Warsaw Pact. Innocent sounds of freedom from a neighboring country (such as Czechoslovakia) are interpreted by the Mother (Mother Russia?) to be threatening. Even intellectuals are eventually persuaded of the need to take action, only to discover the innocence of their victim in the end. Once manipulated into action, further aggression becomes easier to provoke. Such a literal reading, however, diminishes the universality of the play, neglects what can also be seen as allusions to the Vietnam war, and obscures the pivotal role of Max. Max attempts to deal with the escalation toward violence in a logical, humanist manner but ultimately cannot stand up to the war propaganda and personal threats. The lofty and attractive goal of peace which Max strives for in his quiet week-end as well as in his (initially) benevolent attitude toward

⁵³ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the people in the neighboring grove is a difficult end to achieve. Intellectuals are faced with difficult choices, especially when rational opposition to emotional war-mongering can lead to cries of “down with culture” and book-burning. Naghiu is calling for all people to stand up for their convictions, to resist jingoism, manipulation of ethics, and even physical threats, and to withstand the fear of the “other” which can lead to senseless violence.

Celuloid: A Satirical Sketch

A less abstract but still symbolic style can be seen in Naghiu’s Celuloid, produced by Teatrul Nottara in Bucharest in 1968 on a bill of five short plays. Set in a movie theatre, the play satirizes the power that cinema has over many people by becoming more important, more “real,” than their everyday existence. The work takes the form of a collage of vignettes, with characters identified only as “A Voice,” “The Husband,” “The Small Man,” and so forth. Anxious to hear and see the films, the patrons tell one another to be quiet and to stay seated. The Large Man sits on The Small Man, who cannot persuade him to move in the sold-out theatre. The Small Man complains that he can’t breathe but, apparently more importantly, can’t see the film. The Manager announces that a criminal is hiding in the theatre but the audience can only react as if this were part of a film. One patron calls out, “Cum îl cheamă? James Deane? [sic] Spencer Tracy?” [What’s his name? James Dean? Spencer Tracy?]⁵⁶ A

⁵⁶ Iosif Naghiu, Celuloid, in Autostop (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1969), 52.

Fanatic Man extols the imaginary world of films, in which “oamenii nu mor niciodată cu adevărat” [people never actually die] and that are “imagini false care devoră oameni vii” [false images which devour living people].⁵⁷ His tirade culminates in an election, conducted by a dancer with an opera hat who takes tickets from the characters and from the actual audience of Celuloid as if they were ballots. One character complains that “Nici nu se vede pe cine votăm” [We can’t even see for whom we’re voting] in the darkness of the cinema.⁵⁸ In the final monolog of the play, a woman speaks of the lizards and snakes which have invaded her neighbor’s house and strangled the dog. Even this event pales in comparison to entertainment: “Eh, parcă am avut cu o presimțire în seara aceea și am vrut să merg la fereastră să văd ce se mai întâmplă în curtea vecină, dar tocmai atunci rula la televizor serialul acela... cum îi spune?... serialul acela cu ăla blond.” [Eh, I had a foreboding that evening and I wanted to go to the window to see what was going on in the neighboring courtyard, but just then that television series was airing... what is it called?... the series with the blond man.]⁵⁹ Her companion decides to stay in the theatre for “o scenă-două” (a scene or two) and all strain forward to watch the next film as the curtain falls.⁶⁰

The production of Celuloid in the Studio of the Nottara Theatre proved Naghiu’s abilities as “unui autor perspicace, inteligent fără doar și poate” [a perceptive

⁵⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

author, intelligent without a doubt], but lacking a strong sense of variety of effects.⁶¹ The play, according to one reviewer, “compusă parabolic, nu depășește însă nivelul satirei absurde la adresa hiperconsumatorilor de ‘celuloid.’” [composed as a parable, does not rise above the level of an absurdist satire directed against the hyperconsumers of “celluloid.”]⁶² Nevertheless, Naghiu was seen as a powerful writer with high potential for the future.⁶³

Naturalism, Politics, and Absența

Naghiu would return to the allegorical style of Week-end and Celuloid in his short plays of the 1980s and in works after 1989. He also mastered a more naturalistic mode, however. Absența marked the first success of this alternate style for Naghiu.⁶⁴ The full-length, two-act play features a naturalistic setting and realistic dialogue. The main action of the play is psychological. Still, plot elements are introduced which pull the action out of naturalism into a world where absurd events can disrupt anyone’s life.

The scene is set in the living room of Marcu’s home. Also living in the house are his wife, Mara, two children attending college, Petre and Clara, and Mara’s

⁶¹ Dan Crișan, review of Atelier ‘68, by Ilie Păunescu, Iosif Naghiu, Leonida Teodorescu, and Mihai Georgescu (Teatrul Nottara, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 7 (1968): 67.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁴ Absența was produced in 1969 by Teatrul Giulești but not included in the first two of Naghiu’s dramatic anthologies. It was finally published in Iosif Naghiu, Misterul Agamemnon (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 5-78.

brother, Victor. Marcu, after trying for five years to get his job at the university back, has finally been reinstated. At first he seems to have been a victim of unfounded charges, but under Victor's drunken questioning we are led to suspect that Marcu is not as guiltless as we would think. Apparently, Marcu was guilty of some misconduct which he cannot now face up to or even remember. An informant sent a letter to the authorities accusing Marcu of larger crimes. Rather than admit his error and fight the accusation, Marcu stepped down instead. In the middle of a vehement exchange with Victor, Marcu suddenly realizes that he has no idea what subject he used to teach, what his title used to be, or what he's supposed to do when he goes back to work the next day.

Marcu goes to the university but comes back unenlightened. He did not admit his ignorance but still hasn't remembered what subject he teaches. At home, Marcu learns that Clara is engaged to marry the son of the man who informed against him years ago. Marcu realizes that his obsession with the past has caused him to lose touch with his own family and with the needs of the present. Toward the end of the play, Clara reports that the informer, her future father-in-law, died the day before, at the same time that Marcu was rehabilitated. The professor who has replaced Marcu and taught in his place for the past five years enters the room. He wants to meet the person who will now be taking his place. After speaking with him, Marcu submits his resignation. Marcu finally feels liberated, sensing that he's done the right thing. The play thus ends much as it began. Marcu is still without a job, but his situation is now a product of his own choice. Mara, though incredulous at first, ultimately sees that

Marcu has regained his dignity by his action.

The production of Absența by Teatrul Giulești won an award at the national theatre festival of 1969 and thus attracted critical attention. The play was one of several “dramele erorii sociale și reabilitării eroului inocent” [dramas of social errors and the rehabilitation of innocent heroes] of the time, but it avoided formulaic construction and black-and-white moral distinctions: “autorul are curajul de a se lipsi de aparatul ordonator al unor concluzii preconcepute” [the author has the courage of giving up the tidy apparatus of a preconceived conclusion.]⁶⁵ The play, although “o solidă și onestă piesă realistă” [a solid and honest realistic play], walked a fine line between realism and absurd events, such as Marcu’s amnesia, the coincidental death of the informer, and the convenient appearance of the professor at the end of the play.⁶⁶ In this respect, it also reflected contemporary trends in world drama, as Liviu Ciulei pointed out.⁶⁷

In addition to the use of naturalistic dialogue, Absența shows other ties to later plays by Naghiu. One reviewer pointed out the use of the image of darkness as a metaphor for human ignorance—an image that would be central to Naghiu’s next major

⁶⁵ Ileana Popovici, review of Absența, by Iosif Naghiu (Teatrul Giulești), Teatrul, no. 12 (1969): 65, 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁷ Liviu Ciulei, Caietul-program, Teatrul Giulești, 1969-1970 season, quoted in Naghiu, Misterul Agamemnon, 70.

stage production, Întunericul [The Darkness].⁶⁸ Naghiu would also return to the character of Marcu Onofrei in Într-o singură seară [In One Night], in which Marcu, some years after the action of Absența, is reunited with a more dynamic, politically-oriented comrade from his days as a member of the Communist Party in the fight against the fascists in 1943.

These three early plays by Iosif Naghiu, along with other works published in Autostop in 1970, such as Numele meu e Petrescu [My Name is Petrescu], Autostop [Hitchhiking] and Centrala telefonică [Telephone Central], established him as a playwright of promise who drew upon contemporary European dramatic styles and was not afraid to include political statements in his works. Despite the naturalistic style of Absența, Naghiu was primarily known as a proponent of the European avant-garde and the theatre of the absurd. The combination of a tendency toward abstraction and outspoken criticism was to lead to serious difficulties for Naghiu under the Ceaușescu regime, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Early Experiments by Dumitru Radu Popescu

Beginnings

Dumitru Radu Popescu first published fiction and verse in the local Oradea paper, Crișana, at the age of 18 in 1953, with national publication coming the next year

⁶⁸ George Genoiu, Ateneu, no. 4 (1970), quoted in Naghiu, Misterul Agamemnon, 77.

in the journal Steaua.⁶⁹ He published his first book of fiction in 1958 and his first play in 1960, followed by a screenplay in 1963. In his early years, Dumitru Radu Popescu wrote several of what he now calls “trăsniț” (loony) plays. In an interview, he gave an example of one of these unpublished, unproduced plays:

For instance, a title of one of those loony plays is Death Doesn't Come from the Sky. It was a play slightly loony for those times. I had a character, I think it was Picasso, another was [the element] Strontium, another character was me . . . I even had some post-modern experiments, I would call them, although I was unaware of them at the time. I even wrote a play involving characters from [nineteenth century Romanian playwright Ion Luca] Caragiale, having no idea at the time that sometime in the future this kind of writing would have a particular literary genre [i.e., post-modern].⁷⁰

In 1966, Vlad Mugur directed Popescu's 1959 work, Vara imposibilei iubiri [Summer of Impossible Love] at the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, followed in 1968 with a production of the short drama, Damen-vals [Lady's Waltz]. In the same year, Cezar, măscăriciul piraiților [Caesar, the Pirates' Fool] was produced at the State Theatre in Sfântul Gheorghe in Hungarian and at the State Theatre of Oradea in Romanian, while the State Theatre of Târgu Mureș staged Acești îngeri triști [These Sad Angels].

The first two of these plays staged in 1968 are typical of several of Popescu's early works. Both Damen-vals and Cezar, măscăriciul piraiților draw from the

⁶⁹ Dumitru Radu Popescu was born in 1935 and grew up in Dănceu in Southwest Romania. He returned to the western city of Oradea, near his birthplace, for school. He began to study medicine but ended up with a degree in philology from Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj.

⁷⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 27 November 1996, tape recording. Translation by Georgeta Pourchot.

European theatre of the absurd, especially in their circular structures and elliptical use of language. Damen-vals also evokes an expressionistic mode demonstrating the inexplicable and irrational, yet truthful, world of dreams and visions, while Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor is the first of several historical dramas by Dumitru Radu Popescu which play with conflicting views of history either as a powerful force which sweeps all before it or as a process of individual decisions made by human beings facing choices.

Damen-vals

Damen-vals, also known as Visul [The Dream], is primarily a monologue, a form which Dumitru Radu Popescu continued to experiment with in later years, even though his monodramas received few theatrical productions.⁷¹ Damen-vals was published in an English translation as Ladies' Waltz or A Winter Night's Dream in Romanian Review⁷² and was also performed in Paris in 1977.⁷³ The play opens with the main character, Silvia, in her basement bedroom/laundry room waking to the strains of the "Blue Danube Waltz." Her deaf and lame sister is at the hospital, and Silvia alternates between hoping the sister will be all right and wishing for her death,

⁷¹ Recent examples include Biserica dintr-o zi and Biserica dintr-un lemn, written in the fall of 1990 and published in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Mireasa cu gene false (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1994), 45-114.

⁷² Dumitru Radu Popescu, Ladies Waltz or A Winter Night's Dream, trans. Mary Lăzărescu, Romanian Review, no. 1 (1971): 46-53.

⁷³ Constantin Mohanu, "Tabel Cronologic," in Dumitru Radu Popescu, F (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1996), x.

which would seemingly free Silvia from her drab life. She recalls the various people in her life who have died as she receives reports from the hospital by phone and gradually reveals her failings in life and her self-deceptions. In the end, she apparently strangles herself in her pile of laundry. Her sister, Melania, enters to say she is about to go to the hospital. We are evidently back to the beginning of the play, but Melania comments on the disorder of the room, suggesting that time has indeed elapsed.

The themes of loneliness, freedom, judgment, and the creation of a reality from a collection of half-truths seen in the play are recurring motifs in Popescu's works. Silvia has been tied to her helpless sister for twenty years and yearns to be free but realizes that such freedom would be empty, without family, friends, or hope. Most of Popescu's characters never realize that their moral judgments are tainted by self-deception but Silvia acknowledges that her self-proclaimed purity and sacrifice is an artifice: "Why do I judge the world in the name of my purity? Does this give me the right to judge it and find it lousy, squalid, just as I choose, and as it really is . . . Do you think I used to look after mother hoping she'd die? I used to sacrifice myself in order to look like a saint and to be able to judge you [Melania]." ⁷⁴ Her self-inflicted death accomplishes nothing but a release from existence. It is neither a tragic sacrifice or a sad calamity, merely a pitiful end to an empty life.

One critic, however, did view the play as a tragedy, although a strange one, since Silvia does not take any action within the play:

⁷⁴ Popescu, Ladies Waltz, 50-51.

Visul este însă o tragedie a pasivității și a dependenței, o tragedie a acceptării unei condiții subalterne. Imobilitatea personajului reprezintă așadar materializarea unei condiții existențiale. Singurul teritoriu în care Silvia este ‘liberă’ e teritoriul vorbirii; dar este o libertate iluzorie, avînd funcția unei consolări.

[The Dream is still a tragedy of passivity and dependency, a tragedy of acceptance of menial conditions. The stillness of the character represents in actuality an existential state. The only realm in which Silvia is ‘free’ is the realm of words; but this is an illusory freedom, having the function of mere consolation.]⁷⁵

The circular structure of the play highlights its ambiguities. Has Silvia foreseen the future? Have her concerns about the future been so powerful that she has acted them out as if real? Is she reliving a day that has already past? Is the ending a flashback or has time truly been inverted? Some of these same questions arise in Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor, which shares the circular quality of Damen-vals, the later Dirijorul [The Conductor], and Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou [Cat on New Year’s Eve]. However, the expressionistic mode employed in Damen-vals is little used by Dumitru Radu Popescu until seen again in one of his most recent works, Daphnis și Chloe [Daphnis and Chloe].

Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor

Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor combines absurd elements with historical events to discuss the nature of identity and reality.⁷⁶ Although the details of the action are

⁷⁵ Mircea Iorgulescu, “D. R. Popescu dramaturg–replică și acțiune,” Convorbiri literare, April 1975, quoted in Valeriu Râpeanu, ed. O antologie a dramaturgiei românești 1944-1977: Teatrul de inspirație contemporană (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1978), 512.

⁷⁶ Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor was first published in Steaua, no. 1 (1968) and anthologized in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1985-

clearly invented by Popescu, the play is based on an episode from Plutarch's biography of Julius Caesar, in which it is noted that he was taken prisoner by pirates for six weeks and entertained them with his audacity and wit. He was eventually ransomed and then pursued and crucified the pirates, as he had warned.

The setting of the play is the deck of a pirate ship. The pirate crew hangs prisoners by their feet to die while the captain plays his whistle. One prisoner, however, wins a reprieve through a battle of words. The prisoner proclaims himself to be Julius Caesar, destined to become emperor of Rome. His bravado begins to draw others into his world, beginning with the Drunken Pirate:

SLABUL: Te-a insultat pe propria ta corabie, căpitane, aruncă-l la pești!

PRIMUL INS: Să te arunce pe tine, limbricule! Cum să mă arunce pe mine, omul care va ajunge împăratul Romei.

PIRATUL BEAT: Ha, ha... Vino să te sărut! (Rîde voind să-l sărute.)

PRIMUL INS: Sărută-mi mîna (îi întinde mîna să i-o sărute.) Și nu rîde că te pleznesc.

PIRATUL BEAT (murind de ris, stă în genunchi și îi sărută mîna): Ești mulțumit, slăvite împărat?

PRIMUL INS: Pentru un bețivan ca tine, merge.

PIRATUL BEAT: Dar de unde știi că vei ajunge împărat?

PRIMUL INS: Am visat într-o noapte.

[**THIN PIRATE:** He has insulted you on your own ship, captain, throw him to the fishes!

FIRST BLOKE: He should throw you, tapeworm! He can't throw me to the fishes, the man who will become Emperor of Rome.

DRUNKEN PIRATE: Ha, ha... Come, let me kiss you! (Laughs, wants to kiss him.)

FIRST BLOKE: Kiss my hand (he extends his hand to be kissed.) And don't laugh 'cause I'm going to hit you.

DRUNKEN PIRATE (laughs uncontrollably, kneels and kisses his hand): Are you satisfied now, exalted Emperor?

1987), 1:189-248.

FIRST BLOKE: For a drunkard like you, it will do.

DRUNKEN PIRATE: But how do you know you will become emperor?

FIRST BLOKE: I dreamt it one night.]⁷⁷

The prisoner later tells the pirates that he can foresee his future rescue and his return to hang the pirates, and has them enact how he will be assassinated by Brutus and the conspirators, a fate which prevents him from dying by any other means. He raises enough doubts in the crew, or at least offers the expectation of greater entertainment than a speedy execution, that the pirates play his game. Eventually, Caesar is ransomed and returns with his soldiers to punish the pirates. The Captain now claims that he is Caesar and cannot be hung. Caesar is goaded into enacting his death again with the pirates. He is killed and the Captain assumes his identity. As the Captain begins to “fulfill his destiny” by hanging the other pirates, the soldiers return under the command of yet another “Caesar” (played by the Thin Pirate). The new Caesar explains that he pushed the Thin Pirate under his robes before being stabbed and so escaped overboard. The Captain and the remaining crew are then hung, while the Thin Pirate, as Caesar, plays the whistle. When asked who the true Caesar is, the Fat Pirate replies, “Asta n-are nici o importanță. Poate că Cezar nici n-a existat și nici nu va exista, vor fi doar niște inși care mereu se vor numi Cezar.” [It isn’t important. Perhaps Caesar never existed and never will exist; there will always be blokes who call themselves Caesar.]⁷⁸

Amid the confusion of identities and role-playing are serious discussions of

⁷⁷ D. R. Popescu, *Cezar*, 1:191.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:247.

power, freedom, and government. Caesar sees himself as a leader who is fighting to destroy the mediocrity of a Roman Republic filled with demagoguery, black market traffic, and people begging for honors and seeking fortunes. Caesar also dismisses his future assassination as a “mistake”:

Eu o voi acoperi de glorie, nu Brutus! Nici Crassus! Cînd vor încerca să mă ucidă ei vor fi umbrele a doi oameni mari care n-au fost niciodată mari. Ei vor încerca să mă omoare pentru păcatele ce-aș putea să le săvîrșesc devenind rege. Deci nu mă condamnă pentru ce nu sînt, ci pentru ce ar fi posibil să devin. Dar cum să condamni un om la moarte pentru ce-ți închipui tu c-ar fi posibil să devină? . . . Nu mă lasă să ajung rege, și greșind, să mă omoare, nu, mediocritatea mă omoară înainte de a ajunge, ca să nu greșesc. Îți dai seama ce ipocrizie, grasule? Ei se tem că ajungînd rege-îi voi stîrpi pe ei. Fiindcă eu întotdeauna voi da poporului drepturi, avere, spectacole. Și ei o să spună că mă prefac, și vreau să cuceresc mulțimea dîndu-i pîine și libertate. Dar ei dacă știu atît de bine cum se cucerește mulțimea de ce nu-i dau poporului pîine, libertate și spectacole?

[I will bring glory to Rome. Not Brutus! Not Crassus! When they will try to murder me, they will be the shadows of two great people who have never been great. They will try to kill me for sins that I might do by becoming a king. So they do not condemn me for what I am but for what I might become. But how can you sentence a person to death for what you imagine that he might become? . . . They won't let me become a king and by making a mistake kill me, no, mediocrity kills me before I get there. Do you realize the hypocrisy? They are afraid that by becoming king I will exterminate them. Because I will always give the people rights, fortune, and shows. And they will say that I pretend, that I want the multitude to like me by bringing them bread and freedom. But if they know so well how to win the people over, why don't they give them bread, freedom, and shows?]⁷⁹

The political nature of the play, as displayed in this passage, is repeated often throughout the script. The theme of killing a person for what he might become is explored at much greater length by Dumitru Radu Popescu again in Robespierre și

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:204. Translation by Georgeta Pourchot.

regele, written in 1990 (which will be discussed in chapter seven). In addition to the “bread and circus” references, the play also alludes to the dangers of personality cults, an aspect of Joseph Stalin’s regime much criticized after his death in 1953 and echoed in the regime of Romania’s Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej (d. 1965). Nicolae Ceaușescu, after making reforms in the late 1960s, proved to be little different from his predecessors in this regard, which may explain why Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor was quickly interdicted and not staged again until 1989.⁸⁰

Caesar will be dangerous to the conspirators because of his intellectual and imaginative powers. He reveals his source of control over others: “Circe i-a transformat pe tovarășii lui Ulise în porci. Le-a dat o licoare minunată. Eu îi transform altfel pe oameni, nu le dau licoare, le dau mai mult, le dau putere.” [Circe transformed Ulysses’ comrades into pigs. She gave them the enchanted liquor. I transform people differently, I don’t give them potions, I give them more than that, I give them power.]⁸¹ Part of this power comes from the ability to take on new identities and new roles. Another source of power comes from ideas, which originate from great men, but then can be taken over by lesser figures for their own purposes, as the Woman says after it appears Caesar has been stabbed and thrown overboard: “Și un pirat dobitoc va juca rolul tău, Cezar! Visele, idealurile tale vor fi împlinite de pirai!

⁸⁰ Popescu objects, however, to any simplistic link between politics and arts, and insists that he was writing about ambition and madness, “apart from the politics of the times.” Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Georgeta Pourchot, 17 October 1998, Bucharest.

⁸¹ D. R. Popescu, Cezar, 1:203.

Și le vor însuși! Ideile sînt ale geniilor! Și de rodul lor se bucură pirații!” [Even an idiot pirate can perform your role, Caesar! Your dreams and ideals will be fulfilled by pirates! And they will make them over! Ideas belong to geniuses! But pirates enjoy their fruit!]⁸²

In addition to its bold political statements, the play’s ambiguity and use of absurd elements made it impossible to produce in the 1970s. The various plays within plays and references to politics as theatre, along with drawing attention to the theatricality of the performance itself and the circularity of its action, create a multiplicity of viewpoints and questions. Such ambiguity was condemned in the early 1970s as not conducive to the proper communist education of the population and certainly calls into question the historical inevitability and durability of communist governments. The power of language to change reality and a circular, or nearly circular, plot structure are hallmarks of several of Popescu’s dramas from this early period; few survived the resurgence of “socialist realism” during the early 1970s.

Critical reaction to the 1968 production was generally positive but mixed. The initial production in Hungarian at Sfântu Gheorghe was hailed as an original “antiparable” in which the absurd is used in a unique way: “Dar și acesta derivat, adică nu absurd al existenței (deci temă existențială nemijlocit), ci absurd al reflectării necesității istorice.” [But this {the absurd} is also derived, not from the absurdity of existence (therefore the theme of existentialism itself), but from the absurdity of

⁸² Ibid., 1:243.

reflecting over historical necessity.]⁸³ The reviewer also saw the connection to personality cults:

Odată cu moartea sa, nu Cezar, viitorul împărat ucis în for, este eliminat din istorie, ci unul din aceia care ar fi putut deveni viitorul dictator, obiect al cultului personalității sale, hulit apoi și iarăși aclamat când de numele său vor fi legate gânduri ce nu le-a avut.

[With his death, it is not Caesar, the future emperor murdered in the Forum, who is eliminated from history, but one of those who could have become the future dictator, object of his personality cult, berated, then once again acclaimed when his name would be associated with thoughts that he never had].⁸⁴

The production, however, was directed in a cinematic, montage style, which emphasized the pictorial aspects of the play, but made it difficult for the actors to bring the characters to life.⁸⁵ A photo from the Hungarian-language production shows costumes drawn from many centuries in deliberate anachronism and the pirates dressed in a comic-operetta collection of clothes and make-up.⁸⁶

The Romanian-language production later in 1968 in Oradea was likewise reviewed as an original, thought-provoking work that suffered from a clumsy production but also from excesses of youthful writing and heavy-handed comic elements: “scriitura este excesiv de dezinvoltă, chiar neglijentă” [the writing is

⁸³ M. Nad, review of *Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor*, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul de Stat, Secția Maghiară, Sfântu Gheorghe), *Teatrul*, no. 11 (1968): 81.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

excessively casual, even negligent].⁸⁷ Despite the flaws, however, the originality of the work was hailed: “Acest cocktail de calități și defecte are însă un sunet nou în dramaturgia noastră” [This cocktail of qualities and defects is still a new sound in our dramaturgy].⁸⁸

Valentin Silvestru, in his preface to the play in a 1985 collection, calls the play “o comedie macabră . . . parabolă grotescă” [a macabre comedy . . . a grotesque parable], filled with black, anachronistic and low comedy.⁸⁹ Popescu’s own introductory essay in the same volume suggests that this macabre and grotesque vision is a reflection of contemporary reality. He juxtaposes two images from a page in an Italian magazine: a pop star in silver pants singing on his knees surrounded by screaming admirers and a photo of a wounded Vietnamese child, “două absurdități ale anilor noștri,” [two absurdities of our times], each difficult to explain, impossible to reconcile as a pair, and yet undeniably true.⁹⁰ Popescu also draws parallels between Caesar’s thirst for world domination and the escalation of the war in Vietnam. Just as a pirate could take Caesar’s place without changing history, Popescu is suggesting that the attempt to dominate Vietnam is inevitable: if not by France, then by the United

⁸⁷ Ileana Popovici, review of Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor, by D.R. Popescu (Teatrul Oradea), Teatrul, no. 12 (1968): 94.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Valentin Silvestru, Preface to Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor, in D.R. Popescu, Teatrul, 1:182-3.

⁹⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, “Cuvîntul autorului în atenția regizorilor (dacă vor exista),” in D.R. Popescu, Teatrul, 1:184-5.

States; if not the United States, then some other power.

Dumitru Radu Popescu may have attempted to do too much in this early play. One reviewer of the original production found elements of a drama of ideas, the theatre of the absurd, and a use of doubling and concept of the world as theatre reminiscent of Pirandello.⁹¹ These elements, however, remained a blend or mix, and never an alloy.

Despite its flaws and early date, the play has remained topical and fresh. In fact, Victor Parhon, when reviewing the 1992 productions of Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor and Robespierre, noted that the dates of the two plays (1968 and 1990, respectively) seemed reversed when judged by style and topicality, and questioned the ability of audiences and reviewers to judge works based on whether they were written before or after the watershed year of 1989.⁹² Parhon also highlighted the political timelessness of the play as well as its repetitive artistic nature:

El rămîne, preferențial, acela al parabolie grotești, al amestecului sarcastic de tragic și comic, tocmai pentru că istoria se repetă, înlocuindu-și doar regii și măscăricii ‘făcători’ de istorie pe seama celor ce, păstrîndu-și (mai mult sau mai puțin) inocența, sînt sacrificați cu bunăștiință. Un șir nesfîrșit de crime, un șir nesfîrșit de victime și de călăi ce-și dispută supremația în numele unei idei, al unui vis sau al unui ideal, de fiecare dată terfelite în sînge, populează acest bine documentat univers halucinatoriu, animat de un suflu shakespearian, în ciuda incontinențelor scriiturii, sancționate îndeobște de ‘foarfecele’ regizoral.

[He returns, by preference, to this grotesque parable, to a sarcastic mixture of tragic and comic, precisely because history repeats itself, substituting kings and

⁹¹ Dumitru Chirilă, Familia, Nov. 1968, quoted in D. R. Popescu, Teatru, 1:250. The comparison to Pirandello is also made by Florin Faifer, Cronica (12 Sept. 1977), quoted in D. R. Popescu, Teatru, 1:257.

⁹² Victor Parhon, review of Robespierre (Teatrul Toma Caragiu, Ploiești) and Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor (Teatrul Tineretului, Piatra Neamț), Teatrul azi, no. 11/12 (1992): 39.

fools as ‘makers’ of history who remain (more or less) innocent, and are sacrificed to good causes. An unending series of crimes, an unending series of victims and of executioners vying for supremacy in the name of some idea, some vision, or of some ideal, in every age stained with blood, populate this well-documented hallucinatory universe, animated with a Shakespearean breath, despite the excessive writing, generally limited by the director’s ‘scissors.’]⁹³

As was the case in 1968, the power of the script was curtailed by a weak production.

In the 1992 performance, this was due primarily to the weakness of the lead actor, whose diction was bad to the point of being unintelligible.⁹⁴

Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor remains an important work in itself and also as a predecessor to a long line of re-examinations of small but crucial moments in history. Popescu’s lack of reverence for the past combined with his interest in the historical clash of ideas will be seen again in plays such as Studiul osteologic al unui schelet de cal dintr-un mormint avar din Transilvania and Robespierre și regele. The themes of power, history, justice, and the ability of humans to make choices in the face of historical forces also reappear in his later works. Further, Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor and Damen-vals demonstrate the tendency toward the grotesque and surreal which marks both Popescu’s drama and fiction and his sarcastic attitude which often is exhibited by the use of metatheatrical devices, such as anachronisms, self-reflexive use of theatrical metaphors, circular structures, and intertextual references. Silvia in Damen-vals is also Popescu’s first dramatic incarnation of “sad angels,” the imperfect human creatures striving against their own cowardice and hypocrisy who populate

⁹³ Parhon, 39.

⁹⁴ Parhon, 40.

many of Popescu's works.

Marin Sorescu, Iosif Naghiu, and Dumitru Radu Popescu had already established themselves as poets or novelists by 1968. By 1971, all three had also proven themselves to be dramatists of intellect, power, and originality. Their plays expressed metaphysical, historical, and political sentiments indirectly, by metaphor, allusion, and parables. This combination of engaged content and anti-realist forms would lead to serious collisions with the Ceaușescu regime in the coming period of constriction of artistic freedom.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OUTLAWING OF AMBIGUITY

Nicolae Ceaușescu returned from a 1971 visit to China with his own version of a “cultural revolution,” which left enduring effects upon playwriting. A series of decrees were published in the official newspapers in July of 1971, which later came to be known as the July Theses.¹ Among the forty points made in the documents were specific rules for literature and the arts, including re-establishment of censorship and a decreased role for the Writers’ Union. The State Committee on Culture and the Arts, a party-appointed body, gained new powers over publication and performance. This committee published a referat or report on the 1970-1971 theatrical season which publicly chastised many writers, directors, and theatres and expressed concerns about the forthcoming 1971-1972 season.² What makes this document most unusual is the public and specific nature of the criticism. Normally, official reprimands were not made directly to authors, whether publicly or privately; a writer would often find out

¹ Nicolae Ceaușescu, “Expunerea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu,” Contemporanul (Bucharest), 16 July 1971, 1-4; Comitetul Executiv al Comitet Central al Partiiului Communist Român, “Propunerile de măsuri prezentate de tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu,” Contemporanul (Bucharest), 7 July 1971, 1.

² Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, “Despre stagiunea 1970-1971 și unele probleme privind pregătirea stagiunii 1971-1972,” Teatrul, no. 8 (1971): 5-24.

only through friends or an editor that a work had met with official disapproval.³

The effects of Ceaușescu's "Cultural Revolution" were immediate. Of 608 productions nation-wide in repertory or in preparation in the fall of 1971, the emphasis was overwhelmingly on "safe" works: the classics and established Romanian plays. No plays by Marin Sorescu, Ion Baieșu, and Teodor Mazilu, three of the brightest young stars of the 1968-1970 seasons, remained in the 1971-1972 repertory or were even in preparation.⁴ "Ambiguous" works, and those that showed traces of the theatre of the absurd, were purged from the repertory. Damen-vals, Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor, Celuloid, Week-end, Absența, and Iona remained off the stage for the remainder of the Ceaușescu era; Paracliserul was not staged in Romania until 1981.

The abrupt change in Romanian cultural policy can also be seen in the fate of Eugène Ionesco's works. Ionesco, although considering himself to be French, had been embraced by Romania as an example of the world-wide importance of Romanian theatre and several productions of his works had been staged in Romania. The production of Rhinoceros at the Comedy Theatre in Bucharest was felt by Ionesco to be the best production of that work.⁵ In 1971, however, Ionesco's plays were removed

³ Ileana Mălănciou, interview by Lidia Vianu, Censorship in Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 108; Marian Popescu, interview with author, 21 November 1996, Bucharest, tape recording.

⁴ Miles Warren Coiner, Jr., "After the Thaw: Three Playwrights and the Romanian Theatre in the Spring of 1969," (Ph.D. diss, University of Kansas, 1972), 196.

⁵ Simion Alterescu, ed., An Abridged History of the Romanian Theatre (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1983), 169.

from the repertory partly due to his absurdist style, but primarily because Ionesco began to criticize the Ceaușescu regime in the French press and, later, on Radio Free Europe.⁶ After 1971, if Ionesco was referred to at all, it was in the same sentence as Samuel Beckett, Jean-Paul Sartre, and other decidedly foreign authors.⁷ Even quoting from his works was difficult, as Marta Petreu described in 1990: “a few years ago in making a Dictionary of Sophism I had been obsessed with finding ways as crooked as could be to cheat on the censorship and thus succeeded in sneaking in some quotations by the author of Rhinoceros. However, I did not manage to put in his name as well.”⁸ Late in December of 1989, Ionesco was able to say that “I feel I’m becoming a Romanian again.”⁹ His statement was undoubtedly intended to describe his internal feelings but also applied to his reinstatement as a “native” author in Romania. In the spring of 1990, he sent a telegram to the students occupying University Square in Bucharest in protest of the failure of the National Salvation Front to foster a democratic process, asking that he might also be called a “hooligan” along with them.¹⁰ From

⁶ Marian Popescu, “The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Romania 1945-1989,” in The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Eastern and Central Europe 1945-1989, Katarina Pejovic, ed. (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland and DeBalie, 1995), 8.

⁷ See, for example, Alterescu, 133, 168.

⁸ Marta Petreu, “En attendant Ionesco...,” Romanian Review, no. 2/3 (1990): 80.

⁹ Quoted in Emil Ghițulescu, “In Memoriam,” Romanian Review, no. 6 (1994): 100.

¹⁰ România liberă (Bucharest), 4 May 1990, 1.

1990 onward, his plays have again been an important part of the repertory within Romania and “the writer became one of the most cherished subjects . . . the saint of the young generation.”¹¹

This chapter looks first at two plays directly and publicly criticized by the State Committee for Culture and the Arts in the summer of 1971: Sorescu’s Există nervi [Nerves Exist] and Naghiu’s Întunericul [The Darkness], produced under the title Gluga pe ochi [Hood over the Eyes]. Not all plays received such clear disapproval; the sudden changes in policy led to a great deal of confusion among censors and artists alike. This situation will be amply illustrated by the case of Dumitru Radu Popescu’s Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou [Cat on New Year’s Eve]. Although often thought of as monolithic, censorship depended upon many levels of individuals who interpreted the state-issued decrees and guidelines in different ways, and some of the censors were also colleagues of the authors whose works were being scrutinized.¹² The consequences of transgression were also ill-defined: all three plays received official condemnation, but the actual effects on the authors (and on the productions) varied greatly. Such inconsistency was inherent in Romania’s system of censorship.

¹¹ Cornel Ungureanu, “Eugen Ionescu and the Excess of Evil,” Romanian Review, no. 5 (1995): 92.

¹² For an inside look at how censorship in Romania functioned over the years, see Vianu, especially interviews with Maria Banuș, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Nina Cassian, Marin Sorescu, Ileana Mălăncioiu, and Ana Blandiana; see also Marian Popescu, “Muse.”

Marin Sorescu's "Nervous Existence"

Although Marin Sorescu's Există nervi had only received a studio production at Institutul de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică [I.A.T.C., The Institute of Theatre and Film Art] in Bucharest in 1969, it was singled out for specific criticism in the State Committee for Culture and Art's report on the theatre seasons in 1971, apparently because the Bulandra theatre planned to add it to its repertory.¹³

The play begins with two men in their thirties speaking in a small studio apartment. The opening lines alert us that this is not going to be a naturalistic play:

ION (whispers in a confidential tone). This century has ruined my intestinal flora.

ALIN (startled). Good gracious! That's very bad.

ION. It's the worst you can do to an enemy.

ALIN. To say nothing of a friend.

ION. Or a neighbor. Before, you used to poison his cat!

ALIN. Now you ruin his intestinal flora.¹⁴

Alin and Ion agree that the world has become very complicated. Prescriptions can't be read, doctors don't tell the truth, rabbits run away, a comet will eventually destroy the earth, Ion is afraid of water, someone might steal their pins, and so on in a chain of associations. As Ion says later in the play, "after two or three retorts the norms of conversation run wild. It becomes, in a way, abnormal, indifferent to politics."¹⁵

¹³ Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, "Despre stagiunea 1970-1971," 17.

¹⁴ Marin Sorescu, Nerves Do Exist, trans. anonymous, Romanian Review 25, no. 1 (1971): 69. The play was originally published in Luceafărul (Bucharest), 22 Sept 1968, 4-6. It first appeared in book form in Marin Sorescu, Setea muntelui de sare (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1974).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

Suddenly, the apartment door opens and a professor asks if they have an extra seat.

Puzzled, Ion invites him in. The Professor enters with his luggage, saying:

PROFESSOR. I'll ride with you.

ALIN (embarrassed). But we don't ride anywhere.

ION (tugging at his sleeve and whispering). Hush! You don't know who he is. Don't take risks in making any statement. (Aloud) We are just going where everybody is going.¹⁶

The Professor believes he is in a compartment on a train, and Ion and Alin are too afraid to contradict him. The stranger reveals that he has made a scientific breakthrough—he can nullify the existence of nerves through auto-suggestion. Alin steps out, and Ion begins to believe his apartment might actually be a train. Voices, moans, cries, and the banging of furniture are heard in the neighbor's apartment; Ion explains the noises as coming from the dustmen collecting the garbage. Dorina, a young lady, enters with a suitcase and takes a seat on the "train," followed soon after by Magda, who thinks she has found the ticket office. Dorina explains that the man next door was discovered to not have a ticket and that a flying saucer landed on her house the night before and left with all her spoons. The four talk about the void they are heading toward and whether there is an afterlife. Ion then repeats Dorina's story about the flying saucer taking the spoons as if it had happened to him. Ion begs the Professor to cure him of his nerves, but is told that the process is not ready to use on an individual level, only on "a world plane."¹⁷ Ion gets the bill for his rent in the mail,

¹⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷ Ibid., 86.

which he views as assurance that “they haven’t turned my house into a train.”¹⁸

Finally, Alin reappears, dressed in a police uniform, barely recognized by Ion. Alin ends the play in a solemn, official tone: “Gentlemen, it’s closing time.”¹⁹

In addition to the non-linear dialogue and ambiguous allusions made, the play contains explicit references to Marxism-Leninism and an authoritarian regime. Ion and Alin’s fears of being overheard and of who the Professor might be, Alin’s unexpected revelation as a policeman, and the visit by the “dustmen” to the neighbor are clear indicators that they live in a police state. When the Professor says we should admit our faults as openly as we pronounce our vowels, Ion quickly responds, “Hush, foreigners may hear you and rejoice!”²⁰ The Professor explains that people don’t get what they deserve yet, twisting Lenin’s famous words: “For the moment we betray according to possibilities... later it will be according to our merit.”²¹ Ion also uses a disturbing political metaphor to describe his vision of mankind merging into the oceans: “The red hot ashes were falling into the ocean, like voting papers into an urn.”²²

But the State Committee for Art and Culture did not cite these lines in its critique. The key problem with the text, they wrote, was the “ambiguity” of the language, a term which was applied to several other plays with strong political

¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 84.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

messages. The play, wrote the Committee, “propune situația comică absurdă” [suggests an absurdly comic situation] with “vorbă alandala” [random words], a changing setting, and nonlinear use of language, in which:

se amestecă raționamente logice cu aserțiuni fanteziste și cu aluzii transparente la o realitate socială avînd unele similitudini cu societatea noastră, dar totodată sugerînd un univers în care omul este supus unor suspiciuni, unor presiuni, sau tratamente menite a-i zdruncina nervii și sănătatea, fac ca mesajul piesei să fie confuz, inacceptabil.

[logical reasoning is mixed with fantastic assertions and with transparent allusions to a social reality having some similarities with our society, but at the same time suggesting a universe in which man is subject to suspicions, pressures, or treatments destined to shatter nerves and health, making the message of the play confused, unacceptable.]²³

The Committee’s report seems to focus primarily on aesthetic matters, but reading between the lines, it is clear that the real concern is political. The Committee warned Sorescu to change his themes and style in the future:

Credem că poetul înzestrat și apreciat, care e Marin Sorescu, ar trebui să reflecteze mai adînc la efectul scrierilor sale dramatice asupra publicului, avînd în vedere tocmai puterea de comunicare și de influențare pe care cuvîntul, mînuit cu talent și măiestrie, o poate avea atunci cînd este rostit de pe scena unei săli de teatru.

[We believe that a poet as endowed and well-known as Marin Sorescu ought to reflect more deeply on the effect of his dramatic writings on the public, having in view the precise power of communication and influence which the word, spoken with talent and mastery, is able to have when it is uttered on the stage of a theatre auditorium.]²⁴

With this strong criticism on record, it is not surprising that the Bulandra theatre decided not to produce the play. Există nervi, like Iona, disappeared from the Romanian repertory until 1981. The student production at IATC in 1969, although it

²³ Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, “Despre stagiunea 1970-1971,” 17.

²⁴ Ibid.

created much excitement in Bucharest, was ignored by many cultural journals, and the reviews in the daily papers emphasized the production qualities but avoided discussions of the text.²⁵ What was most remarkable was that, despite expectations, the censor did not ask for any changes in the script before the first public performances. Miles Warren Coiner, Jr. speculates that this may have been because the director was Mony Ghelerter, an older, highly respected artist, “with sound leftist credentials.”²⁶ Even Ion Pascadi’s evaluation in Romanian Review, written for foreign consumption in 1969, was qualified in its estimation of Există nervi, especially compared with the praise given to Iona. The work was called “keenly satirical, succeeding as it does in conveying shrewd reflections on man’s life today under the guise of brilliant paradoxes, deliberately grotesque puns and the familiar use of the absurd.”²⁷ However, the reviewer felt compelled to defend the seemingly pessimistic tone, absurd elements, and gratuitous dialogue of the work as serving a positive social function: “To make art contribute to doing away with fetishes and sham notions, to overthrow the rule of myths and fashion, to urge us, as has been noted, to be farsighted. Revealing the absurd inevitably leads to the triumph of reason, which in fact goes to prove that without his even being aware of it, Marin Sorescu is far less pessimistic and sceptical

²⁵ Coiner, 73.

²⁶ Coiner, 72.

²⁷ Ion Pascadi, “A New Dramatist: Marin Sorescu,” Romanian Review 23, no. 4 (1969): 119.

than he sometimes makes us believe.”²⁸

Twelve years later, Sorescu’s plays were, at least briefly, rehabilitated. For a variety of reasons, 1981 saw a brief relaxation of censorship. Romania had successfully stood up to the Soviet Union on the independence of national communist parties and publicly rejected the Soviet demand for increased Warsaw Pact defense spending.²⁹ Perhaps in response to Soviet pressures on Poland to crack down on the Solidarity movement, Romania’s cultural policy signaled a turn away from Soviet norms to Western models, exactly as had been done during the crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1968. In response to domestic strikes and political pressures, Ceaușescu proposed that Romania be run as a “workers’ democracy” rather than proletarian dictatorship.³⁰ The increased freedom of speech was also a useful diplomatic tool, since by 1980, Ceaușescu’s abuses of human rights were becoming increasingly embarrassing to American policy-makers. Romania could announce to the world that “Censorship has been abolished.”³¹ In actual fact, censorship of performances remained unchanged, and authors seeking publication were given, through their editors, strong “suggestions”

²⁸ Pascadi, 119.

²⁹ Robin Alison Remington, “Politics of Accommodation: Redefining Soviet-East European Relations,” in Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1980s, ed. Roger E. Kanet (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 112.

³⁰ Daniel N. Nelson, Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988), 14.

³¹ Nicolae Moraru, “Romanian Dramaturgy Under Debate,” Romanian Review, no. 9 (1978): 102.

by party functionaries regarding unacceptable portions of their works.³²

In the brief thaw of 1981, previously unacceptable plays were staged. Marin Sorescu's Paracliserul received productions in 1981; the production of Iosif Naghiu's Valiza cu fluturi [Briefcase with Butterflies] broke a four-year absence of his works from the Romanian stage; Dumitru Radu Popescu's 1969 absurdist play, Dirijorul [The Director] was finally produced. The first professional production of Există nervi took place at the Teatrul de Comedie in Bucharest in June of 1981. Reviewers still tried to distance the work from the nihilist implications of the theatre of the absurd. Although the situation and many of the anecdotes were seen to be absurd, the overarching logical structure and meaning were judged to be clear. Further, the thrust of the text was recognized to be an exploration not of the absurd itself, but the "îngrijorare trăind coșmarul nuclear" [anxiety of living in the nuclear nightmare] which underlays the theatre of the absurd.³³

In the winter of 1981, a production of Există nervi by Teatrul de Nord in Satu Mare accentuated the terror glimpsed in the play. Beyond chaos, the production introduced "un alt factor malign" [another malign factor].³⁴ The production interpolated actions not in the original text as well as verses from Sorescu's poetry.

³² Marian Popescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 21 November 1996, tape recording.

³³ Marius Robescu, review of Există nervi, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul de Comedie, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 7/8 (1981): 105.

³⁴ Dinu Kivu, review of Există nervi, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul de Nord, Secția Româna, Satu Mare), Teatrul, no. 3 (1982): 52.

Most notably, the characters rebelled in a moment of chaos against the terrorism imposed by the Professor. He is killed but emerges later from his funeral bier.

The return of Sorescu's abstract works to the Romanian stage was, however, extremely short-lived. In 1981, securitate officers raided a transcendental meditation group and, because works by Sorescu were found in the room, he was questioned and placed under surveillance.³⁵ Accused along with many other intellectuals of plotting against the state, Sorescu gave up writing briefly during this period, as he described later:

The accusation of being part of that plot was very serious and could have had extremely unpleasant effects. It made me experience a social shock which took me by surprise. I tried to overcome it by giving up writing, which had brought me into all this in the first place. I remembered that, as a child, I wanted to be a painter. I practised [sic] drawing and coloring . . . Ostentatiously, I started painting in my courtyard, in oil, while the Securitate agent posted at my gate watched.³⁶

Lidia Vianu notes that a huge political trial was conducted against artists who attended the transcendental meditation meetings: "It [transcendental meditation] was harmless, but many dissenters frequented it, so it became the best reason to persecute them, which the communists did, fiercely."³⁷

The restrictions on Marin Sorescu coincided with a resumption of strict controls on performance and publication. The Solidarity movement in Poland seemed crushed under the Soviet-endorsed imposition of martial law. Growing economic problems

³⁵ Virginia Sorescu, conversation with author, 28 November 1996, Bucharest.

³⁶ Marin Sorescu, interview by Vianu, 91.

³⁷ Vianu, 91n.

within Romania posed the threat of similar labor unrest.³⁸ Ceaușescu, ever-balancing his foreign policy stance, moved closer to the Soviet Union once again as East-West detente seemed to fade.³⁹

Există nervi was not produced again until 1992, when productions were mounted in Brașov and Petroșani. The National Theatre in Târgu Mureș revived the play in 1996 in a major production under the very different circumstances of the post-1989 era. As one reviewer pointed out, the play's meaning to audiences in 1968 or 1980 would have been clear, having suffered "invazia 'profesorilor' ce voiau, cu orice preț, să ne convingă de faptul că ne aflăm într-un 'tren al viitorului,' și nu în modesta noastră casă." [the invasion of the 'professor' who wished, at any cost, to convince us of the fact that we were aboard a 'train to the future' and not in our modest home.]⁴⁰ The text spoke to people's lives of those times through an identification with the main character and his situation. The 1996 production removed the specifics of time and place in order to address the fear of reoccurrence of totalitarianism in any form or at any time. Instead of a realistic apartment, the setting mixed reality with metaphor by using Japanese screens and a sliding door. The wooden lathing suggested a jail cell. Somewhat surprisingly at first glance, the 1996 production dealt with the events with

³⁸ Nelson, 158.

³⁹ Walter M. Bacon, Jr., "Romania," in Communism in Eastern Europe, 2nd ed., ed. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 178.

⁴⁰ Ileana Berlogea, review of Există nervi, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Târgu Mureș), Teatrul azi, no. 4/5 (1996): 29.

solemnity, with little of the humor which can be found in the script. One reviewer went so far as to describe this as a “teama de răs” [fear of laughter]: “O teamă inutilă, de altfel, căci Marin Sorescu propune concōmitența răsului și a lacrimilor, cele mai grave probleme tratate de el fiind înveșmântate în glume de sorginte populară, mult și minuțios cizelate.” [A useless fear, since Marin Sorescu proposes the co-existence of laughter and of tears, the most grave problems treated by him being cloaked in jokes of popular origin, very thoroughly polished].⁴¹ Another writer noted that “comical absurd sorescian se pierde într-o monotonie ateatrală” [Sorescu’s absurd comedy gets diluted by an untheatrical monotony].⁴² As Václav Havel has pointed out, a sense of the absurd, a taste for the comic in otherwise grim situations, was a hallmark of theatre in Eastern Europe in the communist years. Indeed, a taste for irony and the absurd was necessary “to carry out our historic role and make the sacrifices that are required of us,” wrote Havel.⁴³ Perhaps the director no longer felt the need for the ironic tone of the original under the new circumstances of post-communist Romania.

During the Ceaușescu era, Există nervi ran afoul of several proscribed areas: the use of the absurd, which contradicted the rational materialism at the base of the communist undertaking; the “damned Aesopic language” that Lenin complained of, in which meanings were not clear and were left open to (possibly dangerous)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Anca Rotescu, “Forme de sincretism,” Teatrul azi, no 8/9 (1996): 36.

⁴³ Václav Havel, Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 113.

interpretation; existential discussions that allowed for the possibility of the existence of God or other higher powers; and specific political and economic references not allowed in the stricter climate after 1971. Even the use of the word “balcony” (a brief but important reference in the play) was banned in later years, when the government was launching a campaign to prevent people from enclosing their balconies with glass windows.⁴⁴ Ambiguity and metaphor are extremely slippery indeed. Miles Coiner pointed out that the play reads beautifully as an anti-Soviet parable—a trusted neighbor (the Soviet Union) is revealed as an enemy; the screams from the neighboring apartment could be those of Czechoslovakia, and so on—except that the play was written two years before the invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁴⁵

The actions of the State Committee for Art and Culture in 1971 made it exceedingly difficult for “pessimistic,” abstract works such as Iona and Există nervi to be produced for many years. The situation is ironically stated in the ending lines of Sorescu’s poem, “Adam,” in which Adam delights in creating new Eves for his amusement out of his remaining ribs until

God noticed
 Adam’s dissolute creation.
 He called Adam to him and swore at him in his godlike manner,
 then drove him out of paradise

⁴⁴ Daniela Crăsnaru, interview by Vianu, 206. Faced with severe fuel shortages, apartment dwellers enclosed their balconies to conserve heat. This visible confirmation that an economic problem existed was suppressed—a prohibition as painfully absurd as the fictional world described in Sorescu’s play.

⁴⁵ Coiner, 68-69.

Because of surrealism.⁴⁶

Probably only a poet of Marin Sorescu's stature could have published such a poem, which dared mention both God and surrealism and made allusion to (the officially non-existent) censorship.

Iosif Naghiu's "Damned Aesopic Language"

Iosif Naghiu's Gluga pe ochi [Hood Over the Eyes], also known as Întunericul [The Darkness] was attacked, along with Sorescu's plays, in the referat released in the summer of 1971 by the State Committee for Culture and the Arts. An examination of the play and its critical reception in the spring of 1971 shows the power of Naghiu's allegorical work as well as an outspokenness which would not be possible in the years following 1971.

The action of the play takes place in the semi-darkness of the house of a writer, Max. Max types a page, reads it, and then contentedly burns it. Two burglars, Sem and Len, break into his house. The burglars and Max seem unaware of each other's presence until Sem picks up and smokes Max's cigar, finally drawing Max's attention. Sem still does not verbally acknowledge Max's presence but pushes him into a chair and covers his mouth, while Len seems unaware of this action and keeps asking if anyone is around. Sem assures him, "E doar întuneric." [It's just the darkness.]⁴⁷

Max opens a window and calls out to the Policeman. The Policeman is

⁴⁶ Marin Sorescu, "Adam," trans. Lidia Vianu, in Vianu, 103.

⁴⁷ Iosif Naghiu, Întunericul, in Autostop (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1969), 158.

reluctant to stop his patrol to investigate. Max tells the Policeman he would see the thieves if he raised his hood, but the Policeman replies that “gluga nu o pot ridica, pentru că măsura ei a fost făcută special pentru capul meu” [I cannot raise my hood, because it was tailored especially for my head].⁴⁸ Max persists in trying to convince the Policeman to intervene, but only confuses him:

POLIȚISTUL: Dumneata mă confunzi... De altfel, e și greu ca cineva să te creadă. Dumneata vrei să mă convingi că discuți cu mine în prezența a doi hoți care nu fac nimic ca să te oprească. E absurd.

MAX: E absurd, dar așa e.

[**POLICEMAN:** You are confusing me... And besides, it's difficult for anyone to believe you. You want me to believe that you are conversing with me in the presence of two thieves who do nothing to stop you. It's absurd.

MAX: It's absurd, but true.]⁴⁹

In despair at being ignored by the authorities and thieves alike, Max shouts and turns on all the lights in the room. Len thinks he hears someone faintly and fires his automatic weapon into the ceiling, breaking some lightbulbs. The room goes back to semi-darkness and Sem reassures his partner that there no one in the room with them. As the curtain falls, Max is wringing his hands, asking, “Nu-i așa că glumiți?” [Isn't this only a joke?].⁵⁰

The second act begins in the same place, “Cîteva minute, secant, sau secole mai tîrziu” [a few minutes, seconds, or centuries later].⁵¹ Len watches as Max's daughter

⁴⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 158.

⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

and boy kiss in the hallway as he tells Sem,

Abia aștept să plec de aici și să mă culc cu prietena mea periferică . . . Și să mă întâlnesc cu prietenii me periferici. Vreau să beau o cafea periferică. Pentru că, oricum ar fi, e periferia mea și o iubesc... Și dacă vine cineva să-mi ia și această ultimă fărîmă de fericire, îlucid . . . Pentru că dincolo de periferie nu mai există nimic...

[I can hardly wait to leave here and go to bed with my peripheral girlfriend . . . And to meet with my peripheral friends. I want to drink peripheral coffee. Because, however it is, it's my periphery and I love it.... And if anyone gets in the way of this last bit of happiness, I'll kill him . . . Because beyond the periphery there's nothing...]⁵²

Max, unaware of the couple's presence, tries to plead with the two thieves not to take his money:

Am scris o grămadă de cărți... (Pauză.) Cărți valoroase... (Pauză.) În ele nu am făcut nici un fel de concesi... (Pauză.) Sau, uneori, concesi mai mici, fără însemnătate. (Pauză.) Dar în cărți se poate citi și printre rînduri . . . Eu am muncit pentru locul meu în societatea asta, și cînd spun societatea asta mă gîndesc că nu există alta mai bună.

[I have written a pile of books... (Pause.) Valuable books... (Pause.) I didn't make a bit of concession in them... (Pause.) Or, some, very small concessions, without significance. (Pause.) But in books one can read between the lines . . . I have worked for my place in this society, and when I say this society I mean that there doesn't exist any better one.]⁵³

The implication is that, as an intellectual, he is entitled to better treatment.

Max goes to the phone to call the police. At this point, the thieves finally begin to interact with Max, but they are affronted by being called thieves. Theirs is a special job which takes unusual skill, they say, and they may report Max to the policeman for calling them names. When the Policeman eventually arrives, the thieves challenge Max to make his case but, by this time, Max is too confused and afraid to admit anything

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 160.

except that they are professionals just doing their jobs. Sem and Len then distract Max in order to allow the daughter to smuggle her boyfriend into the bedroom.

Toward the end of the play, Max realizes what a coward he is and how low he has sunk. He can go no lower, as he tells Sem: “Ați terfelit mîndria mea de om, m-ați pus să mă tîrăsc în genunchi, nu vă e teamă că în curînd aș putea deveni periculos ca voi înșivă?” [You’ve stained my pride as a man, you have brought me to my knees, aren’t you afraid I could become as dangerous as yourselves?]⁵⁴ Max is stunned by his own audacity. Finally, he takes on the abusive attitude that the thieves had earlier, turning the tables. A notebook falls from Len’s pocket which reveals that he is an aspiring writer. Max tells him that he has talent, and Len begins to behave with the subservient attitude and halting speech seen in Max’s telephone conversations with his editor at the beginning of the play. Sem ends the play by noticing the reversal of roles and asking, “Hei, ce-i asta?” [Hey, what is this?]⁵⁵

Naghiu describes Întunericul and similar plays by his colleagues Marin Sorescu, Dumitru Solomon, Paul Cornel Chitic, and others as “o formă a contestației politice, sub auspiciile mijloacelor grotești ale carnavalului” (a form of political appeal, under the auspices of a grotesque method from a carnival).⁵⁶ The carnivalesque nature of the work, said Naghiu in 1990, bore a striking resemblance to the events in the streets of Timișoara in December of 1989 and recalled the characters of Max Frisch’s

⁵⁴ Ibid., 181.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁶ Iosif Naghiu, “Securitatea nu imită arta!,” Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1990): 15.

Biedermann and the Firebugs (also in the Bulandra repertory in 1971).⁵⁷ The work is also connected to Naghiu's earlier play, Week-end, by the use of the grotesque and the ineffectual intellectual protagonist, Max.

When the play opened, one reviewer called attention to the dual nature of the play, which combined buffoonery with mystery; the "hood" of the new title suggested both fool and monk as well as the inability to see. Darkness itself was identified as a key character in the play, a darkness which permeates the life and consciousness of mankind.⁵⁸ Despite the bleakness of this image, Max's aggression at the end of the play, which results in a reversal of roles, was seen as an optimistic solution to his earlier inability to take action.⁵⁹

One of the chief criticisms by the State Committee for Culture and the Arts was that Întunericul exhibited the influence of the theatre of the absurd in showing an abstract universe separated from concrete space and time and from social-historic forces, a view considered "străine de concepția marxistă" [alien to Marxist orientation].⁶⁰ The referat specifically applied Lenin's phrase, "blestemat limbaj esopic" [damned Aesopic language] to the work. Further, the situation in the play was seen as a larger metaphor that encompassed several negative themes: 1) the impotence

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Florin Tornea, review of Întunericul, by Iosif Naghiu (Teatrul Bulandra, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 2 (1971): 74-75.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, "Despre stagiunea 1970-1971," 8.

of intellectuals in the face of robbery (physical and metaphorical) 2) the intellectuals' willingness to compromise when threatened 3) "Guarding bodies" (police) who watch the "robbery" without reacting in any way.⁶¹ The non-specific setting, rather than protecting the play from censure, opened the door to further criticism: the absence of specific, temporal references led the Committee to the conclusion that Naghiu viewed this impotence as universal and the individual as inevitably prey to violence.

Although Iosif Naghiu received specific and blunt censure, the theatre management, director, and actors were also specifically blamed for staging the work:

Faptul că această piesă a ajuns pe scenă și a fost jucată în această formă dovedește grave lacune în orientarea și exigența conducerii Teatrului "Lucia Sturdza Bulandra" ca și în orientarea ideologică a regizorului care a montat-o și care a accentuat în spectacol confuziile, cu contribuția actorilor.

[The fact that this play has been played and staged in this shape is proof of a serious lack in the orientation and capability of the leadership of the Lucia Sturdza Bulandra Theatre as well as the ideological orientation of the director who staged it and who has emphasized in the show the general confusion, with the cooperation of the actors.]⁶²

One of the reasons that the play received so much attention by the regime was its public visibility.⁶³ The Bulandra was and is one of the top theatres in the country, the production was directed by the highly respected Valeriu Moisescu, and Toma Caragiu, a prominent actor who was also the Communist Party Secretary for the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Director Valeriu Moisescu noted that the earlier productions of Celuloid and Absența attracted much less attention, for example. See Valeriu Moisescu, "Războiul bacteriologic," interview by Ileana Popovici, Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1990): 15.

Bulandra company, played the role of Sem.⁶⁴ After only twenty performances in the spring of 1971, the play was forced to be withdrawn from the repertory of the Bulandra. A second production at the Youth Theatre in Piatra Neamț was stopped after just seven performances.⁶⁵ The repercussions went even further: editors at the publishing house which printed the play and at a journal which ran a highly favorable review were reprimanded, and two theatres in Poland called off rehearsals of the play.⁶⁶

The comments of the State Committee for Culture and the Arts on Gluga pe ochi were based in part on a review written by Nicolae Dragoș in the Communist Party newspaper, Scînteia. Dragoș charged Naghiu with distorting social reality and lapsing into mysticism rather than clarity: “Nu este deloc greu de descifrat din metafora străvezie a textului—accentuat de viziunea scenică de altfel—că autorul prezintă intelectualului ca avînd o condiție socială precară, supusă în permanență imixtiunilor, presiunii unor forțe brutale, desconsiderării.” [It is not at all difficult to decipher from the transparent metaphors in the text—emphasized also by the scenic vision—that the author presents intellectuals as having a precarious social condition, constantly subject to indifference, pressured by a brutal, inconsiderate force.]⁶⁷ Further, the reviewer discounted the idea that the allusive, equivocal setting was designed to make the action

⁶⁴ Dan Jitianu, “Cacialmau,” Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1990): 17.

⁶⁵ Eduard Covali, “O rază de lumină camuflată abil,” Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1990): 17.

⁶⁶ Iosif Naghiu, “Securitatea,” 14.

⁶⁷ Nicolae Dragoș, review of Întunericul, by Iosif Naghiu (Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest), Scînteia, 22 June 1971; reprinted in Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1990): 12.

universal. On the contrary, Dragoș charged that, since the action was not set elsewhere, “este vorba de realitatea noastră” [it speaks of our reality].⁶⁸ Further, “prin modul în care își gîndește lumea piesei sale, universul spiritual al personajelor, prin trimiterile aluzive, mistificînd realitatea, autorul dovedește o gravă lipsă de maturitate în fața adevărului vieții, de subestimare nejustificată a responsabilității acestei nobile tribune a ideii.” [By the way in which he thinks about the world of his play, the spiritual universe of his characters, through allusive references, falsifying reality, the author displays a grave lack of maturity in the face of the truth of existence and unjustly underestimates the responsibilities of this noble grandstand of ideas {i.e., the theatre}.]⁶⁹ Dragoș ended his attack by suggesting that the title, Hood Over The Eyes, applied to the author for his failure to see the “truth of existence,” and called for a responsible discussion of the function of theatre in Romania’s socialist society.

The problems created by Întunericul were only the beginning of difficulties for the Bulandra theatre. Just over a year later, the closing of Gogol’s The Inspector General after three performances resulted in the dismissal of Liviu Ciulei as artistic director of the Bulandra Theatre, the professional exile of director Lucian Pintilie, and the removal of actor Toma Caragiu as Party Secretary for the ensemble.⁷⁰ The production strongly ridiculed bureaucracy, but the government’s action came about

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ For details on the censorship of Revizorul [The Inspector General], see the collection of articles in Teatrul azi, no. 1 (1990): 6-11.

primarily because of unfortunate timing. A Russian production of the play had recently just been interdicted in Moscow. On the advice of the Romanian securitate, and after high-level contacts with the Soviet Union, the Romanian production was removed on the grounds of being too offensive to Russians.⁷¹ The Bulandra Theatre was rarely allowed to tour abroad after 1972, a situation described as the “home-arrest” of the Bulandra.⁷²

The artists mounting Întinericul at the Bulandra were apparently very aware of the risk they were taking in staging the play. In a roundtable discussion published before the play opened, the actors, director, designers, and author acknowledged that it was a work open to multiple interpretations. Further, they repeatedly stressed that they were making no references to contemporary events or reality.⁷³ Virgil Ogășanu, the actor portraying Lem, even suggested that his character could be “o prefigurare a unui personaj fascist” [a precursor of a fascist character], which would certainly have made the play more palatable to the ideologues.⁷⁴

The idea of an illusory place of safety, seen here as darkness, reappears in other early works by Naghiu, as Florin Tornea pointed out:

în Week-end din perspectiva miopiei sau pur și simplu a jocului de-a baba oarba cu realitățile incendiare; în Celuloid, din perspectiva izolării deliberate în carapacea cu iluzii a unui ‘întineric’ care te scoate din timp și din condiția

⁷¹ Ion Brad, “O penibilă canossa,” Teatrul azi, no. 1 (1990): 11.

⁷² Marian Popescu, “Muse,” 22.

⁷³ “În ce cheie jucați?” roundtable discussion, Teatrul, no. 11 (1970): 11-15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

propriei existențe; în Centrala telefonică, din perspectiva agresiunii, tot noaptea, a imprevizibilului; în Autostop, din perspectiva umilitoarei și acaparantei incertitudini de sine.

[in Week-end there is the myopic perspective or blind-man's bluff game with incendiary realities; in Celluloid there is the perspective of deliberate isolation in a shell with illusions of a 'darkness' which can protect you from time and from the conditions of existence itself; in Telephone Central there is again the nighttime perspective of aggression, of the unforeseeable; in Hitchhiking the perspective of humiliation and the accumulation of uncertainty about oneself.]⁷⁵

After Întinericul closed, Naghiu's works vanished from Romanian stages for over three years. Although Naghiu continued to write in allegorical and allusive styles and was able to continue to publish his works, only five of his plays received productions in the eighteen years between 1971 and 1989. Of those, only two were produced at more than one theatre. One of those works, Într-o un singură seară [In One Evening], will be examined in the next chapter.

Prize Goeth Before a Fall: Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou

The sudden change of policy in 1971 led, perhaps inevitably, to confusion among writers, theatre managers, and even censors as to what was allowable. In 1971, Dumitru Radu Popescu won the State Committee for Culture and Art prize at the National Festival of Theatre for Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou [Cat on New Year's Eve]. The play premiered at the National Theatre in Cluj and was then produced at the National Theatres in Timișoara and Bucharest as well as at the State Theatres of Brașov and Târgu Mureș before being suddenly removed from the repertoires later that year by

⁷⁵ Tornea, 75-76.

the same State Committee.⁷⁶ The new-found cultural freedom born out of the anti-Soviet euphoria of 1968 ended so abruptly with Ceaușescu's return from China in 1971 that the Romanian version of the Cultural Revolution caught many authors and producers off-guard. In this case the panel of theatre professionals selected by the State Committee for Culture and Art to judge the National Festival entries was at odds with the State Committee on how to judge Popescu's work.⁷⁷ Tellingly, the referat of July 1971 issued by the State Committee does not mention Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou at all, but does acknowledge that the Committee had at times given in to pressures by theatre managers and authors and allowed works to be performed that should not have been permitted.⁷⁸

The primary objection was, as with the Sorescu and Naghiu's works, ostensibly stylistic: plays that were too "ambiguous" and tended toward the absurd were deemed unsuitable for the purposes of communist education. The absurdist influence, however, is barely visible in the work; although containing a grotesque mixture of the comic and tragic, the action is primarily realistic until the final moment of the play, when a character who has presumably been killed reappears as if nothing has happened. The circularity of action could imply a lack of progress or causality, but can also be seen as

⁷⁶ Constantin Mohanu, "Tabel cronologic," in Dumitru Radu Popescu, F (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1996), ix.

⁷⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Georgeta Pourchot, 17 October 1998, Bucharest.

⁷⁸ Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, "Despre stagiunea 1970-1971," 22-23.

offering a second chance for the flawed characters to make better decisions.

A more likely cause for prohibition of the play, however, is the content. The play dealt with political issues which, although dating from the Stalinist period, still reflected on current members of the Party elite and on contemporary reality.

A literary reviewer in 1986, presumably safe from the political crossfire of fifteen years earlier, called the artistic controversies surrounding the staging of Dumitru Radu Popescu's Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou, Pasărea Shakespeare [The Shakespeare Bird] and Balconul [The Balcony] in the early 1970s "o adevărată batalie pentru Hernani ale anilor nostri." [a true battle over Hernani of our time].⁷⁹

Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou is also significant in that it marked a departure from the specificity of Acești îngeri tristi to a more archetypal approach: "The Cat on New Year's Eve marks a decisive orientation of the playwright towards ambivalent situations and cues which can be interpreted in two ways, towards a deeper probing of the characters' spiritual make-up making of them archetypes, towards the use of a graver and more complex language conveying various meanings."⁸⁰

The action of the play takes place at a family party on New Year's Eve. In addition to the mother and three adult children (Aurel, Victor, and Gilda), family friends and neighbors are present. Aurel, the owner of the house, is the director of a chemical enterprise. His wife, Livia, is all but invisible, meekly subservient to his

⁷⁹ Natalia Stancu, "Teatrul ca act de conștiință," România literară 19, no. 28 (10 July 1986): 11.

⁸⁰ Aurel Bădescu, "D. R. Popescu: A Dramaturgy of Truth in Movement," Romanian Review, no. 4 (1974): 134.

wishes. Gilda is a nurse who makes a good salary, which allows her to fulfill her sexual desires: “Asta-mi dă libertatea să nu primesc bani pe ce iubesc . . . Adică să mă culc cu cine vreau, fără onorariu.” [This gives me freedom to not get paid for what I like to do . . . That is to sleep with whomever I want, without asking money for it.]⁸¹ Her current suitor, Platon, the director of a mental hospital, receives Gilda’s scorn for men with complacency, even when asked to get on all fours and bark like a dog. Aurel and Gilda’s brother, Victor, has cancer and has not matched their social or economic success. He repeatedly confronts Aurel with value judgements about his profession, his arrogant behavior and, ultimately, his personal worth. As the evening progresses, we learn that the father, Tudor, was sent to prison years ago, apparently for a political crime, and that his brother-in-law, Elizeu, a literary critic, gave key testimony against him. The mother and Gilda believe that Tudor is still alive but Aurel says they are mad to think he will ever return.

In this atmosphere, a man appears at the door. The mother quickly recognizes him as the long-lost Tudor, but because the children barely knew their father, they need more convincing. Accompanying Tudor is a fellow prisoner, known only as “Mutu” [Mute], who has had his tongue cut out during torture. Aurel is openly hostile toward Tudor and is obviously concerned that the presence of his convicted father might jeopardize his position. Aurel grills Tudor, asking for an identify card or other proof, and begins to make Gilda and Victor doubt that the man is indeed their father. The

⁸¹ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou, in Teatru (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1974), 251.

mother is busy in the kitchen preparing a meal for her husband, so is unaware of the events in the living room. Tudor reveals that he knows that Elizeu's testimony sent him to prison. Gilda is stunned by this announcement, and not only denounces Elizeu for informing on her father but also accuses her uncle of sexually molesting her when she was fifteen. Elizeu, unable to face these charges, hangs himself in the bathroom.

Tudor becomes convinced that his children do not want him back. He tells his wife that he is taking Mutu to the railway station and will be back soon. Privately, Aurel gives a small amount of money to Tudor for a train ticket and says he doesn't want to see Tudor again. It is now clear that Aurel does recognize that Tudor is his father but is embarrassed by his presence. Tudor leaves, followed by Aurel. Gilda and Victor realize that Tudor really is their father when their mother confirms that he has six fingers on one hand. Before Victor can act, a squealing of tires and a crash are heard outside the house.

In the following scene, Aurel returns, saying that he didn't see Tudor in the fog, that Tudor is dead, and that he disposed of the body in a trash bin on the edge of town. The mother is suddenly energized and puts on her coat to summon the police. She says that she can't remain like a cat which defecates on top of the stove, blind to the unhappiness it causes. Before she can leave, the doorbell rings and the play ends with the entrance of Tudor and Mutu. The father calls out, "Bună seara" [good evening] to the stupefied guests.

The re-entrance of Tudor, apparently unharmed, opens many possible interpretations. Was the evening just a game (as suggested by party games featured in

the play's prologue) or a dream (as suggested by the disappearance of Elizeu's body from the bathroom and Platon's report of seeing him in a dream)? Did Aurel kill someone else with his car or only a cat, as he originally claimed? Will Aurel and the others react differently to Tudor's appearance this time? Is Tudor only a symbol of Aurel's past, a symbol which cannot be killed, returning to haunt him? This last interpretation meshes well with the larger issue of the difficult political reconciliation and rehabilitation which took place after 1965. Popescu may be implying that denying or ignoring the past, however embarrassing it may be, will not make it go away.

Running throughout the play is an examination of Aurel's lack of scruples and his attempt to use his social and political power to silence those around him. When Ion begins to tell the others what he witnessed outside the house and that Aurel can tolerate only slaves or enemies, for example, Aurel warns that Ion has no proof, only opinions, "Eu te-aş putea condamna pe tine pentru fapte" [I could condemn you with facts].⁸² He is compared repeatedly with both a cat and a mouse in his dealings. As a cat, he toys with his victims; as a mouse, he nibbles the heads off of others.

But the other characters do not escape blame either. When the others ask Livia how she can put up with being so subservient to Aurel, she responds, "E greu să nu te obișnuiești, când n-ai copii și nu mai ai aproape pe nimeni... Sînt lașă, ce vrei? Și voi o să vă obișnuieți cu el și-o să tăceți, ca să puteți trăi! Și chiar de n-o să faceți ce face el, o să-l apărați tăcînd." [It is hard not to get used to it, when you have no children and almost no other living relatives... I am a coward, I know. But you all are also

⁸² Ibid., 293.

going to get used to him and keep your mouths shut so that you can live! And even if you will not do what he does, you will defend what he does by keeping quiet about it.]⁸³

Finding a balance between the grotesque and tragic elements posed one of the challenges of mounting the play. Each of the productions in the spring of 1971 emphasized different facets of the script. The premiere production in Braşov accentuated the human aspects and relationships, while the production in Cluj took a more intellectual view and emphasized the generalizations.⁸⁴ The production at the National Theatre in Bucharest emphasized the nightmarish aspects by beginning the play with a great deal of light and color and then gradually changing the lighting and acting style as the action progressed, but still kept the mixture of the comic and tragic, burlesque and melancholic.⁸⁵ The compromises made by Aurel were especially highlighted, and the actor, Victor Rebengiuc, was able to show the inner truthfulness of this “negative” character, making his actions intelligible to the audience.⁸⁶

The play was acknowledged as growing out of the political changes of 1965, “an al unui tulburător moment de revizuire și reparații etice în societateă noastră:

⁸³ Ibid., 303.

⁸⁴ Florin Tornea, review of Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul de Stat, Braşov; Teatrul Național, Cluj; Teatrul de Stat, Tîrgu Mureş), Teatrul, no. 3 (1971): 36-40; Mira Iosif, review of Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Național, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 5 (1971): 52-53.

⁸⁵ Iosif, 52.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

momentul reabilitării și reintegrării în viața civică a unor foști deținuți politici.” [a year of some tumultuous revisions and ethical reparations in our society: the moment of rehabilitation and reintegration into civic life of former political prisoners.]⁸⁷ Despite the reviewer’s hopes that these issues could be examined freely in the contemporary environment, that was obviously not to be the case. Perhaps the “nightmare” interpretation drawn upon by the directors was too powerful even so many years later.⁸⁸

Implications

The official reprimands received in 1971 by Există nervi and Întunericul, along with their quick removal from the repertory, signaled to playwrights and theatre managers and directors that a return to a more realistic style and “positive” content would be required in the future. The official reasons for withdrawing Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou from the repertory of five major theatres were never made public, but the message was made clear that recent political history was still a delicate subject to approach. Dumitru Radu Popescu, perhaps because of the wide range of styles he employed, continued to have many of his plays produced and published despite the limitations imposed by the changes of 1971. He was also able to return to political and social criticism in later years with plays such as Studiul osteologic al unui schelet de cal dintr-un mormânt avar din Transilvania, which will be discussed in the next two chapters.

⁸⁷ Tornea, 36.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.

As witnessed in this chapter, three key changes occurred in Romanian theatre in 1971. First, stylistic choices were again linked to philosophical and political viewpoints. Although socialist realism was no longer the only acceptable form, a basic realistic view became the new norm. Artistic variations, as seen in Există nervi and Întunericul, were still possible but potentially dangerous for the author. Second, because theatre was expected to play a clear and positive didactic role, the content of each script was carefully scrutinized by the censors. Theatre was to aid in the transformation of the country under Marxist-Leninist principles. “Art for art’s sake” (as was suspected of Iona) was not an acceptable attitude, and plays need to be clearly in support of the government’s social and political goals. Overt criticism and “negative” themes, as seen in Întunericul and Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou would no longer be allowed. Third, censorship of publication was reinstated and censorship of performances continued, but no clear guidelines were established, as was seen in the case of Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou. The renewed censorship worked by example and rumor rather than by a codified set of rules, making the artist’s role a precarious one.

The fortunes of the three playwrights between 1968 and 1971 set the stage for the next eighteen years. Marin Sorescu and Iosif Naghiu had increasing difficulties in getting plays staged between 1971 and 1989. Not only were the two authors connected closely with experiments in dramatic form, but the content of their early works had been politically outspoken. Authorities undoubtedly feared that any ambiguity or abstraction in the later works by Sorescu and Naghiu concealed a message of dissent. Dumitru Radu Popescu, on the other hand, had already shown a mastery of basically

realistic forms, as seen in Pisica în noaptea Anului Nou and Acești îngeri triști (which will be discussed in the chapter five). He focused on human nature rather than systems and even his works in non-realistic forms generally dealt with concrete individuals in a specific place and time rather than the abstract settings of plays such as Iona or Week-end. How the three writers navigated the tortured paths of censorship in the years leading up to 1989 is the focus of the next three chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

WORKING WITHIN THE SYSTEM

From 1971 to 1989, Romanian writers faced an often capricious and multi-layered system of censorship that changed unpredictably in intensity and direction. This chapter examines how Iosif Naghiu, Marin Sorescu, and Dumitru Radu Popescu adapted to the new restrictions placed on publication and production.

Censorship of journals and publishing houses was multi-tiered. Editors had primary responsibility for suggesting changes in texts, which then had to be approved by censors before being typeset, and approved again before the final print run. Authors had no opportunity to discuss their work with the censors and rarely even knew who was reviewing their text. Because books and journals could even be recalled from bookstores after publication, authors could only be sure their works were truly promulgated after the public actually purchased the publication.¹ Thus, even if a writer wished to write within the boundaries, it was often difficult to predict what would be acceptable and what would be deleted. Authors could avoid some specific words, such as “God,” “angels,” or “church” which were officially proscribed, but censors might also read unintended meanings into works and ask for cuts. An example of such a

¹ For details on censorship in Romania, see Ana Blandiana, Adriana Bittel, and Dan Verona, interviews by Lidia Vianu, in Lidia Vianu, Censorship in Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1988), 132-39, 162-64, 169-88.

reading is recounted by Dan Verona in connection with a stanza of his poem, "The Prayer of the Nail," in which he wrote:

Just that. I feel sick. And I dare
 Say: if I have crucified the Father
 I shall not stop at that. When I feel no longer sick
 I dream of the son's flesh.

Verona explains that this was considered by the editor-in-chief of the publishing house, a former censor, as a "hint at Ceaușescu and his son, the prince inheritor. [An] absurd interpretation, belonging to a sick mind. I never even thought of that."² The consequences of transgression were as indefinite as the rules themselves. The government's reaction to dissidence was deliberately unpredictable, according to Jonathan Eyal:

Throughout the last two decades, most East European dissidents who dared speak their mind, usually knew what to expect from the authorities: loss of employment, perpetual harassment, imprisonment, exile. In Romania, however, this was never the case. The country's few dissidents were almost never put on trial: some escaped unmolested for many years, while others disappeared or experienced fatal 'accidents.' The Securitate's tactic was therefore one of perpetual deterrence through the very unpredictability of the potential punishment.³

Stage productions faced even greater obstacles than printed works. Not only did the text need to be approved, but the production had to be endorsed by a censor in a

² Dan Verona, interview by Vianu, 180-81.

³ Jonathan Eyal, "Why Romania Could Not Avoid Bloodshed," in Spring in Winter: The 1989 Revolutions, ed. Gwyn Prins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 150-51.

preview performance. If cuts or changes were requested, the play could not open until another viewing by the censor was arranged. This system could result in a very protracted process of revisions and additional rehearsals. The opening of Marin Sorescu's Răceala was delayed nearly a year before censors were satisfied with the production.⁴ Even a foreign play already approved for production might be subject to additional changes before being allowed to open, as Ruth Lamb points out in her description of her visits to the National Theatre's rehearsals of Neil Simon's The Prisoner of Second Avenue in Bucharest. In that play, because references to a blizzard and to unemployment were seen as too similar to current events in Bucharest, script changes were made to distance the action and lay blame for the protagonist's unemployment explicitly on the capitalist system.⁵

Nevertheless, the government, always conscious of the international perception of Romania, needed to demonstrate that the arts were vibrant and of high quality. As Zygmunt Hübner has said, "Every regime, especially a totalitarian one, fears being accused of barbarity. So it calls itself 'the heir of the finest progressive traditions of national culture.'"⁶ The attempt to strike a balance between encouraging quality theatrical works and the proper socialist education of the masses resulted in a repertory of vastly disparate quality, but hardly relegated Romania theatre to a "backwater from

⁴ Marin Sorescu, interview by Vianu, 89.

⁵ Ruth Lamb, The World of Romanian Theatre (Claremont, CA: Ocelot Press, 1976), 43-44.

⁶ Zygmunt Hübner, Theatre and Politics, trans. Jadwiga Kosicka (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 93.

which it is still struggling to recover,” as one critic has claimed.⁷

Authors such as Iosif Naghiu, Marin Sorescu, and Dumitru Radu Popescu were still able to get artistically worthy plays published and produced between 1971 and 1989, although not without overcoming significant obstacles.⁸ With all publishing houses and theatres under state control, a strong securitate network, and even typewriters required to be registered with the police, Romania did not develop the network of private performances and samizdat publication witnessed in Poland and Czechoslovakia, although some writers' circles were formed and private circulation of works did take place.⁹ Writers adopted a number of strategies to reduce the impact of censorship. Some authors, such as the novelist Marin Preda, deliberately wrote sections at the beginning of their works that would be unacceptable in order to have a bargaining point with the censor.¹⁰ A poem or play might be set in a western country to imply that any negative inferences apply to capitalism, not to communism.¹¹ Other authors “knew that a price had to be paid; after writing a very conformist book, they

⁷ J. R. Stephens, “Censorship,” in The Cambridge Guide to Theatre, new ed., ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 184.

⁸ Marion Popescu, “The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Romania 1945-1989,” in The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Eastern and Central Europe 1945-1989 (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland and DeBalie, 1995), 16.

⁹ Ana Blandiana and Simona Popescu, interviews by Vianu, 133, 226-27.

¹⁰ Eugen Simion, interview by Vianu, 60.

¹¹ Dan Verona, interview by Vianu, 174, 181.

published one which expressed their true feelings.”¹²

Playwrights could also follow the suggestions made in the State Committee for Culture and Art’s referat of 1971, which listed a series of subjects suited to the advancement of socialist education: historical heroes, workers’ history, the class struggle, the young communists union (U.T.C.), the liberation of Romania from the fascists, the fight against pre-war political parties, post-war reconstruction, the transformation of agriculture, the growth of the working class, the brotherhood between city and village and among workers, peasants, and intellectuals, satires of antisocialist attitudes, lessons against moral vices, lives of model communists, the responsibilities of scientists and artists, and exposure of bourgeois attitudes.¹³

In this and the following two chapters, I examine several popular works by the three authors which were written and produced between 1971 and 1989. First, plays which either supported the regime or were co-opted by the regime as exemplary works will be discussed, including Iosif Naghiu’s Intr-o singură seară, Marin Sorescu’s Matca, and several plays by Dumitru Radu Popescu, including the strange production history of Piticul din grădina de vară. Two additional popular plays by Dumitru Radu Popescu which were critical but not overtly subversive will be dealt with in chapter five, and Marin Sorescu’s history plays will be covered in chapter six.

¹² Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, interview by Vianu, 33.

¹³ Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, “Despre stagiunea 1970-1971 și unele probleme privind pregătirea stagiunii 1971-1972,” Teatrul, no. 8 (1971): 24.

Naghiu's Communist Heroes

Despite the scandal of Gluga pe ochi in 1971, Naghiu's next production took place at the same theatre, the Bulandra, just three years later, and demonstrates the shift in style and content which many Romanian writers made during this period. The work, Într-o singură seară [In One Evening], was not only a more realistic play than Naghiu's absurdist early works, but the two protagonists were "illegalists," communist fighters against the fascist regime of General Antonescu before his overthrow in 1944. This theme undoubtedly went far toward making the script acceptable to the authorities.

Nothing much happens in the play. Indeed, that seems to be part of the message—that a friendship which has been built up over thirty years can not truly change significantly in just one evening. Instead, the focus is psychological and the action examines the friendship of two men who fought together thirty years ago but who now hold very different values and live contrasting lives. Marcu Onofrei, the professor in Naghiu's Absența, returned to his small provincial town, raised a family, and established a reputation as a scientific researcher. George Oniga, in contrast, became a party activist and held a position of high responsibility. In his concentration on social and political issues, however, he has neglected ties to others, has no family and now, in retirement, feels the loneliness of his life. Freed of responsibilities, he finally visits Onofrei one evening at his home in the provinces.

The old friendship is strained by the life choices the two have made over the three decades. In the words of one reviewer, "Oniga is now a man molded by the

experience of power; he is rigid, somehow haughty and sometimes cynical; he behaves like a general on the battlefield, ignores all kindness, is condescending to Marcu's daughter who searches [seeks] protection, and comes into conflict with the only independent spirit who dares oppose him, with Petre, his friend's son, a youth with a keen sense of dignity, so sincere that he becomes rude, angry with the intruder and also with his father whom he considers too submissive."¹⁴ Ultimately, though, it is the father, Onofrei, who restores balance. Although his respect for Oniga is diminished, "Onofrei accepts him as he is, helps him when he is in need and succeeds in saving the precious feeling of friendship; and, at the same time, by his tact, tenderness and generosity he teaches his son a useful lesson."¹⁵

Naghiu described the play as a "critical text" in that it is polemic in nature, the characters are all at critical junctures, and it examines the nature of friendship without resorting to hyperbole.¹⁶ The main character in the play is time itself, a force which has shaped the characters and now compels them to make choices and evaluate their lives and values.

Într-o singură seară received several productions in 1974 in commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the fight of the "illegalists" to overthrow the fascist regime in 1944. Reviewers compared the work to previous plays by Naghiu, such as Celuloid,

¹⁴ Ileana Popovici, review of One Evening, by Iosif Naghiu (Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest), Romanian Review, no. 1 (1975): 115.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Iosif Naghiu, "Cum am scris Într-o singură seară," in Într-o singură seară (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1975), 6.

Absența, Week-end, and Autostop but, not surprisingly, no mention was made of the ill-fated Întinericul.¹⁷ Although the characters were seen as symbolic as well as psychological, the various productions took on very different aspects: the Bulandra production was Chekhovian in its emphasis on psychological development; in Iași, a discordant, argumentative tone revealed the centrifugal nature of the clash of characters; in Timișoara a sparse production, shaped by a director mostly known for his television work, stripped the action to the essentials of a debate.¹⁸ Additional productions were mounted in Arad, in Hungarian in Satu Mare and in Reșița, where the play was held over into the 1975-1976 season.¹⁹

The play also signaled return to the style of Absența for Naghiu. Indeed, without a move away from abstraction his dramas undoubtedly could not have been produced in Romania. His style changed from “cel absurdo-suprarealist, practicat în satira Celuloid, pînă la acel realist-psihologic” [the absurd-surrealist, used in the satire Celluloid, to the realistic-psychological] of Într-o singură seară.²⁰ Naghiu was

¹⁷ See, for example, Florin Tornea, review of Într-o singură seară, by Iosif Naghiu (Teatrul Bulandra, Bucharest; Teatrul Național, Iași; Teatrul Maghiar de Stat, Timișoara), Teatrul, no. 9 (1974): 68; and Nina Cassian, Caitul-program, Bulandra Theatre, in Naghiu, Într-o singură seară, 95. The erasure of embarrassing or critical works from the record is one of the factors which makes the study of modern Romanian theatre extremely arduous, since omissions are often difficult to detect.

¹⁸ Tornea, 70-72.

¹⁹ Valeriu Râpeanu, O antologie a dramaturgiei românești 1944-1977: Teatrul de inspirație contemporană (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1978), 912.

²⁰ Radu Popescu, România liberă, 29 June 1974, quoted in Naghiu, Într-o singură seară, 100.

applauded for his new-found “maturity” of style.²¹

His credentials as a playwright acceptable to the regime restored after the debacle of Gluga pe ochi, Naghiu was able to get his next two works produced by the National Theatre in Bucharest: Valiza cu fluturi [Briefcase with Butterflies] in 1975 and Cîstigătorul trebuie ajutat [The Winner Should be Helped] in 1977. Valiza cu fluturi was revived at least twice by provincial theatres, but the next premiere of Naghiu’s works did not take place until 1983, when Misterul Agamemnon [The Agamemnon Mystery] was produced by the Comedy Theatre in Bucharest and Frunzele amăgitoarei neputinți [Leaves of Delusive Impotence] appeared in Brăila. Naghiu continued to write ambiguous works and drifted back toward the abstract and absurd; needless to say, many of his plays went unproduced.

Two short plays published in 1981 demonstrate his continued critical point of view and use of symbolism and allegory. Cel care se ignoră [The Man Who Ignores Himself] was included in the collection, Misterul Agamemnon. An English translation appeared in Romanian Review a year later.²² Subtitled “a dramatic sketch,” the three-person play is set in a tavern. A new customer tries to start up a conversation with The Man Who Ignores Himself, only to be told to pay no attention to him. As a non-person, the old man is able to eat and drink freely in the bar, since the bartender does

²¹ Marius Robescu, România literară, 20 June 1974, quoted in Naghiu, Într-o singură seară, 98.

²² Iosif Naghiu, Cel care se ignoră, in Misterul Agamemnon (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 285-90; Iosif Naghiu, The Man Who Ignores Himself, trans. G.M. Severin, Romanian Review 5/6/7 (1992): 119-122.

not acknowledge him either. By pretending not to exist, however, the old man (and apparently others like him) can be forced to work in order to protect his non-identity. For example, the Bartender, to demonstrate the advantages of the arrangement to the new customer, corners the old man, and demands to know his identity. When The Man Who Ignores Himself denies that he is the old man who drinks and eats for free, the Bartender insists that he must then be the worker from the brewery and puts the old man to work carrying out the empty beer bottles. The customer is shocked by what he sees and tries to shake the old man into acknowledging himself. The old man becomes upset that his comfortable life is being interfered with, hits the customer, and runs from the bar.

The short play is a parable, with characters meant to be read as metaphors for larger social issues. The title, in the Romanian original, stresses the distancing from humanity which the old man has accepted. A literal translation would be “That Which Ignores Itself,” referring to a masculine person or object. The word “man” does not actually appear in the title; the phrasing accentuates the negation of self which has occurred. Thematically, the play can be viewed on several levels. The old man has given up his identity, voice, and free will in exchange for food and drink. The bartender exploits the old man’s situation for his own benefit. The old man is so determined to be ignored that he knocks the customer to the floor while yelling “IGNORE ME!” The irony is obvious—his cry to be ignored can no longer be ignored. The play can perhaps also be read as a veiled autobiographical statement, given Naghiu’s effective banishment from the Romanian stage—that an artist can exchange his

political silence for physical survival. The play ends with the bartender offering the customer a sandwich, a hint that the cycle may begin again, with the customer becoming a new Man Who Ignores Himself. The situation is not a personal, psychological dilemma, but a social and economic web which ensnares the weak-willed.

Împăratul și calușeii [The Emperor and the Carousel] appeared in the same volume of plays and was also translated in Romanian Review.²³ Like its companion piece, the dramatic sketch invites interpretation as a parable. A self-important and despotic emperor, accompanied by his train of lackeys and fawning journalists, comes upon a carousel which reminds him of his youth. At the climax, the Emperor reveals that his whole life of conquests and rise to power was motivated by his inability to afford to ride the carousel as a child. In the end, he proclaims his possessions and powers to the carousel operator and asks to ride, only to be silenced with a single “no” from the operator.

Although the psychological implications may be heavy-handed (reducing an emperor’s lust for power to an unfulfilled childhood desire in a manner reminiscent of “rosebud” in Citizen Kane), the drama treads on perilous political ground. The emperor has executed the last private shop owner shortly before, and comments, “Yes, we are making radical reforms.”²⁴ Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were razing half of

²³ Iosif Naghiu, Împăratul și calușeii, in Misterul Agamemnon (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 297-306; Iosif Naghiu, The Emperor and the Merry-Go-Round, trans. G.M. Severin, Romanian Review 5/6/7 (1992): 123-27.

²⁴ Naghiu, “Emperor,” 127.

Bucharest at that time to make way for grand building schemes and megalomaniacal monuments. Whether or not Naghiu was consciously targeting the dictator is, in many ways, beside the point. At a time when censors could demand that the number of dogs owned by a character be changed from two to one because it might be seen as a reference to Ceaușescu (who owned two dogs), any portrayal of a dictator in literature had to be risky.²⁵

Naghiu therefore remained a literary figure who passed in and out of favor during the Ceaușescu regime. His continuing critical attitude and disposition toward the allegorical and surreal reduced the opportunities for publication and production. On the other hand, his unyielding stance made him a dissident hero after 1989. As we shall see in chapter seven, his quest for truth did not lead to large audiences for his plays even after 1989.

Sorescu's Model Heroine

Marin Sorescu's theatrical fortunes after 1971 followed Naghiu's path in some regards, although Sorescu benefitted from his international fame as a poet. The third play in Sorescu's Setea muntelui de sare [The Thirst of the Salt Mountain] trilogy, Matca [The Matrix], received many more productions than the previous two pieces, Iona and Paracliserul, probably because its story line is less obscure than the other two, and the ending is more hopeful and understandable. Matca was inspired by the devastating floods which Romania endured in 1970, which, as Sorescu wrote, "set me

²⁵ Marin Sorescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

an example of anonymous deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice . . . With this play the author has already left the framework of monodrama; loneliness is conquered, even if in the final moment only one character is left alive.²⁶ The play highlights the heroism of an ordinary peasant woman facing a natural disaster, an acceptable topic according to the July Theses. Sorescu's play was therefore not so much a work that supported the regime as a work that the regime found useful in raising national pride, despite symbolic and expressionist elements in its construction.²⁷

The play received at least eight productions in Romania before 1989, but was first performed in Geneva, Switzerland, just eight days before the Romanian premiere in 1974.²⁸ The play received additional international stagings in Poland and Finland, and translations into English, French, Russian, and Macedonian as well as Hungarian language productions within Romania.²⁹

Matca centers on Irina, a woman about to give birth, and her father, who is about to die. As the flood waters rise, his coffin becomes a island, on which Irina

²⁶ Marin Sorescu, "Something of a Preface," in The Thirst of the Salt Mountain, trans. Andrea Deletant and Brenda Walker (London: Forest Books, 1985), xiii.

²⁷ In later years, the play may also have served to support the Demographic Program of the 1980s, which monitored pregnant women, outlawed abortion, and banned contraceptives in an effort to increase population and, thus, industrial output. Details of the Program can be found in Kurt W. Treptow, ed., A History of Romania, 3rd ed. (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1977), 551.

²⁸ Râpeanu, 997.

²⁹ Information compiled from various reviews in Teatrul and Virginia Sorescu, "Marin Sorescu: nota biobibliografica," TMs provided to the author, June, 1998.

preserves the new life she has brought forth even as the woman is swept away. Much of the play has the nature of a monologue in that Irina often speaks to herself, to a trio of "fates," and to characters offstage. Sorescu speaks of this third part of his trilogy as exploring the round womb of birth, a circular image in contrast to the horizontal quest of Jonah and the vertical quest of the Verger.³⁰ Interestingly, he began the play not while in Romania, but in Iowa City in the winter of 1971, looking at the solid ice floes of the Iowa River.³¹

The initial Romanian production, at Teatrul Mic, used three actresses as Irina. Sorescu thought this was confusing to the audience, but later stated that "this did not stop Cernescu's production of this play [from] being one of the best and most successful of any yet staged in Romania."³² Audiences were likewise enthusiastic, and the play remained in the repertory for some time.³³ The production by Teatrul Mic was also Romania's entry in the 1975 international theatre festival in Warsaw.³⁴

Sorescu directed a revised version of the play for the Youth Theatre of Piatra Neamț later in the 1974-1975 season, using a young cast combined with the scene

³⁰ Marin Sorescu, "Something Like a Preface," in The Thirst of the Salt Mountain, trans. Andrea Deletant and Brenda Walker (London: Forest Books, 1985), x.

³¹ Marin Sorescu, "Variante și anexe," Teatrul, no. 4 (1975): 25-26.

³² Marin Sorescu, "Something Like a Preface," xii.

³³ Radu Nichita, "Matca spectacolului," Teatrul, no. 4 (1975): 35; Râpeanu, 997.

³⁴ Ana Maria Popescu, "Romanian Playwrights on the World's Stages," Romanian Review, no. 1 (1976): 84.

design of veteran Liviu Ciulei. The script changes were not drastic. Surprisingly, the major difference was to make the staging much more concrete, much more rooted in Oltenean village life than the original production, a focus which “traduce in limbaj visual marea metaforă a Matcăi” [translates into visual language the great metaphor of The Source].³⁵ Later stagings in Romania, however, emphasized the poetic and symbolic elements rather than these concrete details.³⁶

In the 1997 revival at the National Theatre in Craiova, the play was greeted with enthusiasm. As one reviewer stated, the play has “capacitatea de a transforma datele conjuncturalului–inundațiile din 1971 [1970]–în materia primă a unei drame a condiției umane, care va interesa, cu siguranță, și în mileniul următor.” [the capacity of transforming the facts of the events–the floods of 1971 {1970}–into prime material for a drama of the human condition, which will be interesting, certainly, even in the coming millennium.]³⁷

Matca, written and produced after the thaw of the late 1960s, displays a much different style and transparency of meaning when compared to Iona and Paracliserul. Nicolae Manolescu noted a similarity in style to the works of Ionesco and Beckett, but

³⁵ Mira Iosif, review of Matca, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Tineretului, Piatra Neamt), Teatrul, no. 5 (1975): 43.

³⁶ One reviewer could not seem to find an appropriate category in which to place the play, comparing it in turns with the avant-garde, classical tragedy, expressionism, Sanskrit drama, and the films of Fellini! Florin Potra, review of Matca, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Maghiar de Stat, Timișoara), Teatrul, no. 5 (1977): 42-43.

³⁷ Victor Parhon, review of Matca, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Craiova), Teatrul azi, no. 4/5 (1997): 28.

held that the play's optimism set it apart from the theatre of the absurd: "fără să închidă ochii la întuneric și la absurd; regăsind toată superba măreție a omului care n-a fost cruțat nici de experiența întunericului, nici de aceea a absurdului." [without closing one's eyes to darkness and the absurd; recovering all the superb greatness of the person who is not crushed by the experience of darkness or of the absurd.]³⁸ Nevertheless, Sorescu had to defend the apolitical nature of the play by writing that "Păreră mea este că adevăratul teatru include, în esența sa, actualitatea și implicația politică, în cazul nostru, evident, actualitatea socialistă, politica partidului comunist." [It seems to me that the true theatre includes, in its essence, political realities and implications, in our case, obviously, socialist reality, politics of the Communist Party.]³⁹ Sorescu, like Naghiu, proved to be too intractable to be used as a cultural trophy by the Ceaușescu regime. Particularly following 1981, when Sorescu was questioned in connection with a supposedly subversive group practicing transcendental meditation, it became increasingly difficult to receive the approval of the censors for productions of his plays. Some of these issues will be dealt with further in chapter six, in connection with two of Marin Sorescu's historical dramas.

Propaganda or Truth: The Enigmatic Years of Dumitru Radu Popescu

Dumitru Radu Popescu walked a dangerous tightrope during the period of 1973 through 1989. He continued to write plays, essays, and novels at breakneck speed, but

³⁸ Nicolae Manolescu, quoted in Râpeanu, 1000.

³⁹ Marin Sorescu, "Autograf: Ce înseamnă 'teatru politic'?" in Râpeanu, 1007.

the outspokenness and radical stylistic experimentation found in his early plays largely vanished. Instead, some of his plays seemed to be written in support of, or even at the request of, the Ceaușescu regime. On the other hand, he also wrote plays during this period which were openly critical of Romanian society. To this day, Popescu remains silent on his personal political views; his plays reveal a complex and multi-leveled exploration of social and political issues and a persistent concern for what it takes to be an honorable human being in an imperfect world. This enigmatic stance allowed Dumitru Radu Popescu to be simultaneously viewed as a collaborator and a dissident following the 1989 revolution, as will be discussed in chapter seven. In the following discussion, I examine several of Dumitru Radu Popescu's plays which seemed to support the regime, while two of his more critical works will be analyzed separately in chapter five.

Piticul din grădina de vară: Martyr or Metaphor?

In conjunction with the crackdown of 1971 came a call from the Central Committee for a new direction in playwriting. Authors were urged to be constructive and to focus on themes which would advance communist education, including the celebration of communist heroes. Out of this environment came Dumitru Radu Popescu's Piticul din grădina de vară [The Dwarf in a Summer Garden], first produced in 1974 in celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the liberation of Romania from fascism. The play is notable in that it faithfully conforms to the 1971 directive but raises much larger political, social, and personal issues which allowed it to be

performed in a somewhat subversive manner in 1989.

The script relates the story of a communist woman who endured horrible tortures from the Romanian fascists in 1944. The heroine of the play, Maria, is led into a courtyard garden containing a large stone dwarf where prisoners are being executed. Maria faints and, upon inspection by a doctor, is found to be pregnant. Her execution, although already announced in the newspapers (making her dead to the world), is delayed by nine months, during which time she is harassed, asked to reveal the names of fellow communist rebels, and threatened with rape. Throughout her ordeal, she keeps her dignity and compassion. Her captors become increasingly affected with panic as it becomes clear that Americans and Soviet troops are closing in on Germany and its allies. Deliverance does not arrive in time for Maria; after giving birth, she is executed. Her story continues, however; her fellow prisoners see her float magically above the place of her execution in a transcendent image of courage and purpose in the face of confinement and persecution.

As is often the case in Dumitru Radu Popescu's works, the situation is used primarily as a backdrop for discussions on various themes: life and death, loyalty and betrayal, freedom and captivity, and the courage evidenced by an ordinary person placed in extraordinary circumstances. The focus remains sharply on Maria's internal ability to rise above the fear which permeates her environment, rather than on the handful of dramatic incidents which occur during her captivity.

Maria expresses her hate for her captors but also speaks of the worth of the individual human being and the right to political freedom. Her political agenda is

clear. When she is told that she can obtain her freedom by informing on others, she refuses:

Și ce libertate am pierdut venind în pușcărie? Libertatea de a nu face coadă la pâine. De a nu vota niște imbecili, de a nu spune poezii de ziua unui rege găngăvit. Ce-am pierdut? Libertatea de a nu putea să vorbești nimic. De a te teme de telefonul din casă, de a vedea în fiecare poștaș un polițist, în fiecare instalator de gaz—un turnător ca tine . . . Ce-ai tu cu cuvintele mele, ce-aveți voi cu cuvintele? De ce să le controlăm, de ce le controlați? Toate javrele se tem de cuvinte. Ce-aveți cu verbele, cu proverbele, cu substantivele? Nu le tăiați, nu le ștergeți cu guma, nu le asasinați, nu omoriți cuvintele, gândurile, nu ucideți oamenii! . . . Și dacă mor, ce pierd? Că nu găsesc ce vreau pe piață?

[What freedom did I give up by coming to prison? The freedom not to wait in line for bread. The freedom not to vote for a bunch of idiots, or to sing praises and say poems to an idiotic king. What have I lost? The freedom of not being able to speak freely. Of being afraid of your own telephone, of imagining that every postman is actually a policeman or every mechanic who fixes your pipelines is a squealer like you . . . What do you have against my words, what do you all have against any words? Why should you control them, why do you all want to control them? All curs are afraid of words. What do you have against verbs, proverbs, and nouns? Do not cut them, do not white them out, do not murder them, do not kill words, thoughts, do not assassinate people! . . . What do I miss if I die? The fact that I cannot find what I want in the markets?]⁴⁰

Although Maria is referring to political life under the parliamentary monarchy of pre-war Romania and the fascist dictatorship which replaced it, her complaints could also apply to the communist regime as well: particularly to the pervasiveness of the securitate and the renewed restrictions on free speech. By the early 1980s, Romania's severe shortages of consumer goods and coercion of odes to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu would turn Maria's words into prophecies.

Piticul din grădina de vară premiered in 1974 at the State Theatre in Cluj in a

⁴⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Piticul din grădina de vară, in Teatru (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1974), 175.

Hungarian language production, followed immediately by a Romanian staging in Târgu Mureș. The poetic and ballad-like elements of the play were noted, as well as the tension created by the juxtaposition of romanticism and reality.⁴¹ The script demonstrated “argumentul bine valorat, al unei demonstrații elocvente despre timpul care nu-și alege eroii, ci pune câteodată pe oamenii cei mai obișnuiți și banali în situații excepționale, și atunci, apele se aleg, cei tari despărțindu-se de cei slabi, cei buni de cei ticăloși.” [the valuable argument, the eloquent demonstrations about the era which not only made heroes, but sometimes put the most obscure and commonplace of people into exceptional circumstances, and then, chosen from the roll, separated the strong from the weak, the good from the wicked.]⁴²

Shortly after the premiere in Cluj, a Romanian language production opened at the Nottara theatre in Bucharest. The script was called “una din cele mai frumoase, mai dramatice și mai semnificative scrieri, inspirate din realitățile de răscruce ale anului 1944” [among the most beautiful, most dramatic, and most meaningful writing inspired by the events of the war in 1944].⁴³ Popescu succeeded in combining the reality of daily life and historical events with a sense of the mythic and folk-ballad.⁴⁴ Maria was

⁴¹ Mira Iosif, review of Piticul din grădina de vară, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Maghiar de Stat, Cluj and Teatrul de Stat, Târgu Mureș), Teatrul, no. 6 (1974): 54-56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ Valeria Ducea, review of Piticul din grădina de vară, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Nottara, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 9 (1974): 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; Iosif, 55-56.

seen as putting “crediința, iubirea și speranța ca într-un sipet viu în pruncul pe care-l naște.” [belief, love and hope as if into a living coffer {formed out} of the baby which she bears.]⁴⁵

The final production of Piticul din grădina de vară took place in 1989 at the National Theatre of Craiova, directed by Silviu Purcărete. Staged in honor of the forty-fifth anniversary of liberation, Piticul din grădina de vară was called “un tulburător poem dedicat luptei comuniștilor pentru libertatea patrie” [a moving poem dedicated to the communist fight for the country’s liberation] by Teatrul, Romania’s leading theatre journal.⁴⁶ In the actual production, however, references to communism were toned down and audiences apparently saw the play as a metaphor for the actions of the communist regime. “The type of the character, of the communist woman, was perfectly valid for the anti-communist martyrs as well. This is how the play was understood by everybody working on it. The audience didn’t cry over the sad destiny of the communist woman from 45 years ago, but perceived a very actual situation, a very present one,” said Purcărete in an interview several years later.⁴⁷

Because Dumitru Radu Popescu writes from a human and complex point of view, his plays can easily be read or produced in such opposing ways. Popescu,

⁴⁵ Constantin Radu-Maria, “Elena Amaria Bog: Maria,” Teatrul, no. 8 (1975): 33.

⁴⁶ Ion Toboșaru, review of Piticul din grădina de vară, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Național, Craiova), Teatrul, no. 8 (1989): 42.

⁴⁷ Silviu Purcărete, interview by Marian Popescu, trans anonymous, Semnal teatral, no. 1 (1995): 86.

however, downplays the political ramifications of the script, claiming that he was writing about a very specific person caught in the simultaneous presence of life and death. He recently stated that attempts to turn the play into a pro-communist or anti-communist statement were merely following the superficial and temporary political currents of the day rather than the essential content of the script.⁴⁸

Patriotic Projects

In addition to Piticul din grădina de vară, Popescu wrote other works to celebrate key national landmarks. In 1977, Două ora de pace (Two Hours of Peace) and Muntele (The Mountain) were written and produced in celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of Romania's war of independence from the Ottoman Empire. The first play, which takes place in 1877, is a patriotic portrayal of the fight for freedom against imperialism.⁴⁹ The work was premiered at Teatrul Mic in Bucharest, with productions later in 1977 at the National Theatres of Cluj-Napoca and Tîrgu-Mureş. All three stagings were awarded prizes in the national festival, "Cîntarea României," in 1977.⁵⁰

Muntele is set in the fourth century B.C. in Dacia and retells the story of Dromichaites, one of the earliest known Getae chieftains, who resisted the armies of

⁴⁸ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Georgeta Pourchot, Bucharest, 17 October 1998.

⁴⁹ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Două ore de pace, in Teatru, (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1987), 2:13-63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:11.

Alexander the Great in the Danube region. Although the context is of a great struggle, the entire action of the play is set in the peaceful palace of Dromichaites. Feigning weakness by day to lure the Greeks into underestimating their task but harassing the enemy army each night and destroying all food supplies, Dromichaites saves his people by a war of attrition, taking advantage of the honey and fruit which the Getae cultivate so effectively. Lysimachus, the king of the Macedonians, reaches the palace of Dromichaites only to surrender for want of food. The play becomes a struggle of ideas and ideals rather than of weapons: “oamenii trebuie să se înfrunte prin forța ideilor și nu a armelor, cumpănirea, înțelepciunea, zidirea morală fiind temelia vieții geților” [men ought to confront one another through the force of ideas and not through arms; balance, understanding, moral development being the foundation of Getic life].⁵¹ The play, a relatively simplistic piece by Popescu’s standards, did not have the wide success of some of his other works. It was produced in Piatra Neamț in 1977 and by the Dramatic Theatre in Brașov in 1979, and translated into English in 1978.⁵²

Another play apparently written by Popescu in response to the regime’s needs was Rugăciune pentru un disc-jockey sau Ziua pe insula [Prayer for a Disk-Jockey or The Day on the Island].⁵³ Following the “cultural revolution” of 1971, a wave of

⁵¹ Mira Iosif, review of Muntele, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Tineretului, Piatra Neamț), Teatrul, no. 7 (1977): 38.

⁵² Dumitru Radu Popescu, The Mountain, in Romanian Review, no. 11 (1978): 8-59.

⁵³ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Rugăciune pentru un disc-jockey, in Teatru (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1987), 2:411-79; Dumitru Radu Popescu, The Day on the Island, trans. Rozioara Duță, Romanian Review, no. 1 (1987): 12-53.

authors defected to western countries. Writers were enlisted to help dissuade others from following. Paul Everac, for example, wrote his 1974 play, Un fluture pe lampă [Butterfly on a Lamp] apparently “to voice the Party condemnation of defectors.”⁵⁴ Whether Dumitru Radu Popescu’s play was written in response to Everac’s or at the request of the Party, it also rejects emigration as a viable choice but, as is normally the case with Popescu’s plays, allows for multiple viewpoints on the issues and leaves many questions unanswered.

In the play, two men emigrate to the West. One remains abroad and dies in loneliness; the other returns without fully knowing why. The man who returns knew that his boss in Romania had been extorting money and had probably murdered a co-worker, and now feels he must stop running away from the truth. Despite this morality play structure, however, characters who quickly condemn the émigrés are shown to be acting solely for self-aggrandizement. As critic Valentin Silvestru phrased it, “The originality of the play resides in its castigation not only of the sad derelictions of contemporary man’s essential duties but also of the rush[ed] or false considerations of such cases, sometimes stemming from pharisaic judgements hiding basest rascaldom.”⁵⁵ The play explores two polar but co-existing motivations for leaving the country: fleeing and seeking. The fates of the two characters demonstrate the idea that youths have a natural curiosity about the world but that there is also a responsibility toward one’s homeland that should not be betrayed.

⁵⁴ Marian Popescu, “Dissident Muse,” 6.

⁵⁵ Valentin Silvestru, “A Polemic Play,” Romanian Review, no. 7 (1987): 53.

As was the case in Piticul din gradină de vară, Rugăciune pentru un disc-jockey cannot be dismissed as a “mere” propaganda play. The multiplicity of views expressed and the sympathy created for both of the émigrés creates a complex web of insights and motivations. Popescu’s sense of truth, and his repeated insistence that drama not become journalism, goes far too deeply to allow him to write a one-dimensional drama.⁵⁶ In his foreword to Rugăciune pentru un disc-jockey he stipulates that writers must keep universal, durable truths in mind in their works: “The writer inhabits a town called word and truth is his homeland and he who cheats is eliminated like a counterfeit coin.”⁵⁷

It must also be stressed that, despite later criticism for having written some of his plays “to prove loyalty to the regime’s needs,”⁵⁸ and for his membership in the Central Committee (a position which normally accompanied the role of president of the Writers’ Union), Dumitru Radu Popescu was rarely a contributor to the many special sections of Teatrul and other journals which lauded Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in the last twelve years of their dictatorship. Indeed, Dumitru Radu Popescu, using the power of his position and international reputation, was responsible for defending authors such as Iosif Naghiu and Ileana Mălăncioiu.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Vianu, 84.

⁵⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, foreword to The Day on the Island, trans. Rozioara Duță, Romanian Review, no. 1 (1987): 13.

⁵⁸ Marian Popescu, “Dissident Muse,” 6.

⁵⁹ Iosif Naghiu, interview by author, Bucharest, 20 November 1996, tape recording; Ileana Mălăncioiu, interview by Vianu, 107.

The Two-edged Sword of Position and Power

Becoming President of the Writers' Union in 1981 and serving as the editor of Contemporanul took a toll on Popescu's writing. He continued to publish plays and novels, but at a slower pace. Despite his position, his new plays received few productions, although many of his older works continued to be published, translated, and produced.⁶⁰ Popescu says that his new social station discouraged some producers from staging his plays for fear of being perceived as sycophants.⁶¹ Some of the change could be attributed to his political and editorial duties, but there was also a shift in emphasis in his themes and style during this period. His plays became much more concerned with abstractions; the time and setting of the action was more likely to be ambiguous, and large philosophical questions dominated the action. The director of Ca frunza dudului din rai [As the Mulberry Leaf in Paradise], for example, set the action in a pigsty in a 1982 production as a metaphor for ethical decay and spiritual degradation.

Surviving the New Cultural Policies

The period from 1972 through 1989 was exceedingly difficult for Romanian writers in general due to the erratic but generally strict censorship of publications.

⁶⁰ Most notably, Popescu published two collections of dramas during this period: Reservația de pelicani (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1983) and Moara de pulbere (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1989). Few of these new plays, however, received stage productions.

⁶¹ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Georgeta Pourchot, Bucharest, 17 October 1998.

Playwrights faced the additional hurdle of persuading directors and actors to take a chance on staging a new play, as well as making the cuts and changes commonly asked for by the production censors. As I have indicated, Iosif Naghiu was able to get abstract and even politically critical plays published, but only his realistic, relatively non-polemical works such as Într-o singură seară could be produced on stage. Marin Sorescu's abstract works, such as Iona and Paracliserul, were relegated to literary analysis; despite getting a few more concrete works, such as Matca, staged, even Sorescu's (seemingly) patriotic historical dramas could be produced only after protracted negotiations with the censors, as will be seen in chapter six. Interestingly enough, of the three authors, it was Popescu who was able to get critical works produced during this period, perhaps in part because he also wrote laudatory and realistic plays such as those described above. Marian Popescu and Silviu Purcărete speculated in 1995 that Dumitru Radu Popescu was able to deal with subjects forbidden to other authors both because of his political position and because he placed his plays in a mythological setting which provided "a bit of salvation" from censorship.⁶² Two of these critical works by Popescu will be analyzed in the next chapter.

⁶² Purcărete, interview by Marian Popescu, 84.

CHAPTER FIVE

WORKING WITHIN THE SYSTEM II: CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Plays which offer criticism of the political regime or social organization but which do so in a constructive way, without questioning the roots of the system itself, formed an important, although small, part of the Romanian repertory.¹ Satirical comedies constituted the extreme form of constructive criticism in Eastern European theatre. The referat of 1971 specifically recommended that Romanian writers create satirical works, based on the neo-classical assertion that satire was appropriate to combat vice, including “Satira unor atitudini, mentalități și desprinderi antisocialiste—în muncă, în viața publică, în viața particulară . . . Combaterea unor vicii morale dăunătoare societății: lașitatea, indiferența blazată, carierismul.” [Satires of attitudes, outlooks, and antisocial detachment—in work, in public life, in private life . . . Campaigns against moral vices harmful to society: cowardice, blase indifference, selfishness.]² Works which were too critical of the regime were suppressed, but

¹ Such works are not included in Zygmunt Hübner’s schemata since they are not truly works of propaganda or of resistance, but they filled an important niche in the Romanian drama of 1971-1989. Zygmunt Hübner, Theater and Politics, ed. and trans. Jadwiga Kosicka (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 62-66.

² Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, “Despre stagiunea 1970-1971 și unele probleme privind pregătirea stagiunii 1971-1972,” Teatrul, no. 8 (1971): 24.

satires of bourgeois attitudes, vices such as greed and hypocrisy, or even the labyrinthine machinations of bureaucracy were often allowed.

Satire was thus used to uphold a conservative agenda, a function dating back to Aristophanes.³ Some Romanian authors, such as Aurel Baranga, met great success with audiences and the regime by writing satirical comedies. Baranga's prodigious writings between 1946 and his death in 1979 targeted bureaucracy, as seen in Mielul Turbat [The Turbat Family]; bribery, in Adam și Eva [Adam and Eve]; servility, in Opinia publică [Public Opinion] and Interesul general [The General Interest]; and immorality and hypocrisy, contained in many of his plays. These plays received both popular and government support: Mielul Turbat was so successful that it was produced at fourteen of the twenty-eight theatres operating during the 1953-1954 season.⁴ In Eastern Europe, it has been said that most acceptable satire was written by insiders, those whose basic support for the system was unquestioned and whose targets were carefully limited to human foibles which could be corrected by exposure to public

³ Robert W. Corrigan, "Aristophanic Comedy: The Conscience of a Conservative," in Classical Comedy: Greek and Roman, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987), 69-80.

⁴ Mihai Vasilu, Istoria teatrului românesc (Bucharest: Editură Didactică și Pedagogică, 1995), 108. Satirical drama had a long pedigree in Romania. Playwright Cezar Bolliac, an activist in the 1848 nationalist revolt, wrote in Trompeta carpatilor in 1869 that, in addition to historical and traditional subjects, "even the ridiculousness of the Romanians could be called national plays." (Quoted in Romulus Diaconescu, "A Survey of the Historical Theatre," Romanian Review, no. 3 (1989): 64.) The nineteenth century satirical works of Vasile Alecsandri and Ion Luca Caragiale continue to be performed today. A similar situation can be seen in the Soviet Union, where Vladimir Mayakovsky, Evgeny Shvartz, Aleksandr Chervinsky and many others walked the narrow line between satire and censure.

ridicule. Václav Havel, describing the situation in Czechoslovakia, wrote that social and political abuses “could only be criticized by someone who identified with ‘all the positive aspects of how our society lives,’ and who shared the ideals that society was allegedly aspiring to. Such satires were therefore written by communists, people who sincerely identified with the government ideology and who—seeing the contradictions between their ideals and social practice—castigated the evil practices.”⁵

None of the three Romanian playwrights under examination here could properly be called satirical authors, although there are elements of satire present in many of their plays. Further, Naghiu and Sorescu were certainly not “insiders” and showed little interest in the concrete specificity needed for satire or constructive criticism. Several of the plays of Dumitru Radu Popescu, however, can be seen as pointing out flaws in social and political life without undermining (at least on the surface) the basic power structures. Works such as Acești îngeri trști [These Sad Angels] and Studiul osteologic al unui schelet de cal dintr-un mormânt avar din Transilvania [The Osteologic Study of a Horse’s Skeleton from an Avar Tomb in Transylvania] contain criticism, but it is focused on individual behavior rather than on the political system. If humans can be educated and reformed, Popescu seems to say, then the communist system can work. On the other hand, one could invert this to say that, since human nature is what it is, no political system can be perfected. In any case, these two plays were on the boundary of acceptable criticism, but were also seen as supporting the

⁵ Václav Havel, Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 41.

current regime, as evidenced by the fact that neither play has been produced since the 1989 revolution.

“Acești îngeri triști”: The Truth Above All

Acești îngeri triști [These Sad Angels] has been Dumitru Radu Popescu's most-produced drama, receiving at least nineteen separate stage productions in Romania between 1968 and 1989, as well as radio and television presentations.⁶ It is exceptional for its combination of love story and attack on hypocrisy and corruption in local politics and the workplace. Acești îngeri triști won the prize for playwriting at the National Festival of Theatre for the 1968-69 season, the I. L. Caragiale prize of the Academiei Republicii Socialiste România in 1970, was chosen to be included in Valeriu Râpeanu's O antologie a dramaturgiei românești 1944-77, and was translated into English in Romanian Review in 1985.⁷ It is a probing drama of several flawed human beings interlinked by their work and their relationships. Although many dramatic events occur before and during the play, almost all the physical action takes place off stage, placing the focus on the feelings and interactions of the characters. That focus, together with the poetic tone of the play, evokes echoes of Anton Chekhov and Aleksandr Vampilov. The play is also notable for the character of Silvia, one of the

⁶ From reviews in Teatrul and Teatrul azi, 1968 to present, and a production chronology published with the play in Valeriu Râpeanu's O antologie a dramaturgiei românești 1944-77: Teatrul de inspirație contemporană (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1978), 505-14.

⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Acești îngeri triști, in Râpeanu, 425-504; Dumitru Radu Popescu, These Melancholy Angels, trans. Leon Livitchi, Romanian Review, no. 5 (1985): 47-87.

few fully-developed women's roles in Dumitru Radu Popescu's repertory and a much-coveted role for Romanian actresses.⁸ The quick and wide-spread success of the play at several theatres as well as on radio and television established Dumitru Radu Popescu as a playwright as well as a writer of fiction.⁹

The primary character, Ion, is a troubled youth who has been in jail twice: once for a theft he didn't commit and once for a charge of "hooliganism" which could have been dismissed. He blames most of his past problems on his failure to speak out against wrongs, and his pent-up anger toward others emerges during the course of the action. He is contrasted with three co-workers at the furniture factory: Petru, the careless youth concerned only with soccer, guitar music, and pursuing married women; Marcu, a former colleague, now a foreman, who has wronged Ion in the past but now is trying to provide him with a job and a wife; and Cristescu, a petty boss who accepts money in exchange for favorable work schedules. Ion's father, whose beatings caused Ion to be partially deaf and caused his mother's death, appears briefly in the play to borrow money from Ion. The final major role is that of Ioana, once engaged to Ion, who is now married to Marcu and flirting with Petru. In addition, Ion and Silvia's memories take concrete form on stage through dancers and offstage voices.

The play opens at a carnival shooting booth. Ion is drunk and attempting to win

⁸ Dumitru Radu Popescu recently addressed this imbalance with O batistă în Dunăre [A Handkerchief in the Danube], featuring an all-female cast, produced in Bucharest in 1997. Magdalena Boianiu, review of O batistă în Dunăre, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Național, Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 6/7 (1997): 41-42.

⁹ See, for example, the hyperbole used by Aurel Bădescu, "D. R. Popescu: A Dramaturgy of Truth in Movement," Romanian Review, no. 4 (1974): 131.

a prize at the booth by hitting a metal figure of a bride. Several of his friends and co-workers stop by, and we see that he shuns flattery to the point of being abusively honest. He is introduced to Silvia, who speaks of marriage as merely a method of getting someone to chop wood for the fire. Even her attitude toward money is flippant. When she is told that Ion earns very little, she responds,

Silvia: Excellent! Then I'll marry him. If he earned much, he would spend much on his sweethearts and would have no time for me. While so, earning little, he will take care of me alone. And he will love me. I earn more, I'll be with the money, he with the love. We'll be a model wedded pair.

Ion: Give me thirty more cartridges.
(Shoots all the time).¹⁰

Silvia adopts a tough facade to keep others at a distance, but Ion eventually succeeds in penetrating her defenses by his persistence and unflinching honesty.

As the play evolves, we learn more about the past of Ion, Silvia, and the many interconnections between all of the characters. The primary dramatic action stems from Marcu's attempts to ease his conscience and protect his position by supporting Ion. Marcu had tried to arrange a marriage between Ion and Ioana as a facade to continue his affair with Ioana. Ion initially defended Ioana's honor in an incident which branded him as a "hooligan" and earned him a jail sentence of three months, but Ion soon discovered the ruse and refused to marry Ioana at the wedding ceremony. With Ion stigmatized as a troublemaker, Marcu had taken Ion's place at a demonstration of an improved saw invented by Ion, a betrayal and usurpation which Ion bitterly resents. Marcu later married Ioana "to preserve her honor."

¹⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, These Melancholy Angels, 50.

In the course of the play, Petru, a star soccer player in the company team, is put on the night shift. Through lack of sleep caused by his womanizing, the unavailability of a company apartment, and the night work hours assigned to him, he cuts his fingertips on a circular saw, ending his guitar playing. Marcu, in a moment of distraction, leaves a store with a small bottle of liquor and is charged with petty shoplifting. Ion testifies in his favor, much to Marcu's surprise, but Ion privately accuses Marcu of larger crimes: Ion's jail time and Petru's loss of fingers, since Marcu, out of jealousy, refused to change Petru's shift. In addition, Ioana announces that she was never in love with Marcu (or with Ion) and that she is leaving him. Rather than face his defects, Marcu hangs himself. Ion's reaction is characteristic: "Marcu gets more on my nerves now that he's dead than when he was alive... When he was alive he could answer for his foolish acts, now he's drawn down the window coverings like the most cowardly of all cowards, writing on the door: 'Closed for ever!'"¹¹

Ion and Silvia are drawn together and find a healing power from one another. They even share a common dream one night, of having angel wings and flying high above the factory and the town. Ultimately, however, Silvia realizes that she feels no physical love for Ion, and her sense of honesty keeps her from remaining with him.

Dumitru Radu Popescu stated that the character of Ion was based on stories of a cousin of his brother-in-law. In his typically exaggerated fashion, the author denies any artistic invention whatsoever:

¹¹ Ibid., 85.

Toate personajele acestei piese sînt reale. Eu n-am făcut altceva decît să le adun de pe drumuri și să le oblig să trăiască împreună, spre bucuria unora și spre nebucuria altora dintre ele.

Eu n-am pus decît niște accente. Și m-am semnat.

[All characters in this play are real. I did not do anything except to bring them to the stage and oblige them to live together, for the pleasure of some and for the displeasure of others.

I did not add anything but some accents. And I signed it.]¹²

The play maintains a generally naturalistic tone, except for a few memory sequences to be performed by dancers in the shadows. A sense of poetry emerges, however, from the interplay of characters and the aspirations of Ion and Silvia for a more perfect world. As many reviewers were to note, the entrances and exits of characters are handled very awkwardly within the naturalistic context, with little motivation given for the characters to appear or disappear. The play is also striking for the emphasis on the relationship between Ion and Silvia, since modern Romanian theatre gives little focus to romance, and for the shortcomings seen in all of the characters, ranging from the cowardice and hypocrisy of Marcu and Cristescu to the anti-social anger displayed by Ion. These are flawed human beings, unable to soar like angels due to their sad imperfections. Characters such as Ion, the imperfect crusader for a more perfect world, reappear in several of Popescu's other works:

This is a favourite idea of the playwright: in his plays there are no perfect characters, but characters in evolution, in course of transformation. From among them, one character comes to the fore, a character who has come closest to truth by an effort of moral straightening-out and who further acts with a view to retrieve the others, by judging them, and placing a mirror in front of them.¹³

¹² Dumitru Radu Popescu, "Autorul despre piesă," in Râpeanu, 424.

¹³ Aurel Bădescu, 132.

Overall, critics have applauded the play for its passion and stand against cowardice and hypocrisy. Ion Vlad perhaps best expressed the theme noted by so many critics: “‘Îngerii’ traduc ideea aspirației spre fericire și frumusețe, în timp ce indignarea și cinismul lor vin dintr-o experiență acumulată, dar neconformă decît parțial cu valorile reale.” [‘Angels’ bring hopeful ideas of happiness and beauty, in a time of indignation and the cynicism which comes from their accumulated experiences, but not conforming even partially with actual values.]¹⁴ The play contains several of Popescu’s recurring concerns: “pledoaria pentru adevăr, credință în dragoste, valoarea-om.” [pleading for truth, belief in love, the value of man.]¹⁵ The sometimes crude language was also noted but defended: “Un limbaj crud–dar nu vulgar–generat de revolta unei conștiințe civice, dar totodată un limbaj plin de poezie, izvorît din curățenia sufletească, din setea de dragoste și de frumos a tinerilor din zilele noastre.” [A crude language–but not vulgar–generated from the revolt of a civic consciousness, but always a language filled with poetry, springing from purity of the soul, from craving for love, and from the beauty of the youth of our times.]¹⁶ This emphasis on the voice of youth must be seen in the light of the world of 1968: the tensions of the Cold War, the defiant non-participation by Romania in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia,

¹⁴ Ion Vlad, “Însemnări la teatrul lui D. R. Popescu,” Tribuna, 6 May 1971, quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, “Piesa văzută de...,” in Acești îngeri trîști (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1976), 117.

¹⁵ Doina Diaconu, “Opoziție, paralelism scenic, contrapunct, ambiguitate în Acești îngeri trîști de D. R. Popescu,” Teatrul, no. 10 (1988): 31.

¹⁶ Dina Cocea, quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, “Piesa văzută de...,” in Acești îngeri trîști (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1976), 115.

the Vietnam war, the student riots in France, America, and elsewhere. As Petru asks in the play, is love possible “in our Atomic century?”¹⁷

The production history of Acești îngeri triști reveals much about the politics and artistic policies in Romania during the Ceaușescu years. Despite its huge popularity and successful productions, the play was performed primarily at regional theatres. A television broadcast of a 1970 production in Giulești first introduced the play to audiences in Bucharest, but a live production in the capitol was slow to appear. Of the two stage productions in Bucharest, the first, in 1976, was a limited run performed by students at the Academy of Theatre and Film. It was not until 1985 that the play premiered at Teatrul Nottara in Bucharest, to remain in the repertory for over 104 performances. Director Mircea Cornișteanu stated that he was proudest of that production out of all his many works in a 1996 interview.¹⁸ Several factors seem to have been at work in this case: the regional theatres were (and still are) more interested in producing Romanian scripts than their counterparts in Bucharest; the regional theatres often could take more political chances on new plays; and many of the productions took place in the Transylvania region where Dumitru Radu Popescu lived and published.

The initial production at the Teatrul de Stat din Târgu-Mureș [State Theatre of Târgu-Mureș] not only met with critical praise but proved to be an audience-pleaser. It

¹⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, These Melancholy Angels, 62.

¹⁸ Mircea Cornișteanu, interview by Magdalena Boiangiu, Teatrul azi, no. 8/9 (1996): 7.

was performed thirty-four times for 13,416 people during the 1969-1970 season, an average of 395 seats filled in a house of 600.¹⁹ The Târgu-Mureş production was entered in the National Theatre Festival and won a Special Prize by the jury for best performance of a contemporary play. Teatrul, Romania's leading theatre journal, also awarded its 1969 prize for playwriting to Dumitru Radu Popescu for Acești îngeri triști.²⁰ The Teatrul review of the premiere closed with unusual enthusiasm: "Privită în ansamblul ei, premiera Teatrului de stat din Tîrgu-Mureş constituie o etapă în dramaturgia românească contemporană" [Seen in its entirety, the premiere at the State Theatre of Târgu-Mureş constitutes a {new} stage in contemporary Romanian playwriting].²¹

What made this play so remarkable? First, it was primarily a love story, a rarity for its time. Secondly, the play is very critical of managers, sports stars, local party functionaries, and other normally idealized figures. For the Romanian theatre of its day, only recently freed from the constraints of socialist realism and still called upon to be an instrument for communist education, the dramatically and politically successful combination of love story and social critique was, indeed, a landmark achievement. Silvia and Ion reflected the attitudes of many young people throughout the world in the

¹⁹ Attendance figures are reported in Râpeanu, 505-6. Seating capacity reported in Alina Popovici, "A Small Guide to the Theatres of Romania," Romanian Review no. 5/6/7 (1982): 243.

²⁰ Teatrul, no. 12 (1969): 15.

²¹ Radu Albala, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul de Stat, Târgu Mureş), Teatrul, no. 11 (1969): 98.

late 1960s who were exposing hypocrisy and searching for love and truth. Dumitru Radu Popescu was seen to have brought to light an amorphous but very real social issue:

Și este un merit al său că, aducînd pe scenă o problematică contemporană, frămîntările unor tineri nesofisticați ai zilelor noastre—frămîntări aparent numai cotidiene și banale, dar cu mult mai adînci implicații și rezonanțe—el a izbutit să rămînă stăin de orice șablon, de orice drum bătut.

[And it is also a merit of his that, bringing on stage a contemporary problem, the unrest of some unsophisticated youths of our time—stirrings apparently only daily and banal, but with much deeper implications and resonances—he has accomplished this while remaining distant from any pattern, from any beaten path.]²²

Unlike Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor and other early plays by Dumitru Radu Popescu, the initial production of Acești îngeri triști was directed, designed, and performed with a skill and intelligence which revealed the quality of his writing. The opening carnival scene remained on stage throughout the production and was used to highlight key moments in the play as well as to reinforce the scorn deserved by characters such as Marcu and Cristescu. The Teatrul review also applauded the lively, complex characterizations of Ion and Silvia, but pointed out the awkward motivation of entrances and exits in the play. The writing was also seen to need editing to tighten the action to avoid “momentele cînd acțiunea lîncezește” [moments when the action stagnates].²³

Four more productions followed quickly in 1969 and 1970 in Timișoara, Botoșani, Brașov, and Giulești. These new stagings not only secured a permanent place

²² Albala, 97.

²³ Albala, 98.

in the Romanian repertory for the play, but also opened up the possibilities of a more symbolic interpretation of the script, such as expanding the opening scene, set at a carnival shooting booth, into a metaphor for the entire play. Such departures from naturalism also disguised some of the clumsiness of character motivation, including the otherwise awkward entrances and exits commented upon in the reviews of the original production. Of special note were the productions at Braşov and Giuleşti.

Eugen Mercus' second staging of Aceşti îngeri trişti, later in the 1969-70 season at Teatrul din Braşov, confirmed the "consacrarea oficială" [official consecration] of the play.²⁴ Mercus broadened the symbolic aspects of the play, such as in the opening setting for act three, in which a forest of coatracks with hats and jackets was used to visualize the confrontation between the truth-seeking Ion and the opportunists, such as Marcu and Cristescu. The flatness of the latter characters was also overcome through lively and emotional performances by the cast. The play promised to be a cultural, political, and commercial success at Braşov, a theatre already focused on Romanian dramaturgy.²⁵

It is not surprising that yet another production of the play, at Teatrul Giuleşti, formed the basis of the television production seen in Bucharest and throughout the country. Directed by Geo Saizescu, a film director who had collaborated with Dumitru Radu Popescu on earlier films, the fluid and dynamic stage production was cinematic in

²⁴ Valeria Ducea, review of Aceşti îngeri trişti, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul din Braşov, Braşov), Teatrul, no. 4 (1970): 94.

²⁵ Ducea, 94.

style.²⁶ This style overcame the awkwardness of entrances and exits as well as the lengthiness of the play, but the artificialness of the staging somewhat contradicted the action of the play, which is to strip away artifice and hypocrisy.²⁷

Several early productions of the play likewise concentrated on the cinematic qualities of the script. Paul-Cornel Chitic applauded Petru Mihail, the director of a 1972 production for realizing that the script, in Chitic's view, is not a stage play at all but a film or television drama:

O sumă de particularități ale textului, câteva procedee de desfășurare succesională apar stînjenoare pe scenă și sînt considerate—în mod eronat—vicii de construcție dramatică, căci textul care a stat și la baza spectacolului de la Sibiu este un tulburător scenariu de film sau de televiziune. [Many details of the text, some sequences of events, appear uncomfortable on the stage and are considered—erroneously—vices of dramatic construction, since the text which stands at the base of the production in Sibiu is an exciting film or television scenario.]²⁸

From 1971 through 1989, the play remained in the repertory throughout Romania, with new productions staged in Baia Mare, Sibiu, Oradea (Romanian and Hungarian sections), Bacău, Craiova, Satu Mare, Ploiești, Piatra Neamț, Constanța, Arad, and finally in Sfântu Gheorghe (Hungarian section) in April of 1989. During this period, it became a standard offering of modern Romanian theatre. It is significant, for example, that the Teatrul review of the 1973 production in Oradea

²⁶ Mira Iosif, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Giulești, Giulești), Teatrul, no. 5 (1970): 54.

²⁷ Iosif, 54-55.

²⁸ Paul-Cornel Chitic, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul de Stat, Sibiu), Teatrul, no. 5 (1972): 38.

focused almost exclusively on the acting and production choices—within four years of its premiere, no need was seen to speak of the script or theme of the piece.²⁹ A 1975 review called the script “unanim îndrăgită” [universally loved] and summarized the “message” of the play as a given: “că mesajul ei de aspirație către puritate și frumusețe, de vehementă împotrivire lichelismului, oportunismului, carierismului se păstrează strălucitor și limpede ca un metal rar.” [its message of aspiration toward purity and beauty, vehemently opposed to parasitism, opportunism, {and} selfishness has remained as radiant and clear as precious metal.]³⁰

In 1976, the play was at last performed in Bucharest, but with a cast of student actors at the Academy of Theatre and Film. Nevertheless, the performance demonstrated the viability of the script, and departed from the cinematic production style used in earlier stagings. The production used a carousel motif on a revolving stage which smoothed the many changes of scene in the play. The actors remained visible on stage throughout the performance, making the entrances and exits more easily accepted. The everyday, banal moments of life shown in the text took on an elevated, symbolic quality. Unfortunately, the third act was not a success. The tone of the production shifted, and groupings of performers were used in a bewildering way,

²⁹ Constantin Paraschivescu, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul de Stat, Secția Română), Oradea, Teatrul, no. 10 (1973): 43.

³⁰ Virgil Munteanu, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Dramatic Bacovia, Bacău), Teatrul, no. 11 (1975): 35.

apparently in an attempt to show the inner psychology of the characters.³¹

The I.A.T.C. production was followed by other directorial experiments with the play, which was increasingly referred to as a “classic” script in the repertory and as the most important work by the prolific Dumitru Radu Popescu. In the same year as the first Bucharest production, a musical adaptation was staged by the Hungarian section of the state theatre in Oradea. A 1983 review of a revival in Ploiești identified the script as a “classic” and as a “referential work” within the literary output of the author.³²

The themes of questioning the status quo, Ion’s constant and violent refusal to conform, his stands against cowardice, and the mix of crude realism with romanticism made the play “unul dintre cele mai viabile texte ale dramaturgiei românești din întreaga perioadă postbelică, cu un nedezmintit succes la spectatori, și mai ales la cei tineri.” [One of the most viable texts in post-war Romanian drama, with an undiminished success with spectators, especially with youth.]³³ Unfortunately, the staging in Ploiești by Dragoș Galgoțiu placed Ion constantly on a motorcycle, evoking (perhaps appropriate) images of the American film, Easy Rider, but filling the auditorium with annoying smoke and noise.³⁴

In the fall of 1983, a fully-staged professional production of Acești îngeri triști

³¹ Mira Iosif, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Carnet I.A.T.C., Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 6 (1976): 53.

³² Dinu Kivu, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Municipal, Ploiești), Teatrul, no. 7/8 (1983): 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

was finally mounted in Bucharest. Silvia was played by the same actress who had performed the role as a student in the I.A.T.C. production. The small space (in the Studio of Teatrul Nottara) gave the production a compelling intimacy, and marked a turn away from the carousels, carnival settings, use of projected film, and other elaborate production concepts used in the past. The “tragic-grotesque” production was over four hours in length.³⁵ An impressive 104 performances had been included in the rotating repertory by April of 1985.

Following the Bucharest production, the play became a more open opportunity to express dissatisfaction with aspects of Romanian society. The anger and stubborn refusal to give in to mediocrity and hypocrisy shown by Ion offered a springboard for broader criticism. Teatrul Tineretului in Piatra Neamț staged the play in 1986 in a manner which created surprise that such a “classical” play could be so topical.³⁶ An overt critique of communism was reported by reviewers of an otherwise poetic production that same year in Constanța. That production emphasized the contradictions of the human condition. Human beings are not angels and must attempt to reconcile good and bad in themselves and in others. This internal struggle is broadened to show an external struggle, showing the best and worst of society, in which socialism “nu fi

³⁵ Irina Coroiu, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Nottara, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 5 (1985): 43.

³⁶ Alice Georgescu, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Tineretului, Piatra Neamț), Teatrul, no. 3 (1986): 41. Despite its name (The Theatre of Youth), the company is not solely composed of young actors or intended for young audiences, but has been known as a very experimental company relative to the other state-run theatres of Romania.

cîtuși de puțin una edenică, scutită de orice contradicții și asperități, ci, dimpotrivă, una umană, nelipsită adică de drame individuale, de suferință și de speranță.” [is not at all a paradise, exempt from any contradictions and roughness, as, on the other hand, a person is not freed from individual tragedy, from suffering and from hopes.]³⁷ These contradictions were played out even more clearly at Arad in 1987 in a performance which played with opposites both in tone and settings: the circus noise and vulgarity continually undercut the poetic, delicately romantic moments.³⁸

A final production was staged by the Hungarian section of the theatre at Sfântu Gheorghe in 1989. Events of December of that year quickly overwhelmed the production, and the script has not been produced since that time in Romania. As was the case with Popescu’s Piticul din grădina de vară, the highly politicized environment in which Romanian theatre functions meant that the very success of Acești îngeri triști during the Ceaușescu years made the play politically suspect after 1989.

Although the play, like many other works written before 1989, did not survive the change of regime, it did hold the stage for over twenty years. Acești îngeri triști received far more productions than Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor and Damen-vals, both of which, although also first produced in 1968, emphasized absurdist or expressionistic modes. The durability of the play was the result of the combination of its style (primarily realistic, therefore acceptable during the anti-abstract period of the 1970s,

³⁷ Victor Parhon, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Dramatic, Constanța), Teatrul, no. 4 (1986): 54-55.

³⁸ Alice Georgescu, review of Acești îngeri triști, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul de Stat, Arad), Teatrul, no. 7/8 (1987): 113.

but still open to directorial interpretations) and content (a relatively mild political critique which would not offend censors, but also a youthful, honest view of social problems which would appeal to audiences). When the play was anthologized in 1986, a reviewer noted this longevity: “Acești îngeri trști a avut la apariție (în 1968) și și-a păstrat chiar la reluarea sa scenică din 1980 forța unui manifest teatral prin implicarea în realități social-politice, pregnanța observației și vigoarea atitudinii morale.” [These Sad Angels, from its appearance (in 1968) as well as through restagings in 1980, has had a clearly theatrical force through its realistic social-political implications, pregnant observations, and vigorous moral attitude.]³⁹ During the period of 1971-1989, Dumitru Radu Popescu did not completely give up writing in “ambiguous” styles but his more realistic works received far more attention and production.

A Transylvanian Epic

In 1979, Dumitru Radu Popescu wrote and published Studiul osteologic al unui schelet de cal dintr-un mormint avar din Transilvania sau Mormintul călăretului avar [The Osteologic Study of a Horse’s Skeleton from an Avar Tomb in Transylvania or The Tomb of an Avar Horseman].⁴⁰ The script lives up to the epic proportions of the title, covering three generations of characters in a small town in Transylvania. In addition to the length of the title, the play is remarkable for its indictment of the early

³⁹ Natalia Stancu, “Teatrul ca act de conștiința,” România literară 19, no. 28 (10 July 1986): 11.

⁴⁰ First published in Teatrul, no. 7/8 (1979); later anthologized in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1985-1987), 2:499-576. First performed in January of 1981 by Teatrul Dramatic din Brașov.

actions of the Communist Party in Romania following World War II and even of some actions of the party just a few years before the play was written. The play illuminates “indivizii străini de mișcarea comunistă, pervertindu-i o clipă principiile și deturnându-i cursul” [individual strains of communist activity, perverting it for a key moment and detouring its course].⁴¹ Other critical plays were certainly written in Romania during this period but Studiul osteologic... was not only published and produced, but won the Writers’ Union prize for the best play of 1979 and thus achieved an unusual recognition for an “uncomfortable” play of its time.

The title refers to a scientific paper describing tombs discovered in the Transylvanian town of Cicău which dated back to the sixth or seventh centuries. The tombs were identified as the burial chambers of the Avar people, who were among the first waves of migrants from the East to settle in what is now Romania. The identity of the earliest inhabitants of Transylvania is not only the subject of historical and archaeological debate, but remains a hotly contested political issue.⁴² The region was joined politically to Wallachia and Moldavia to form modern-day Romania only after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire following World War I. The prevailing Romanian view is that the modern Romanian people descend from the Roman settlers

⁴¹ Valentin Silvestru, preface to Mormîntul călărețului avar, in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1987), 2:488.

⁴² See, for example, the Romanian response to a 1987 Hungarian history of Transylvania: Ștefan Pascu, Mircea Mușat, and Florin Constantiniu, “A Conscious Forgery of History Under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,” Romania: Pages of History 12 (1987) quoted in Gale Stokes, ed. From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 229-31.

of Dacia and have lived continuously north of the Danube (including the region of Transylvania) since that time.⁴³ The prevailing Hungarian view is that the Avars and Huns settled the area first, and that Romanian-speaking people moved northward at a much later time.⁴⁴ Innumerable linguistic, historic, and archaeological works have been published to prove both sides of the debate and to provide a basis for Hungarian and Romanian nationalistic movements in Transylvania.

In a foreword to the play, Popescu describes a key question raised by the scientists: who would have looted the Avar tombs in such an out-of-the-way location? The answer: “mormintele au fost jefuite de populația băștinașa. E o probă că aici exista, în acele vremuri, o populație băștinașa.” [the tombs were robbed by the native population. This is proof that here, at that time, a native population existed.]⁴⁵ The play can therefore be seen as a patriotic defense of Romania’s claim to Transylvania. However, the irony of proving the existence of the ancient Romanian inhabitants by also charging them with theft is not lost on Popescu: his play shows a continuing practice of theft, betrayal, cowardice, and hypocrisy that can only be tempered by values grounded in traditional village life, common sense, and the power of love. As

⁴³ Kurt W. Treptow, ed., A History of Romania, 3d ed. (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1997), 1, 46-47; Gheorghe I. Brătianu, An Enigma and a Miracle of History: The Romanian People, trans. Patricia H. Georgescu (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1996).

⁴⁴ See, for example, André Du Nay, The Early History of the Rumanian Language (Lake Bluff, IL: Jupiter Press, 1977). Revised and reissued as The Origins of the Rumanians (Toronto: Matthias Corvinus Publishing, 1996).

⁴⁵ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:492.

in many of Popescu's plays, from Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor to Daphnis și Chloe, history repeats itself; the players change identities but the pattern is often duplicated. Some individuals can change history if they are willing to sacrifice themselves. History, therefore, can be made by individuals but also leaves its mark upon them.⁴⁶ In the end, human nature at its best and its worst remains a powerful force, not easily changed by any political or economic structure.

Although the play is epic in scope, each of the thirteen scenes is basically naturalistic, with a village woman as the central character binding the story together. Her name is a characteristically village name, "Măria," versus the more Latinate "Maria." Popescu views her as a balance to the wars, both external and internal, that have passed through the region: "Peste dealurile și văile torturate de timp ale Transilvaniei, istoria nu de puține ori s-a scris cu sânge. Fără uniformă militară, această femeie aș putea spune că a fost un soldat etern al acestor locuri, apărând demnitatea pusă în cumpănă și libertatea amenințată de cizme." [Over the hills and valleys of Transylvania, tortured by time, history was often written in blood. Without a military uniform, I could argue that this woman was an eternal soldier of these places, defending the human dignity sometimes threatened by military boots.]⁴⁷

The play spans a period from before World War II to the death of Gheorghe

⁴⁶ Aurel Bădescu, Contemporanul, 13 Nov 1981, quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:588.

⁴⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:492.

Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, although no firm dates are given within the script.⁴⁸ We see the terrorism and anti-Semitism of the German-backed fascists at work, followed by the strong-arm tactics employed by the Soviet-backed Stalinists after the war. A large cast of characters interweave in various combinations throughout the thirteen scenes. Măria and other villagers are caught between the machinations of opportunists such as Gilu and Bască, and the forces of a more humanist communism, as represented by characters such as Nicoară and Ilie. Despite her attraction to Gilu, Măria maintains her peasant common sense, and slowly gains a political consciousness.

The basic theme of the play, the need for leaders to serve the people and avoid self-serving hypocrisy, can be seen in the final conversation between the now-discredited Bască and Ilie:

Ilie: . . . Ce-a spus Nicoară?
 Bască: Oameni, fiți comuniști!
 Ilie: Și când a murit?
 Bască: Nu știu.
 Ilie: Comuniști, fiți oameni!
 [Ilie: . . . What did Nicoară say?
 Bască: People, be communists.
 Ilie: And when he died?
 Bască: I don't know.
 Ilie: Communists, be people.]⁴⁹

The action of the play is primarily serious, and includes several deaths at the Avar tomb, but also contains highly comical moments, such as a professor's speech on dinosaurs in which every detail is scrutinized through a political lens, regardless of

⁴⁸ A synopsis is provided in appendix 1.

⁴⁹ Dumitru Radu Popescu, *Teatru*, 2:573.

scientific accuracy, and Măria's ability to keep people from complaining (and thus being punished) by feeding them apples as soon as they open their mouths. Popescu also indulges self-reflexive irony late in the play, when he introduces Viorel, Măria's son from her affair with Gilu, who wrote a play which received a prize but was removed the next day from the repertoire, much like Popescu's own Pisică în noaptea Anului Nou. Ilie remarks,

Oricum, cei care întâi l-au premiat și apoi l-au scos de pe afiș erau datori să-și dea demisia: ori, că fiind proști au premiat o stupizenie și, recunoscându-se, public stupizenia, trebuiau să lase scaunele vacante, ori că aveau dreptate, piesa era bună și-au scos-o de pe afiș că le-a spus cineva, și ei n-aveau caracter s-o apere...

[Anyway, those who awarded the prize {to this play} and then removed it {from the repertory} should have resigned: they either were idiots to give an award to a stupid play, and {by removing it} they publicly admitted their ignorance, therefore they should have quit their jobs; or they were right, and the play was worth the award but they removed it because someone else instructed them to do so and they did not have the character to defend its worth...]⁵⁰

Critics did not quite know how to handle the scathing critique offered by the play. Reviewers seemed to wish to distance themselves from the message of the play, as was the case in Paul Tutungiu's notes in Teatrul. His review is quick to point out that Popescu's political views are personal and "arguable" but that the structure and satirical content are in keeping with the dramaturgy of other communist countries:

Într-adevăr, Studiul osteologic... este o importantă frescă istorică, concepută pe durata a trei generații, în care, apelând la mijloace compoziționale specifice literaturii dramatice moderne, dar și la formula personajului-simbol, dramaturgul încearcă un punct de vedere personal, evident discutabil, asupra rolului maselor și al personalității în istorie, asupra relației dintre adevărul propagat și adevărul neexprimat. Numeroasele accente pamfletare, o anume aglomerare de probleme acut contemporane, sincronizează universul tematic al

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2:552.

acestui nou text, semnat de D.R.P, cu tendințele evolutive actuale ale dramaturgiei din multe alte țări, inclusiv din lumea socialistă.

[In truth, The Osteologic Study... is an important historic fresco, conceived as lasting three generations, in which, appealing to compositional methods specific to modern dramatic literature, but also to the formula of symbolic characters, the playwright tries a personal point of view, obviously arguable, about the roles of masses and personalities in history, about the relation between the promulgated truth and the unexpressed truth. The numerous satiric accents, a special combination of acute contemporary problems, synchronize the thematic universe in this new text, signed by D.R.P., with the current evolutionary tendencies of playwrights from many other countries, including the socialist world.]⁵¹

In production, the script was cut, undoubtedly in part to reduce the playing length, but perhaps also to avoid confrontations with the censors. For example, when the play was published in the journal Teatrul in 1979, only eighty of the 150 pages of text were printed, which Popescu claims was not for space considerations.⁵² The second production of the play in 1981 in Timișoara was staged “with great scandal,” according to the author, and the Bucharest production at the Bulandra Theatre omitted entire scenes.⁵³

The initial production in Brașov was flawed by an overly illustrative directing style (Nicoară’s ghost, for example, is shown by projection during one scene) and the elimination of the second scene removed important motivations needed to understand

⁵¹ Paul Tutungiu, “Premii de dramaturgie pe anul 1979,” Teatrul, no. 1 (1981): 51.

⁵² Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 26 November 1996, tape recording.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Gilu's later actions.⁵⁴ Interestingly enough, the reviewer saw Gilu, "hoțul de cai și de inimi" [the thief of horses and of souls], as the hero of the play, although not adequately portrayed by the actor in the Brașov cast: "Gilu este pe deplin reprezentativ pentru lumea lui D. R. Popescu, el este de fapt eroul piesei, din păcate nu și al spectacolului." [Gilu is plainly the representative of D. R. Popescu's world, he is in fact the hero of the play, through unfortunately not of the production.]⁵⁵ The shift of focus from Măria to Gilu could have occurred in part because of the cuts made in the script but it is clear that Popescu intended the play to center on Măria.⁵⁶ Despite the cuts, the reviewer felt that the first half of the play lacked unity and the second half suffered from the ironic tone of Viorel, as well as overly-colorful costumes, which were distracting.⁵⁷

As has normally been the case in Romania, the "scandal" in Timișoara is not apparent from the production reviews. In a much better production than the premiere in Brașov, Ioan Ieremia's direction brought out the subtext and "umorul cu substrat dureros" [the humor with a painful undertone].⁵⁸ The parallel between the Avar horseman and the history of Romania from 1940 to 1965 was clearly delineated, with

⁵⁴ Review of Mormîntul călărețului avar, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Dramatic, Brașov), Teatrul, no. 1 (1981): 59.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁶ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:492.

⁵⁷ Review, 59.

⁵⁸ Paul Tutungiu, review of Studiul osteologic..., by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Național, Timișoara), Teatrul, no. 6 (1981): 59.

Gilu acting as the modern representative of the Avars. His character is distinctly Popescan: “capabil să distrugă orice îi stă în cale, în numele unui adevăr care este, în fond, al verii lui.” [capable of destroying anything standing in his way, in the name of a truth which is, at root, his desire.]⁵⁹ Măria and the others demonstrate the continuity of the Romanian people: conquered, bent, but ultimately surviving long after the invaders have departed. The “scandal” undoubtedly lay in interpreting the play too clearly, allowing its universality to be seen and its parallels to the present to be too obvious.

The production in Bucharest received lukewarm reviews. The director, unfamiliar with the repertory company at the Bulandra Theatre, elicited uneven performances from the cast, although it was noted that “știm prea bine, cine și-o asumă, își asumă și riscuri mari” [as we well know, whoever assumes {a big task} also risks a great deal].⁶⁰ The passionate but unpolished and loosely structured script lost its “râsuflarea fierbinte” [fervent breath] in production.⁶¹ Măria, however, was firmly planted as the center of this historical-mythical-legendary world, around whom the other characters gravitate.⁶²

Although the play did not receive the number of productions that Acești îngeri

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁰ Virgil Munteanu, review of Mormîntul călărețului avar, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Bulandra, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 11 (1981): 39.

⁶¹ Ibid., 39-40.

⁶² Ibid., 39.

triști did, it was considered a major dramatic work, as evidenced by the awards, publications, and critical references received following 1981. Valentin Silvestru called it “una din cele mai importante opere scenice actuale” [one of the most important stage works of today].⁶³ Notably, the drama was one of only four plays from 1965-1989 to be singled out in a homage to the “Epoca Nicolae Ceaușescu” [The Nicolae Ceaușescu Era] by Teatrul. A photo of the play from the Bulandra production bears the headline, “Dramaturgia și-a sporit funcția educativă” [Drama also used in an educative function].⁶⁴

Several critics also noted the Brechtian elements of the script, although Brecht himself was considered to be “inconvenient” politically in Romania after the 1960s.⁶⁵ The structural similarities were most noticeable: the play was described as a “fresco” by several reviewers, one of whom pointed out that the scene titles (Seven Brides, The Violinist, The Apple Tree, etc.) are “veritabile capitole ale unui posibil roman-frescă” [veritable titles of some possible Roman frescos].⁶⁶ Not only the form, but the “distancing” effects of the play made it one of the most explicitly epic scripts of its

⁶³ Valentin Silvestru, preface to Mormîntul călărețului avar, in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:486.

⁶⁴ “1965-1989; O epocă de înflorire a culturii românești,” Teatrul, no. 7 (1989): 9.

⁶⁵ Marian Popescu, “The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Romania 1945-1989,” in The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in Romania 1945-1989, ed. Katarina Pejovic (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland and DeBalie, 1995), 18.

⁶⁶ Constantin Măciuca, Viziuni și forme teatrale (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1983), quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:578.

time.⁶⁷

The critical nature of the script was also hailed by several critics. Dumitru Chirila wrote of Popescu's world of would-be tyrants that "evenimentele vin și trec, iar accesul oamenilor la putere este perisabil, consumându-se în cicluri scurte" [events come and go, but men's access to power is perishable, consuming them in short cycles].⁶⁸ Any idealism can be twisted by imperfect humans, including Marxism.⁶⁹ Popescu unmasks "abuzului de forță dedus din cultul personalității" [the abuse of force deriving from the cult of personality],⁷⁰ abuses which took place under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, but already quite apparent under Ceaușescu by 1981. In the opening scene, even the "detestabilele practici ale discriminării rasiale" [the detestable practices of racial discrimination] were exposed,⁷¹ which went against the official line that all races and ethnic groups co-existed in harmony and that anti-Jewish actions during the war came only from German forces.

These criticisms are hardly earth-shaking by western standards but were enough to make the play impossible to produce after 1981. Popescu shows the corruption within the system and the abuses of personality cults, and his portrayal of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2:577-78.

⁶⁸ Dumitru Chirila, Familia, May 1981, quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:580.

⁶⁹ Constantin Cubleşan, Teatrul—între civic și etic (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1983), quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:589.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2:589.

⁷¹ Chirila, 2:581.

collectivization efforts could be taken as an allusion to the razing of villages and forced urbanization planned by Ceaușescu. Although “piesă nu acuză, nici nu dezvinovățește” [the play neither accuses nor exculpates], perhaps too many inferences were left open for interpretation.⁷² After 1989, the opposite interpretation could be taken—that the play was too “communist.” Dumitru Radu Popescu, like his characters, lives “în acest univers, în care toate ființele sînt maculate de viață” [in this universe, in which all beings are stained by life].⁷³ Those “stains” were to prove difficult, but not impossible, to overcome after 1989, as will be seen in chapter seven.

⁷² Florin Faifer, Dramaturgia între clipă și durată (Iași: Editura Junimea, 1983), quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:590.

⁷³ Irina Coroiu, Luceafărul, 7 Nov 1981, quoted in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Teatru, 2:587.

CHAPTER SIX

MARIN SORESCU'S HISTORY PLAYS AS COMMENTARY

As Herbert Lindenberger has pointed out, "It has long been a commonplace that historical plays are at least as much a comment on the playwright's own times as on the periods about which they are ostensibly written."¹ Zygmunt Hübner saw historical drama as more than the use of allusion in that the author "wants to talk about the order of the world, not about its mere incidents."² Dumitru Radu Popescu certainly used contemporary and ancient history in his works, but plays such as Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor, Studiul osteologic... and the later Robespierre și regele employ historic events as a backdrop or environment rather than presenting a dramatization of familiar historical events. Popescu wishes to speak about the process of history itself; history is the subject of his plays, not a subterfuge. Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor, for example, is not "about" the life of Julius Caesar but how free will, initiative, and personality interact with the forces of history. Dumitru Radu Popescu, as Marian Popescu wrote, "always had this gift, of placing an event, a certain situation, in a context which is

¹ Herbert Lindenberger, Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 5.

² Zygmunt Hübner, Theater and Politics, ed. and trans. Jadwiga Kosicka (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 65.

quite difficult to relate to any precise references.”³

Historical dramas gave Marin Sorescu, on the other hand, the foothold in concrete reality he needed for his poetic, abstract style. Within the shelter of historical drama, Sorescu was able to have his works performed again in Romania. Perhaps the strongest examples of historical settings used to comment on the Ceaușescu era are Sorescu’s A treia teapă [The Third Stake] and its companion piece, Răceala [A Cold]. The plays are ostensibly based on the few historical facts known about Vlad Țepeș, the fifteenth century Wallachian prince also known as Vlad the Impaler or Vlad Dracula, the name later appropriated by Bram Stoker for his gothic vampire character.⁴

It is important to remember that within Romania, Vlad Țepeș is seen primarily as a hero. He defended Europe against the Turks after the fall of Constantinople, helped to unify the Romanian-speaking areas, and restored order during a chaotic time. Several patriotic works celebrating Vlad have been written by Romanian authors, including Mihail Eminescu’s long poem, “The Third Letter.” Eminescu conjures up the spirit of Vlad to ask him to do away with the corrupt and greedy political elite of Romania in the early 1880s:

Vlad Țepeș, come down to us, old prince, gather them together
like madmen and thieves, divide them into two stinking herds
and these drive into two houses, as you did once with thieves,

³ Marian Popescu, “Interview with Silviu Purcărete,” Semnal teatral, no. 1 (1995), 84.

⁴ A good discussion of the mix of history and fiction can be found in Radu R. Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, Dracula, Prince of Many Faces (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989).

setting fire to both houses, the prison and asylum!⁵

Several dramatists before Marin Sorescu had used the story of Vlad in patriotic spectacles. Dan Tărchilă's play, Moartea lui Vlad Tepeș (The Death of Vlad Tepeș), for example, celebrated the 500th anniversary of Vlad's unification of the Romanian principalities and was performed as an outdoor drama amid the ruins of Vlad's castle in Tîrgoviște in 1976.⁶ Tărchilă sought to correct the mistaken image of Vlad his detractors had created and to emphasize his heroic aspects.⁷

Sorescu's work is much less reverent and celebratory than the plays of his predecessors. A fragment of the work, excerpted in the journal Cronica under the title Dimineata (în pădure) [Morning (in the forest)] in 1971 drew extensive and explicit criticism from the State Committee on Culture and the Arts. The script, although only under consideration for possible production by the Bulandra Theatre, was singled out as ambiguous and criticized for de-mythologizing and ruining educative history and for lacking a firm moral foundation.⁸ Nevertheless, the play was eventually published in

⁵ Mihail Eminescu, "The Third Letter," in Mihail Eminescu, The Last Romantic: Mihail Eminescu, trans. Roy MacGregor-Hastie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1972), 57.

⁶ Virgil Munteanu, review of Moartea lui Vlad Tepeș, by Dan Tărchilă (A. Davila Theatre, Pitești), Teatrul 22, no. 1 (1977): 33.

⁷ Dan Tărchilă, "Autorul despre piesă," introductory remarks to Moartea lui Vlad Tepeș, in Valeriu Râpeanu, ed., O antologie a dramaturgiei românești 1944-1977: Teatrul de inspirație istorică (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1978), 654.

⁸ Marin Sorescu, Dimineata (în pădure), in Cronica, 26 June, 1971; Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, "Despre stagiunea 1970-1971 și unele probleme privind pregătirea stagiunii 1971-1972," Teatrul, no. 8 (1971): 17.

1978, staged several times, and translated into English.⁹

Sorescu's vision calls attention to the simultaneous presence of past and present and to a host of other dichotomies—hero/villain, myth/reality, purity/corruption, comedy/tragedy—using a mix of vulgar and refined language. These competing views of reality are present simultaneously, often within the single character of Vlad. No clear point of view is allowed to win us over. At the end of the play, Vlad remains, as he does in history, a hero and a monster. Rather than “debunking” history or showing us the “real” Vlad, Sorescu's play reflects the ambiguity of the historical sources and the divergent contemporary views of the Wallachian prince. The play creates an enigmatic and disturbing portrait that is open to a wide array of interpretations by the audience, director, critic, and censor.

Although Marin Sorescu normally refused to give away the “key” to his works, his preface to the English translation by Dennis Deletant offers some tantalizing clues as to how he viewed the play. First and foremost is the idea of symmetry. Drawing from the philosophy of Lucretius, Sorescu states that key world events, and even the creation of life itself, arise from the deviations caused by the breaking of symmetry.¹⁰ The play employs a multitude of mirror images and polar attitudes to set up a symmetrical world which is broken only at the very end of the play by Vlad's self-

⁹ Marin Sorescu, Dimineata, la prinz, si seara, in Teatrul 23, no. 12 (1978): 52-86; Marin Sorescu, The Impaler's Third Stake, trans. Andreea Gheorghiu, in Romanian Review 9/10 (1980): 168-216; Marin Sorescu, Vlad Dracula the Impaler, trans. Dennis Deletant (London: Forest Books, 1987).

¹⁰ Marin Sorescu, “Preface,” in Sorescu, Vlad Dracula, 9.

impalement. His act, although gruesome, is creative in the sense that it breaks the cycle of betrayals and wars and that his self-sacrifice might bring relief to his people's suffering.

A treia teapă contains symmetries within symmetries. Indeed, the entire script can be seen as symmetrically opposite to Sorescu's other play about Vlad, Răceala [A Cold].¹¹ Răceala was written in 1977 while A treia teapă was still in progress, and the two plays complement one another quite explicitly.¹² In Răceala, Vlad does not appear on stage, although he is clearly the pivotal figure in the action. Sorescu wrote that Vlad "is absent because he was bigger than the stage," an enigma.¹³ Instead, we learn about his actions primarily through the eyes of the Turkish court. A treia teapă not only introduces an entirely new cast of characters (except for Papuc, one of Vlad's generals), but is nearly a monologue by Vlad. A 1988 revival of A treia teapă deliberately emphasized this aspect, bringing it close to the style of Iona and Paracliserul, Sorescu's early monodramas.¹⁴ The pair of plays thus offers external and internal views of Vlad. It is difficult to imagine how yet another perspective would fit with this pair of plays, but apparently Sorescu envisioned (but never completed) a third

¹¹ Marin Sorescu, Răceala/A Cold, Romanian/English ed., trans. Stavros Deligiorgis (Iasi: Junimea Publishing House, 1978).

¹² Marin Sorescu, "A Confession," Romanian Review, no. 9/10 (1980): 217.

¹³ Marin Sorescu, "A Cold," Romanian Review 5/6/7 (1982): 81.

¹⁴ Irina Coroiu, "Uncensored Theatrical Season," Romanian Review 4 (1990): 123-24.

work, to be called The Well Poisoners, which would complete a trilogy.¹⁵

Within A treia teapă, symmetries in structure, style, and theme abound. The five acts are labeled symmetrically with a time of day: morning, evening, noon, evening, morning. Act one opens with two men speaking in darkness. As the morning light increases, we see that they are impaled on either side of the stage. One man is a Romanian caught trying to leave the country, the other a Turk caught trying to enter. Their symmetrical fates, as well as their wordplay and trivial concerns, negate any attempt to portray realistic suffering. The two are much like the characters of Samuel Beckett who speak from garbage cans or while buried in sand, unaware that their situations might be anything out of the ordinary. Vlad enters, speaks with them, and finds that at least one may have been punished unjustly. He erects a third stake “just in case.” The fifth act mirrors this opening—we return to the two impaled men (still cracking jokes many years later) and Vlad imposes justice upon himself by occupying the third stake. A similar parallel exists between act two and act four. Act two focuses on the conspiracy of Dan Basarab and Țenea against Vlad. The two men meet in a dark ravine, with offstage sounds representing their two forces as well as those of Vlad. This mood is echoed in the fourth act, in which Vlad and Papuc are in a dark prison in Hungary, with the rustling of rats (which Vlad identifies with Romania’s enemies)

¹⁵ While trying to complete the trilogy, Sorescu wrote Luptătorul pe două fronturi [Fighter on Two Fronts], which threatened to turn the project into a tetralogy, as he describes in Marin Sorescu, “Test Paper on Myself,” Cahiers roumains d’études littéraires, no. 2 (1984): 44. Later, he placed the two Vlad plays with Vărul Shakespeare (Cousin Shakespeare) in a “Trilogy of Creation.” Irina Coroiu, “A World Premiered Play,” Romanian Review, no. 6 (1990): 114.

omnipresent. Act three functions as the pivotal point for the symmetry of the other scenes. The act begins with a feast for the beggars, at the end of which the doors are locked and the building burnt to the ground. Vlad has refused to pay tribute to the Turks, and the peace he has achieved is shattered by the attack of Dan Basarab from the north and the Turks from the south. Vlad also confirms that one of the two impaled men was punished wrongly, an error which haunts Vlad much more than any military or diplomatic action he takes. Act three therefore marks the culmination of Vlad's crusade to impose order in his country as well as the beginning of his decline in external (military) strength as well as his internal (moral) strength.

It is clear that the play is meant to be taken as much more than a historical drama. The designations of the acts by time of day rather than year call attention to the poetic attitude of the action, which is simultaneously specific (the mid-fifteenth century) and universal (any morning, noon, or evening, including the present). Sorescu acknowledges that, in a general sense, history is always filtered through the present: "What I have learned while writing theatre is that you have to know your age very well, because it is the mother tongue of the history play."¹⁶ Vlad often refers to the shortage of time in which to reach his goals; indeed, one critic has stated that "the missing character invoked quite often is time itself."¹⁷

The use of multiple historical times within the play is clearly illustrated by the

¹⁶ Sorescu, "Test Paper," 43.

¹⁷ Coroiu, "Uncensored Season," 124. A similar evaluation was also made by Valentin Silvestru, "The New Play as an Expression of Topicality," Romanian Review, no. 2 (1980): 124.

character of Minică, described in the cast list as “a visionary.” The man, brought to Vlad’s attention because he refuses to pay taxes, explains that he comes from the year 1359, and doesn’t see why he should pay taxes 100 years in advance. His wife, after losing five children “all on account of history,” has sent him ahead in time to see if she should bear her sixth child or kill herself instead. Minică has not found any age to his liking so far, and even brings his own ax and chopping block since each ruler has reacted to his story by killing him. The man doesn’t like Vlad’s time either, and continues on, thinking that everything will be fine in 1600. These dates have ironic resonances. In Wallachia, 1359 was something of a golden age, with a fair degree of stability for the newly independent principality. Moldavia laid its foundation as an independent state that year, and the Romanian Orthodox church was also founded.¹⁸ The year 1600 stands as a symmetrical pole to 1359. In that year, Michael the Brave unified Wallachia with Moldavia and Transylvania for the first time. Although a year of wars and of pressure from Poland and Turkey, 1600 could be seen as a second high-water mark for Romania as a national entity, since the Ottoman Empire would dominate Wallachia and the rest of Romania from Michael’s death at the hands of his Hapsburg allies in 1601 until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁹ Vlad’s recommendation to have the child because “We need more people. Let them live and multiply.” seems

¹⁸ Andrei Ōtetea, A Concise History of Romania, English ed., Andrew MacKenzie, ed. (London: Robert Hale, 1985), 166-68; 171.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 220-22.

very appropriate, given the centuries of warfare that lie ahead.²⁰

Sorescu also keeps the play from becoming a traditional history play by the ironic attitude that permeates the action. Not only do the two impaled men continue their wit and wisecracks through the play, but similar juxtapositions of mood are created in what would seem to be the most inappropriate moments. For example, following the burning of the church in which the beggars were feasting, Vlad complains to Papuc about the yelling he hears:

VLAD: Is there a beehive around here? There's a lot of humming! I can't even hear my own thoughts!

PAPUC: (Goes upstage and shouts out loudly) Silence! Shut your mouths! His Highness is planning the future of the country and can't hear his own thoughts...

VLAD: What did they want?

PAPUC: Well, you know how it is. They're frightened. Want to get out.

VLAD: Let them piss the fire out. Pity about the church!²¹

The incident shows the great distance between Vlad's concerns and those of ordinary people, which is so vast a disconnect as to be comic. He has acted justly, although cruelly, and apparently might listen to requests from the doomed beggars, but not to pleas for mercy. His need to think clearly is more important than their pain and fears. Despite the cruelties and horrors presented in the play, the comic tone is so pervasive that the entire play can nearly be seen as a comedy, as Valentin Silvestru pointed out: "Were it not for the appearance of death at the end of the play—in the guise of a terrifying allegory—we could say that Marin Sorescu has created the comic historical

²⁰ Sorescu, Vlad Dracula, 38.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

drama in the Romanian modern theatre.”²²

Thematically, the play draws on both myth and history to show Vlad as a hero and as a monster. Writing about Răceala, Sorescu emphasizes the function of Vlad as a national hero: “Vlad the Impaler was neither a fool, nor a vampire, nor a bad soldier and strategist, as long as his actions, considered by many as desperate, saved the hope of the Romanians for justice and for a better life, giving them a much-needed continuity at a crucial moment.”²³ On the other hand, A treia teapă includes incidents drawn from folk tales which show Vlad in a less than heroic light: cutting off the breasts of a prostitute and nailing the hands of her bastard children in their place; burning the beggars in the church; impaling rats while imprisoned in Hungary; burying Dan Basarab alive. Sorescu’s genius is such that he is able to include these aspects of Vlad, show Vlad’s justification for his acts, and yet maintain a light tone and keep our interest in the character.

One of the by-products of Sorescu’s use of polar symmetry in the play is the ability for a director, audience member, or reader to identify with those attitudes which attract them the most. This may explain why the play was allowed to be published and produced, even though one can easily read the play as a condemnation of Ceaușescu’s totalitarian regime. Some published reviews alluded to this aspect of the original production. For example, one critic wrote that “Vlad the Impaler is also a character

²² Valentin Silvestru, quoted in “Opinions on The Impaler’s Third Stake,” Romanian Review, no. 9/10 (1980): 219.

²³ Marin Sorescu, introductory notes to “A Cold,” Romanian Review, no. 5/6/7 (1982): 81.

that makes one thoroughly consider the use of power and violence for lofty social and moral reasons.”²⁴ In the translation published in England, Dennis Deletant called attention to a general parallel in twentieth-century Romania, which “is obvious to anyone familiar with Romania’s present situation, and particularly to the Romanian theatre-goer.”²⁵ More overtly, Irina Coroiu, writing in 1990, stated that the play compares “the legend personality of Vlad the Impaler with the entity of historical present.”²⁶ The comparison of Ceaușescu to Vlad the Impaler was not Sorescu’s invention. Andrei Codrescu records that Ceaușescu was compared not only to Vlad but to Bram Stoker’s vampire character.²⁷ Caryl Churchill, drawing from interviews and news reports about the 1989 revolution, used a vampire character as a political image in her play, Mad Forest.²⁸ In Sorescu’s play, Domnica addresses Vlad as “uncle,” just as Romanians were encouraged to address Ceaușescu as “father.”²⁹

A treia teapă was staged at six different Romanian theatres from 1979 to 1982,

²⁴ Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, quoted in “Opinions on The Impaler’s Third Stake,” Romanian Review, no. 9/10 (1980): 218-19.

²⁵ Dennis Deletant, introduction to Vlad Dracula the Impaler by Marin Sorescu, (London: Forest Books, 1987), 15.

²⁶ Coroiu, “A World Premiered Play,” 114.

²⁷ Andrei Codrescu, The Hole in the Flag: A Romanian Exile’s Story of Return and Revolution (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 70-71.

²⁸ Caryl Churchill, Mad Forest: A Play from Romania (New York: Samuel French, 1992), 52-55.

²⁹ Patrick Brogan, The Captive Nations: Eastern Europe: 1945-1990: From the Defeat of Hitler to the Fall of Communism (New York: Avon, 1990), 223.

including the National Theatres in Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest, and Craiova, and was revived in 1988 at the Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest under the direction of Ion Caramitru. Critics generally applauded the play as a new vision of what a history play could be and cautiously pointed out how contemporary the work appeared. Mihai Ungheanu, for example, pointed out that the language used is deliberately ambiguous: “Această ambiguitate sau reversibilitate a limbajului . . . fiind țărănesc–poate fi și de atunci, dar și de acum” [This ambiguity or reversability of its language . . . being of the peasants–can be of then or of now].³⁰ Another critic pointed out that the allusions made, however, are not superficial parallels to the present but more metaphysical: “Aluziile la contemporaneitate abundă, dar ele devin substanțiale numai atunci când aparțin relației eterne dintre omul care face istorie și înaintarea ineluctabilă a timpului.” [Allusions to the present-day abound, but they become substantial only when they refer to eternal relations between the man who makes history and the ineluctable advancement of his era.]³¹

Not only did the productions vary in interpretation, as would be expected, but Sorescu also allowed multiple versions of the text to be performed.³² These variations may have stemmed from the long evolution of the script, started some eight years

³⁰ Mihai Ungheanu, “Marin Sorescu sau cristalizarea unei structuri literare,” Teatrul 24, no. 1 (1979): 25.

³¹ V. Mîndra, review of A treia teapă, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Cluj-Napoca and Teatrul Național, Bucharest), Teatrul 24, no. 7/8 (1979): 117.

³² Mîndra, 120; Paul Tutungiu, review of A treia teapă, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Craiova), Teatrul 24, no. 10 (1979): 32.

earlier, and from the decentralized censorship in place for theatre productions. Sorescu has said that he often would change words at the censors' request, without really changing the meaning.³³ For example, one reviewer noted the substitution of words: "La București, un personaj pronunță situație, la Craiova, același personaj rostește, cu tîlc, conjunctură." [In Bucharest, a character said "situation," in Craiova, the same character said, meaningfully, "junctione."]³⁴ For the 1988 production at Bulandra, Sorescu cooperated in compressing the play into the monologue form desired by Ion Caramitru.³⁵ The revival, like the earlier productions, was greeted with great enthusiasm by the public.³⁶

The multiplicity of viewpoints is even more explicit in Răceala, first produced in 1977 at the Bulandra Theatre and published in 1978. Vlad does not appear in the play, but each of the many characters comment on his character and actions. Getting Răceala onto the stage was a long ordeal for Sorescu. Sorescu attended numerous preview performances for a year and met weekly with the Ministry of Culture and its various committees and subcommittees in a process that used up a great deal of his time and energies.³⁷ Sorescu explained later that, although consuming, the effort was

³³ Marin Sorescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

³⁴ Tutungiu, 33.

³⁵ Ion Caramitru, interview by Paul Silvestru, Teatrul, no. 9 (1988): 26.

³⁶ Carmen Firan, "Victor Rebengiuc în A treia țeapă de Marin Sorescu, Teatrul 'Bulandra,'" Teatrul, no. 8 (1988): 85.

³⁷ Marin Sorescu, interview by Lidia Vianu, Censorship in Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 89.

important: "If the plays were not allowed to be performed here, the Ministry of Culture would not allow them to be performed in any other socialist country. Only now, for instance, have I learned that Iona or [sic] The Third Pale were interdicted by the Ministry of Culture in Poland and Czechoslovakia. There were cooperation contracts between these countries."³⁸

Sorescu deliberately connected the history of Răceala to the present. In his preface to the play, he wrote "If I catch any halberdier in my historical theatre, I will kill him, I said to myself . . . I let contemporary speech into my play, because period language might have obscured the period heroes, and sometimes we would have had words, instead of facts, before us."³⁹ The topicality of the play was clear to critics as well, who admired "its universally modern character, its modern language overbrimming with autochthonous humour and wittily highlighted by the amazing interplay of text and subtext."⁴⁰

The initial production of Răceala at the Bulandra, as painful as the process might have been, was a great success. The play was "unanim apreciât drept cea mai însemnată producție a Teatrului 'Bulandra' în stagiunea '76-'77" [appreciated rightly by all as the most noteworthy production of the Bulandra Theatre in the 1976-1977

³⁸ Ibid., 90.

³⁹ Marin Sorescu, preface to A Cold, trans. Leon Levițchi, Romanian Review, no. 5/6/7 (1982): 81.

⁴⁰ Traian Șelmaru, "Young Stage Directors," Romanian Review, no. 6/7 (1978): 135.

season].⁴¹ The play was described as a patriotic ballad: “Tragedie istorică, într-un fel, Răceala e, într-altfel, o baladă a vieții, a luptei și a morții, pentru libertate, a poporului român.” [An historical tragedy on one hand, Răceala is, on the other, a ballad to life, to war and to death, for liberty, to the Romanian people.]⁴² Given the difficulty getting the work produced, one suspects that the reviewer’s repeated use of the word “patriotism” was intended more for the censor than the general public.⁴³ The play, although withdrawn briefly from the Bulandra repertory, continued to be performed through at least 1983.⁴⁴

The political and theatrical difficulties of the work caused a three-year delay before a second production of the play was attempted, this time at the Romanian section of the State Theatre in Sibiu. The production was an ambitious choice for a young ensemble, which won admiration for its courage in producing the work, called “O piesă dintre cele mai valoroase ale dramaturgiei noastre contemporane.” [Among the most worthy plays of our contemporary dramaturgy.]⁴⁵ Despite the high esteem held for the work, the next production took place eight years later, in 1988, by the

⁴¹ Mădălina Stănescu, review of the 173rd performance of Răceala, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Bulandra, Bucharest), Teatrul, no. 6 (1983): 34.

⁴² Virgil Munteanu, review of Răceala, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Bulandra, Bucharest), Teatrul 22, no. 3 (1977): 41.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Stănescu, 34.

⁴⁵ Virgil Munteanu, review of Răceala, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul de Stat, Secția Română, Sibiu), Teatrul 25, no. 2 (1980): 41.

National Theatre in Timișoara. Again, the contemporary quality of the work was clear: “un teatru de esență clasică, tulburător prin profunzimea semnificațiilor și prin rezonanța contemporană a interogațiilor sale dramatice.” [an essentially classical theatre, exciting through the profusion of meanings and through the contemporary resonance of his {Sorescu’s} dramatic questions.]⁴⁶ Given the fact that any references to the electricity and heating oil shortages of the late 1980s were forbidden, getting a play with a title such as “A Cold” produced in 1988 was quite a feat.⁴⁷

Through his poetic vision, Sorescu offers a way to look at history that is not reduced to a simple chronicle or forcing into “either/or” choices. In Vlad’s world, choices must be made, but nothing is clearly “correct.” In A treia teapa, Vlad agrees with the time traveler that his epoch is uncomfortable and that he can see the lure of denying the times, but this is not an option that is open to him as a ruler. Vlad must deal with the present, as imperfect as it is, and as imperfect as he is. At the end, Vlad can say he did all he could for his country, but can also condemn himself for his failures. He is a hero, but he is also a monster. Both aspects coexist for him and in history’s view of him. Sorescu thus challenges our views of history and the writing of history by allowing these multiple perceptions of events and people to coexist on stage. He throws into question any simple, single view of history in favor of a multi-layered, complex matrix of values of perceptions. He also implicitly acknowledges that the

⁴⁶ Victor Parhon, review of Răceala, by Marin Sorescu (Teatrul Național, Timișoara), Teatrul, no. 6 (1988): 74.

⁴⁷ Dan Verona, in Vianu, 181, 184-5; Daniela Crăsnaru, in Vianu, 205, 210.

historical Vlad cannot be separated from the Vlad of myths, legends, and fiction.⁴⁸

These multiple layers also allow for multiple views on any contemporary political meaning of the plays. The ambiguity of Sorescu's history plays, as with the earlier plays such as Există nervi, allowed for negotiation with the censors while leaving contemporary references open for audiences and readers.

⁴⁸ Sorescu's play even acknowledges the unfortunate but now inseparable connection between the historical Vlad and Romanian vampire tales created by Bram Stoker's fictional Dracula character.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFTER THE REVOLT OF 1989

In this chapter, I look at the fortunes of the three authors in the years following the 1989 overthrow of Ceaușescu, the bloodiest transition from communist rule seen in Eastern Europe. New artistic patterns arose out of the contexts of the political transformation. Iosif Naghiu developed a new style in which his characteristic use of the absurd and allegory is combined with overt references to contemporary events and situations. Marin Sorescu at first found himself in a state of “non-creation,” and then became involved in political duties which drew him away from writing plays, although theatres actively sought new works from him. Dumitru Radu Popescu resumed his early experiments with intertextuality and expressionism while retaining a socially engaged viewpoint. Before turning to these specific narratives, I need to put these developments into context by reviewing the events which began in 1989 and their general impact upon writers and theatre production.

On December 16, 1989, the Romanian people openly rebelled against Ceaușescu’s rule, first in Timișoara, then throughout the country. In Bucharest, crowds assembled to applaud the dictator began to shout anti-Ceaușescu slogans. The dictator and his wife fled the capital by helicopter, but were captured and executed on Christmas day, 1989. The army was initially used to control the crowds in Timișoara

and elsewhere, but soon sided with the rebellion and fought against the securitate forces who continued the battle for several days. Early reports were that 60,000 people had died in the fighting, but was later estimated at less than one thousand.¹ When the shooting ended, political power rested primarily with a group of former communist leaders. Ion Iliescu, a high-ranking official who had been openly critical of Ceaușescu's leadership, was formally elected President on May 20, 1990. Popular demonstrations against the new government continued in Bucharest through the summer of 1990.

Whether the events in Romania truly constituted a popular revolution or a palace coup timed to take advantage of the unsettled situation has never been completely clear, but the end of Ceaușescu's twenty-five year rule did bring about an end to ideological censorship for writers and theatre artists. In a sweeping decree issued on December 29, 1989, the Front for National Salvation, which had quickly taken power, declared an end to Ceaușescu's constraints on artists. Among other decrees, the Front vowed:

- așezarea pe baze noi a dezvoltării culturii naționale;
 - Liberarea presei, radioului și a televiziunii; trecerea acestora în mîinile poporului . . .
 - libertatea cultelor; garantarea liberei manifestări a credințelor religioase . . .
- Sînt și rămin dizolvate toate structurile de putere ale fostului regim dictatorial.
- [- to secure a new base for the development of national culture;
 - freedom of the press, radio, and television; placing these into the hands of the people . . .
 - religious liberty; guarantees of freedom of religious beliefs . . .
- All structures of power belonging to the former dictatorial regime are and

¹ Kurt W. Treptow, ed., A History of Romania, 3d ed. (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1997), 555.

remain dissolved.]²

Since censorship had never been established by law, no formal repeal of censorship was necessary; the committees, censors, and administration simply ceased to function.

Inevitably, the sudden freedoms enjoyed in politics, public speech, television, newspapers, and artistic expression created challenges for Romanian theatres.

Playwright Dumitru Solomon, editor of the new theatre journal, Teatrul azi, spoke of these problems in his first editorial in 1990:

Obsesia libertății s-a transformat, chinuitor de crispant, într-o obsesie politică . . . Nimic mai firesc totuși decât această fervoare politică, acest cvasidelir general după o existență vegetativă de cincizeci ani. Însă fiorul de neliniște care ne încearcă se datorează sentimentului tulbure că monstrul politic tinde să devoreze tot ceea ce constituie zona noastră intimă de pace și senin, greu încercată și ea pină nu demult: cultura, contemplarea, meditația, credința . . . Sălile de teatru sînt pe trei sferturi goale, sau, în cazuri fericite, pe jumătate pline, prin expoziții se trece în goană, cu bicicleta, cum ar spune Karel Capek, la concerte doar Celibidache poate umple într-o clipă sala Ateneului, televiziunea transmite pe programul II piese de Shakespeare în timp ce toată lumea privește pe programul I dezbaterile parlamentare sau procesele judecate de tribunale militare.

[The obsession with liberty was transformed, with tormented fixation, into the obsession with politics . . . Nothing is more natural than this political fervor, this general quasi-delirium after a vegetative existence of fifty years. But the tremor of unrest which we are experiencing is due to the troubling sense that the political monster tends to devour all of what makes our private area of peace and serenity, reached with difficulty until not long ago: culture, contemplation, meditation, religion . . . Theatres are three-quarters empty, or, in happy cases, half-full, people walk through exhibits at a fast pace, as if on a bicycle, as Karel Capek would say; at concerts only {renowned composer/ conductor} Celibidache can fill the Atheneum concert hall in a minute; on television, a play by Shakespeare is broadcast on Channel Two while everyone is watching the debates in parliament or the judicial process of the military

² "Decret-Lege," România liberă, 29 December 1989, 1,3.

tribunal on Channel One.]³

The theatres had an additional obstacle to overcome in competing with the dramatic events and changes unfolding in 1990. The stable repertory system meant that plays normally opened only after a very long rehearsal period and then, if demand warranted, would stay in the repertory for many years. This structure made quick changes very difficult. Some productions begun in 1989 were scrapped entirely. Others were quickly revised, but did not have the power to move audiences, as Dumitru Solomon observed: “Aceste spectacole nu au puterea de a-i aduna pe spectori de pe străzi, din piețe, din fața televizoarelor spre a-i readuce în sălile de teatru.” [These productions do not have the power to attract audiences from the streets, from the public squares, from in front of televisions and bring them back into the theatres.]⁴ Playwright Paul Cornel Chitic echoed this thought, stating that even the great Romanian playwright Ion Luca Caragiale seemed shallow when viewed against the background of the national events, and that politics was the new theatre of choice:

Iar scenele teatrelor erau goale . . . Pe cine mai interesează destinul unui personaj dezghiocat în detalii și nuanțe? . . . Căci AZI, la NOI, unicul destin care contează este destinul națiunii . . . Strada a luat locul scenei. Cine să se mai așeze în stal? Strada are acum ațintiți ochii asupra a patruzeci și șapte de personaje (deocamdată numai atâtea)–PARTIDELE POLITICE. Care actor ar avea curajul să le înfrunte și să concureze cu acestea? . . . Deocamdată, oamenii de teatru sînt spectatori.

[And the theatre stages were empty . . . Who now is interested in the fate of characters analyzed in all their complexities? . . . Since TODAY, NOW, the

³ Channel Two was received only by a small audience, while Channel One was the main television station with country-wide reception. Dumitru Solomon, “Cuvînt de început,” *Teatrul azi*, no 1 (1990): 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

only fate which matters is the fate of the nation . . . The street has become the stage. Who sits now in the auditorium? The street is now focused on forty-seven characters (this many for now)—the POLITICAL PARTIES. What actor would have the courage to come forward and compete with this? . . . For now, theatre people are spectators.]⁵

Works previously banned were now possible to produce, but the social context had changed and the works of the past no longer had their power, as playwright George Genoiu wrote in the first issue of his new cultural journal, Monitor Magazin:

“Privim acum la televiziunea noastră piese ‘interzise’ care ni se par fade și puerile, deoarece a dispărut materia vieții, a conjuncturii. Aceeași realitate se cere tratată artistic dintr-o altă perspectivă, pentru a căpăta viabilitate estetică.” [We watch on our televisions ‘interdicted’ plays which now seem to us vapid and childish, because the substance of life and of the context {in which they were staged} has disappeared. The same reality needs a new artistic treatment from a different perspective, in order to gain aesthetic viability.]⁶

Commercialism, nudity, and sexual topics, all previously banned, suddenly appeared in newspapers, journals, and other media. A striking example can be found in the second issue of Monitor magazin, which not only contained a picture of Loreta Goggi in a wet tank top, but an entire back cover devoted to “Cinci actrite frumoase și capriciile lor vestimentare” [Five beautiful actresses and their preferred attire], featuring photographs of the faces and breasts of Linda Evans, Jessica Lange, Bo

⁵ Paul Cornel Chitic, “Spectacolul politic/Spectacolul teatral,” Teatrul azi, no. 1 (1990): 4.

⁶ George Genoiu, “Programul nostru,” Monitor magazin 1, no. 1 (1990): 2.

Derek, Pamela Bellwood, and Morgan Fairchild; hardly what one would expect in an otherwise “serious” journal devoted to theatre and film.⁷ Theatre critics raised alarms at what they perceived as a similar onslaught of “pornography” on stage as well as on television.⁸ Marin Sorescu, as Minister of Culture in 1993, fought with determination against this trend.⁹

There is no question that theatres faced a crisis of audiences, repertoires and personnel in the early months of 1990. The theatre in Galați had only five actors remaining.¹⁰ For a few months, it seemed, “nobody even remembered that the theatre even existed at all.”¹¹ The drop in theatre attendance, however, may not have been as influenced by political events as some writers perceived. At Teatrul Nottara in Bucharest, for example, the number of performances dropped sharply in 1990, but overall attendance in 1993 and 1995 was actually smaller than in 1990, as can be seen in table one. Clearly, if events in the streets were the primary cause of the drop in attendance, one would have expected to see a dramatic rebound in attendance in 1991 and 1992.

⁷ “Cinci actrite frumoase și capriciile lor vestimentare,” Monitor magazin 1, no. 2 (1990): 24.

⁸ Alex Leo Șerban, remarks at panel discussion on the state of Romanian arts, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, 30 March 1996.

⁹ Marin Sorescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

¹⁰ Paul Cornel Chitic, “Ce se mai întâmplă în teatre?” Teatrul azi, no. 4 (1990): 10.

¹¹ Marian Popescu, “The Theatre’s Long Journey into Society,” trans. Delia Răzdolescu, Teatrul azi, no. 1/2 (1991): 92.

TABLE 1
ATTENDANCE AT TEATRUL NOTTARA, 1990-1996

Year:	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996 ^a
No. Premieres	4	5	3	5	4	6	7
Total Attendance	60487	71627	65229	58425	62662	59538	31456
No. Performances	144	174	206	179	174	147	95
Attend. Per Perf.	420	412	317	326	360	405	331

Source: Teatrul Nottara box office records, provided to author 25 November, 1996.

^a 1996 figures through September only.

Theatre, once one of the few places in Romanian society where a sense of community and at least an allusion to reality might be found, lost its privileged place, while politics, journalism, and freedom of speech fulfilled their proper roles. A similar transition took place throughout Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia, Peter Oslzly, director of Theatre on a String, wrote:

In Czechoslovakia in the last twenty years the theatres had taken over those activities which were absent from ordinary life—free speech, free discussion, political debate. And now the theatres had become again only theatres and no more. The activities which the theatres had taken over returned where they belonged: to parliament, to the press, to television, to political conferences, to the privatisation auctions.¹²

Poland's theatre institutions faced similar problems, as Daniel Gerould points out:

“with its oppositional role suddenly removed, the new democratic Polish theatre found

¹² Peter Oslzly, quoted in Barbara Day, Czech Plays: Modern Czech Drama (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994), xvi.

itself without clear function or direction . . . the theatre must now find a place in a competitive world in which its own centrality can no longer be taken for granted, as had been the case throughout Poland's troubled history when the stage embodied the national spirit."¹³

In Romania, writers and artists with the reputation of dissidents were elevated to places of honor. Some actively worked in political parties or political actions. Poet Ana Blandiana, actor Ion Caramitru, and other artists were highly visible in the winter of 1990. Artists who had been exiled or compelled to silence could now be heard from again: Andrei Șerban was invited to return from the United States to head the National Theatre in Bucharest;¹⁴ Directors Vlad Mugur, Lucian Giurchescu, and others returned;¹⁵ Eugène Ionesco was now recognized as a "Romanian" playwright; Matei Vișniec brought forth dozens of scripts which he had not even attempted to publish or produce during the 1980s. Iosif Naghiu, Marin Sorescu and other playwrights benefitted from their reputations as dissidents, as shall be seen in this chapter. Other authors too closely identified with Ceaușescu had difficulty gaining public support. The case of Dumitru Radu Popescu, as has been the pattern in this study, is much more

¹³ Daniel Gerould, "Poland," in Cambridge Guide to Theatre, new ed., ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 872.

¹⁴ An account which captures the sometimes surreal interplay between Șerban's artistic goals and the events on the streets in front of the National Theatre can be found in Oana-Marie Hock, "At Home, in the World, in the Theatre: the Mysterious Geography of University Square, Bucharest," Performing Arts Journal, no. 38 (May 1991): 78-89.

¹⁵ Natașa Raab, "Încotro mergem?" Teatrul azi, no. 9/10 (1990): 15.

complex. The new directions taken in his writing, as well as the mixed reception his plays have received on the part of theatre managers and directors, will be traced in this chapter.

Iosif Naghiu's Long-Delayed Recognition

Iosif Naghiu was the first dramatist to be published in both Teatrul azi and Luceafărul following the revolution of December, 1989.¹⁶ Known as a dissident for many years, his poetry and dramas were given wide distribution in the euphoric period of new-found freedom, and Naghiu won several prizes for his works during the 1990s. These plays generally demonstrate a combination of topical subject matter with the abstract techniques seen in writers such as Ionesco and Mrozek.¹⁷ Few of Naghiu's plays, however, received theatrical productions. Key works by Naghiu from this period, as indicated by television productions, publication, and prizes awarded, are Ghilotina [The Guillotine], Spitalul special [The Special Hospital], and Celula poetului dispărut [The Cell of the Lost Poet]. I consider an additional play, Revolta [The Revolt], as an example of Naghiu's continued interest in the one-act form, but which displays a more overtly topical content underpinning his abstract situations.

Ghilotina, a short play set in the chaotic days of December, 1989, was published early in 1990. It was also published in a collection of Naghiu's dramatic

¹⁶ Iosif Naghiu, Ionescu sau O ipoteză absurdă, in Luceafărul, no. 2 (1990), 8-9; Ghilotina, in Teatrul azi, no. 8/9/10 (1990): 51-59.

¹⁷ Naghiu stated that "Teatrul meu s-a născut sub zodia lui Ionescu, Dürrenmatt, Mrozek" [My theatre was born under the zodiac sign of Ionesco, Dürrenmatt, Mrozek] in an interview by Adina Bardeş, Teatrul azi, no. 7/8/9 (1994): 39.

works in 1993.¹⁸ Of the ten plays in the volume, few had been produced as of 1998: Ghilotina was produced for Romanian television in 1990, Aerisirea (adapted by Silviu Jicman) was broadcast in 1997, and A treia caravelă [The Third Caravel] received a pre-publication reading in the summer of 1989, and a full production in 1997 by Teatrul Odeon in Bucharest.¹⁹ Ghilotina discusses the issues of justice, guilt, and the thirst for violence in a revolution. The action is set in Bucharest around Christmas of 1989, but Naghiu leaves the setting open to “alt timp istoric sau literar” [another historic or literary time].²⁰ It is not intended to be a historical re-enactment or elegy to the revolutionaries, but “un spectacol al exorcizării” [a play of exorcism].²¹ Naghiu’s style stays true to his non-realistic mode; the play contains literary allusions, historical anachronisms (such as the use of the guillotine), and surreal elements. Most of the play is a confrontation between the revolutionaries, the representative of the revolutionaries, and a terrorist accused of murder. In the theatrical ending, the child whom the terrorist murdered appears, holding his fingers in a “v” and crying “Victorie” [Victory]. The actors drift off stage, each audience member receives a “Certificate de Participant la Executarea prin Sinucidere a Teroristului Paul Ivoan”

¹⁸ Iosif Naghiu, Ghilotina, in Execuția nu va fi amânată (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1993), 19-58.

¹⁹ “Cenaclul de dramaturgie,” Teatrul, no. 7 (1989): 75-77; “Premiile criticii 1997 și premiile UNITER stagiunea 1996-1997,” Scena, no. 1 (1998): 6-7; “Cel mai bun... cea mai bună,” Scena, no. 4 (1998): 16-21.

²⁰ Naghiu, Ghilotina, 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

[Certificate of Participation in the Execution by Suicide of the Terrorist Paul Ivoan], and the television cameras are left focused on one another.²² The certificates are a reference to the papers issued by the Romanian government to those who were wounded or lost their lives fighting against Ceaușescu's forces in December of 1989. Many people fraudulently received these certificates despite their marginal involvement in the struggle; Naghiu's instructions to issue similar certificates to the audience members as "participants" degrades the value of the original certificates by yet another level.²³

Revolta is also short play mixing the abstract, allegorical style of Naghiu's earlier plays with contemporary events and political statements.²⁴ The action is set in December, 1989. Two securitate agents, "Friend" and "Good Friend" are speaking cryptically while a valet burns papers. Their former pupil and friend, Amic (which also means "friend" in Romanian and who is referred to as "little A") has stirred up a revolt in a public speech. They speak of him in terms often used by Ceaușescu (in fact,

²² Ibid., 57.

²³ Carmen Chibaia, "Revoluționarii Cornelius Roșianu, Ion Dichiseanu, primari, judecători, avocați au primit terenuri pe Litoral," Adevarul (Bucharest) 20 August 1997. Available from <http://adevarul.kappa.ro/a2118-02.html>, accessed 8 February 1999; Răzvan Mitroi, "Guvernul deschide și mai larg punga pentru asa-zisi luptători din decembrie '89," Adevarul (Bucharest) 11 March 1997. Available from <http://adevarul.kappa.ro/a2254-02.html>, accessed 8 February 1999.

²⁴ Iosif Naghiu, Revolta, in Execuția nu va fi amînată (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1993), 5-17.

many people referred to him with a lower-case “c” after his death).²⁵ They are unsure of whether to inform anyone of the revolt or not. When finally forced to notify someone of the events, they end up speaking with the President, who had plugged his ears and did not hear the speech. The room literally implodes from the crowd noises outside while the valet physically removes both securitate agents as if they were pieces of furniture.

Naghiu uses a style of speech for the two agents which not only reflects much of the Ceaușescu rhetoric (with characteristic words such as “multilateral,” for instance) but is also used to obscure meanings, since neither agent wants to be seen as giving up the cause or spreading bad news to their superiors. They speak of “our action” without specifying what that action will be, for example.

A plot touch typical of Naghiu is the appearance and then sudden disappearance of Amic’s lover. Pointless in terms of dramatic action, her insignificance is perhaps a signal that love and human connections are irrelevant in this shadowy world of the securitate. The two men have defined themselves so closely to the ruling regime that there is no other role possible for them.

In part, the play can be seen as an answer to the question of why the government did not react quickly to the events of December 1989, and why Ceaușescu seemed to be taken completely by surprise. In the climate of suspicion and fear which he had cultivated for over twenty years, perhaps no one was willing to take the risk of

²⁵ See, for example, the orthography used by exiled director Lucian Pintilie, “Voices from an Abolished Exile,” Romanian Review, no. 1 (1990): 60-61.

telling him the truth about his lack of popular support. Given the topicality of the play, it is astonishing to learn that the play was actually originated in 1971.²⁶

Naghiu won the prestigious “Best Play” award in 1993 from UNITER, the union of theatres, for Spitalul special [The Special Hospital], which was published by Unitext, the publishing arm of UNITER, in 1994. The play operates on two levels. The outward story is of a man shot by a terrorist during the 1989 revolt who shares a hospital room with the man who shot him. Their lives appear to be symbiotically linked—as one’s condition improves, the other weakens. Interwoven into this situation are non-realistic scenes revealing the hospital’s leadership and its incomplete transformation from a political prison to a humanitarian hospital. In addition, surreal scenes portray capitalism run amok, as vendors ply the hospital hallways at night. Naghiu calls the play a tragicomedy set in a “spital al tranziție” [hospital of transition].²⁷

Naghiu’s mixture of reality and the surreal is deliberate and disturbing. In an introductory disclaimer, he notes that “Orice asemănare cu persoane sau întâmplări din timpul evenimentelor din Decembrie 1989 este posibilă. Orice neasemănare cu ele dovedește că arta, neputând să copieze natura perfect, apelează la ficțiune.” [Any similarity with people or occurrences from the events of December of 1989 is possible. Any difference proves that art, unable to copy nature perfectly, calls upon fiction.]²⁸

²⁶ Naghiu, interview by Adina Barțaș, 39.

²⁷ Iosif Naghiu, Spitalul special (Bucharest: Editura Unitext, 1994), 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

An example of the juxtaposition of the mundane with the poetic can be seen in the absurd exchange between Burlacu, the director of the hospital, and Păun, the former party secretary, which opens the play:

PĂUN: Bună dimineața, domnule director!
 BURLACU (se scoală greu): Bună dimineața! Cât e ceasul?
 PĂUN: Șapte!
 BURLACU: Dimineața sau seara?
 PĂUN: Dimineața!
 BURLACU: Iarna sau primăvara?
 PĂUN: Iarnă... spre primăvară!
 BURLACU: Înainte sau “după”?
 PĂUN: După...
 BURLACU: Deci nu am visat!
 PĂUN: Nu ați visat, domnule director!

[PĂUN: Good morning, Mr. Director!
 BURLACU (he sits up with difficulty): Good morning! What time is it?
 PĂUN: Seven!
 BURLACU: Morning or evening?
 PĂUN: Morning!
 BURLACU: Winter or spring?
 PĂUN: Winter... nearly spring!
 BURLACU: Before or “after”?
 PĂUN: After...
 BURLACU: Then I didn't dream it!
 PĂUN: You didn't dream it, Mr. Director!]²⁹

The line between waking and dreaming remains indistinct throughout the play, and the division between “before” and “after” the December revolution is likewise revealed to be much less precise and meaningful than the characters (and, presumably, the reader) would like. Despite the newly coined partitioning of Romania's history, Naghiu shows that a continuity of people, attitudes, and institutions exists and must be dealt with.

The lives of the hero and the terrorist are inextricably interwoven.

²⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

In 1994, Naghiu's Celula poetului dispărut (published in translation as The Cell of the Self-Lost Poet) won the Ministry of Culture's Camil Petrescu prize for original drama, as well as a prize from the Writers' Union. The play was also published in Teatrul azi and Romanian Review and produced by Romanian Television in the same year.³⁰ The script reflects the post-1989 style of Naghiu in which the use of the absurd and poetic symbolism is mixed with overt references to the social and economic situation of contemporary Romania. Irina Coroiu reported that "the historical perspective is new; the playwright still uses the manner of Eugen Ionescu [Eugène Ionesco], which gives him the opportunity of playing with rich meanings, taking advantage of the black humour resources."³¹

The poet of the title, Daniel Pană, returns to the prison where he had been held for his political writings. As he revisits his cell, we see him in the present and in flashbacks to his earlier imprisonment. At times, the time period is ambiguous, suggesting that his status as prisoner has not completely vanished.

When Pană returns as a visitor to the cell in which he had been imprisoned, he finds that the political prisoners who used to populate the prison have been replaced by economic prisoners: black marketeers and embezzlers who have been caught in their illegal dealings, but who still have hard currency to pay for their incarceration, beer, and poker games with the prison staff. The Warden still works there and is eager to

³⁰ Iosif Naghiu, Celula poetului dispărut (Bucharest: Editura Expansion, 1994); also in Teatrul azi, no. 7/8/9 (1994): 42-55; Iosif Naghiu, The Cell of the Self-Lost Poet, trans. anonymous, in Romanian Review, no. 11/12 (1994): 4-38.

³¹ Irina Coroiu, "Iosif Naghiu," Romanian Review, no. 11/12 (1994): 3.

ascertain that there are no hard feelings against him, since he feels he was only doing his job. His attitude is very reminiscent of that of the foreman in Václav Havel's Audience.³² In both plays, the protagonist, although very much subject to the control of the boss or prison warden, possesses a moral and verbal power over the other character. Paná's "crime" was the publication of a poem. As the Warden introduces Paná to the current inmates, he is referred to as the poet "who had the guts to write the famous "Epitaph to a Troglodyte" before the troglodyte had died!"³³

The inmates leave for their exercise, followed by the Warden, and Paná reappears in a flashback, wearing prison clothes. We see him attempting to hide poems written on scraps of paper. The Warden plays verbal games with him, intimidating him with accusations of "stealing the country's trust." Another writer visits Paná and nervously offers to smuggle his poems out of the country, but Paná denies having any to give. Despite his friend's desire to publish his works in France and create another Havel or Kundera, it is clear that Paná cannot afford to trust anyone. The fellow writer is also concerned that Paná has allowed his dignity to suffer by cleaning the bathrooms without protest, and warns Paná that his actions could "endanger a whole literary scaffolding."³⁴ In a later scene, Paná confesses to a young student that he knows his poems are confiscated and burnt, but that copies are made first for the files. He is

³² Václav Havel, Audience, trans. George Theiner, in The Garden Party and Other Plays (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 183-211.

³³ Naghiu, Cell, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

content with the knowledge that “I had a few readers who not only read my poems but they also feared them.”³⁵ In this, Naghiu draws from a case in the Soviet Union in which a text by Bulgakov was preserved through the diligence of the KGB. Naghiu quotes from an article in the French press that “it so happens that certain texts, had it not been for the KGB’s care, would have been lost. One might call that an irony of fate, since, due to its ‘perfectionism,’ totalitarianism has preserved the antidote.”³⁶ The Warden tells Pană that they often had to work hard to transcribe his poems: “It took our specialists so long to decipher them . . . The paper was greasy with margarine. They could not read them even with a magnifying glass. Then they made the decision that the Ministry of Foodstuffs should reduce the percentage of fat in margarine.”³⁷

But it is not just his poems which Pană seeks. The knowledge that his works were feared gave him a confidence which he has lost in the years after 1989. He had defined himself by being in opposition to his captors and now no longer knows who he is. He has stopped writing and dabbles in politics, apparently ineffectually. A similar transformation happened in his family life. While in jail, he dreamed of seeing his wife and family again; the wife came to the prison every week in hopes of being allowed to see him. Now that it is possible to be together, they have divorced and his wife lives abroad with the children.

³⁵ Ibid., 36.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 31.

The Warden is polite and accommodating toward Pană, but does not reveal where his confiscated poems are. At the end of the play, the Prison Commander enters for the regular poker game with the inmates and tells the Warden not to allow Pană to look in the archives. The Commander warns:

See what you do about him! Although he is no longer necessary as a poet, he was a dissident, nonetheless. But don't forget that, although he was a dissident, he is no good anymore. Let him search the cell for his poems, for his identity, but don't let him go to the archives room. A man's past, even a poetical one, is not the same thing with the collective memory. Don't supply him data that might help him regain his past, but don't prevent him from doing this if they are too obvious. The man is however looking for some manuscripts that belonged to him ... And be polite, kind, after all, we are a prison that observes national and international agreements, and is a member of all Christian and humanitarian [sic] bodies. But you might give him a dig in the rib so that he should not forget that we've preserved our national specific features.³⁸

Naghiu thus reminds us that some things did not change as much as would be hoped in the years after 1989, and captures the difficulty faced by artists attempting to redefine themselves in the new era of apparent freedom. While the convicts, Warden, and Commander play poker, arguing over the exchange rate between lei and dollars, Pană “searches for himself in despair,” saying, “I was one with what I wrote, I wrote what I thought, and now, when I finally thought that I won the battle, that I am my true self, I cannot find the right words anymore.”³⁹

Iosif Naghiu did not fall into the despair seen in Pană, his creation, but he did find himself in the strange position of being called upon to contribute to roundtable discussions, serve on juries for drama festivals, and have his short plays published in

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

literary journals, but to receive very few theatrical productions. One notable exception was the revival of Gluga pe ochi in Brăila, directed by Naghiu himself late in 1997. The play, closed for its political implications in 1971, retained its power as a parable depicting the impotence of the intelligentsia. Despite the passage of time and the changes in political environment, intellectuals in Romania still faced similar problems, as critic Magdalena Boiangiu pointed out:

intelectualul oprimat de puterea totalitară prin agenții săi întunecați poate fi înlocuit acum cu intelectualul marginalizat de o putere indiferentă. În anii '70, imaginea lui Max, căruia i s-au smuls ochelarii, căutați de el târiș pe podea, sugera situația creatorului umilit. Acum creatorul e liber să spună ce vrea, el este umilit de propria incapacitate de a se adapta.

[the intellectual oppressed by totalitarian power through its shadowy agents might now be replaced with the intellectual marginalized by an indifferent power. In 1970, the image of Max, groveling on the floor for his glasses torn off {by the thieves}, suggested the situation of the humiliated creator. Now that the creator is free to speak as he wishes, he is humiliated by his own incapacity to adapt.]⁴⁰

Unfortunately, Iosif Naghiu's lack of skill as a director cast a shadow upon the admirable quality of the script. The production at Brăila oversimplified the complexities of the conflicts in the text. As Boiangiu stated in her review, "dramaturgul Naghiu este sistematic sabotat de regizorul Naghiu" [Naghiu the playwright is systematically sabotaged by Naghiu the director].⁴¹

Iosif Naghiu continues to write plays and poetry and, as leader of the Asociația Scriitorilor din București (Bucharest Association of Writers), has done much to

⁴⁰ Magdalena Boiangiu, review of Gluga pe ochi, by Iosif Naghiu (Teatrul "Maria Filotti," Brăila), Teatrul azi, no 1/2 (1998): 48.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

encourage emerging writers. His voice, however, remains one of dissidence, describing disturbing social and political realities (which today's audiences may not wish to hear) in the form of absurdist allegories emphasizing intellectual rather than emotional conditions .

Marin Sorescu–Poet and Politician

Following 1989, Marin Sorescu was hailed as a dissident who had been actively critical of the regime. Many of his older works were reissued (with cuts demanded by the censors restored), virtually all of his plays written before 1989 were restaged, and new volumes of poetry were published. Notably absent, however, were new dramatic works.

Several factors may explain this lack of dramatic output. First, Sorescu had many non-literary demands on his time: he completed his Ph.D. in philology in 1992, became Minister of Culture in 1993, and prepared several showings of his drawings and paintings. Second, he spent a great deal of effort working on revisions to older works as well as on new projects. One example was the restoration of 150 pages cut from his novel, Trei dinți din față [Three Front Teeth].⁴² His widow, Virginia Sorescu, has set up a foundation to continue the editing and publishing of the numerous works still in progress at the time of his death in 1996, but no new theatre pieces are

⁴² Marin Sorescu, Trei dinți din față (Bucharest: Editura Creuzet, 1993). Originally published by Editura Eminescu, 1977. Sorescu briefly describes the censorship in an interview by Lidia Vianu, Censorship in Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 89.

among the unfinished projects.⁴³ Third, Romanian theatres showed less interest in Romanian works in the years following 1989 and royalties for authors from productions were minimal.⁴⁴ Finally, Marin Sorescu continued to write poetry even on his deathbed; the distillation and condensation of imagery rather than the broad canvas of drama seemed to suit him well during his last years.

In addition to volumes of poetry and works translated and published outside of Romania, new editions of several plays were published after 1989. Vărul Shakespeare, Luptătorul pe două fronturi, Casa evantai, Iona, and A treia teapă were published in collections in 1992.⁴⁵ Răceala, Iona, and the previously unpublished Desfacerea gunoaielor [Opening the Trash], written in 1971, appeared in 1994 and 1995.⁴⁶

Although no new plays were forthcoming, Sorescu's older works received new productions at several theatres. With the exception of A treia teapă and Luptătorul pe două fronturi (both long, historical plays with large casts), all of Sorescu's published dramatic works were staged by one or more theatres in Romania between 1990 and 1996. Several of these plays had not been produced for many years due to their abstract styles and ambiguous meanings, such as Iona and Paracliserul. Marin

⁴³ Virginia Sorescu, interview by Georgeta Pourchot, Bucharest, 17 October 1998.

⁴⁴ Marin Sorescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

⁴⁵ Marin Sorescu, Vărul Shakespeare și alte piese (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1992); Teatru (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1992).

⁴⁶ Marin Sorescu, Răceala (Bucharest: Editura Creuzet, 1994); Iona (Bucharest: Editura Creuzet, 1995); Desfacerea gunoaielor (Bucharest: Editura Expansion-Armonia, 1995).

Sorescu's plays were among the few "acceptable" plays dating from the pre-1989 era.⁴⁷ Unlike Naghiu's works, most of Sorescu's plays emphasized the poetic and symbolic rather than the absurd, and were generally anchored in history or mythology familiar to audiences. Further, Marin Sorescu's poetry has been extremely popular, and audiences were thus attuned to his poetic style before even entering the theatre. His plays were generally seen to show little signs of age, although at least two critics felt that Sorescu's works were more effective when read than when played on stage.⁴⁸

Vărul Shakespeare [Cousin Shakespeare] had been in rehearsal in the fall of 1989 at the National Theatre in Craiova, and was quickly adapted to the new freedom from censorship. Vărul Shakespeare is a multi-faceted, post-modernist work which centers on a discussion of art and life between two characters—William Shakespeare and Sorescu. Sorescu coaches Shakespeare, offering advice and even giving assignments: "Enough for today. Next time it will be even better. Composition for home: The Merry Wives of Windsor."⁴⁹ Additional characters—Ben Jonson, Hamlet, a Romanian from the year 1600 bearing the head of Michael the Brave, and others—interact in a wild interweaving of literature, history, and multiple world perspectives.

Notable revivals of Sorescu's older plays included Iona at the National Theatres

⁴⁷ Dan C. Mihăilescu, "Cum privește critica literară dramaturgia română," Teatrul azi, no. 5 (1990): 7.

⁴⁸ Victor Ernest Mașek, "Prejudecata filologică," Teatrul azi, no. 9/10 (1991): 45; Alexandru Ștefănescu, "Totul va fi bine!" Teatrul azi, no. 7/8 (1991): 22.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Irina Coroiu, "A World Premiered Play," Romanian Review, no. 6 (1990): 115.

in Bucharest and Craiova, Matca at the National Theatres in Craiova and Timișoara, Casa evantai at the Bulandra Theatre, and Paracliserul at the National Theatre in Bucharest. Despite these and other productions, Sorescu's plays were not greeted with the same critical enthusiasm received by previously unstaged plays of Matei Vișniec or Dumitru Solomon.⁵⁰

Sorescu's acceptance of the post of Minister of Culture in 1993 likewise received mixed reviews. Sorescu was criticized for associating himself with the government of Ion Iliescu, which was dominated by former communists. On the other hand, he fought to maintain the repertory system in Romanian theatres, an expensive but artistically fruitful structure which gave actors financial stability. Sorescu also worked to balance the repertory by encouraging new Romanian works. He later stated that as Minister of Culture he was always fighting someone and that many people were interested in profiting from his position. Allies from before turned out to be his most serious adversaries and biggest problem. The post proved to be an exhausting one that took a great deal of his time and energy.⁵¹ During his tenure from 1993 to 1995, Sorescu initiated playwriting contests to combat the virtual elimination of Romanian plays from the repertory and tried to pull the theatres away from what he considered

⁵⁰ For example, in the compilations of critical opinions published annually by Teatrul azi, Sorescu's works rarely received nominations in the category of "best production of a Romanian play." Productions of Iona at the National Theatres of Craiova and Timișoara each received one vote in 1996. "Cel mai bun... cea mai bună," Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1996): 32-33.

⁵¹ Marin Sorescu, interview by author, Bucharest, 28 November 1996.

“pornography” and “the degeneration of cultural life.”⁵²

Marin Sorescu was admitted into the Romanian Academy in 1992, a long-overdue honor which underscores how profoundly culture life had been disrupted during Ceaușescu’s rule. From 1969 to 1989, no new names had been added to the Academy. Similarly, after the Writers’ Union Conference in 1981, no new authors were allowed to join the Union, and membership fell from thirteen hundred members in 1981 to one thousand in 1989.⁵³

The new freedom which came after 1989 was a double-edged sword for Sorescu. On the one hand, the government harassment to which he and his wife had been increasingly subject ended. Although Sorescu had been allowed to travel abroad due to his international stature, he was always followed by a securitate agent. Also, he was never sent on official delegations or asked to participate in cooperative contracts with other countries. “I was not considered an official person,” explained Sorescu.⁵⁴ A police car was often stationed outside his house. Visitors from abroad were told to move their automobile from his street. Other small but menacing forms of harassment, such as cutting off access to specific phone numbers, being cautioned not to have friends outside of the country, and anonymous phone calls threatening his life, were now a thing of the past.⁵⁵ The change of regime may have come just in time for

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Mircea Dinescu, interview by Vianu, 194.

⁵⁴ Marin Sorescu, interview by Vianu, 90.

⁵⁵ Virginia Sorescu, conversation with author, Bucharest, 28 November, 1996.

Sorescu. Faced with the mounting costs of continuous surveillance both in Romania and abroad and with no signs of change in his dissident attitude, a plot to poison Sorescu was apparently organized in 1988. Fortunately, the attempt failed.⁵⁶

On the other hand, life after 1989 was disrupted by the political, economic, and social changes which developed with great speed. In 1991, Sorescu admitted that “censorship stimulated me.”⁵⁷ Suddenly, there were so many choices that creativity was stifled. When asked if he was experiencing writer’s block, he replied, “If not a block, perhaps a state of noncreation. And I am not the only one. Lots of writers mention this. The cause is first and foremost the general confusion, both social and political. We have suddenly entered an era of numberless possibilities and, strangely enough, we are now the victims of too much choice. We feel unable to choose.”⁵⁸

Sorescu was able to move past this stage of “noncreation,” producing an impressive body of poetry from the past and present and receiving a nomination for the Nobel Prize for Literature. The eulogies published after his death ranked him as the “cele mai frumoase spirite ale generației șaizeci” [the most beautiful spirit of the generation of the 1960s].⁵⁹ Two poems capture much of the courage, vision, and ironic attitude which sustained him through the years. Several obituaries included the poem Sorescu wrote on his deathbed, “A Ladder to Heaven”:

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Marin Sorescu, interview by Vianu, 86.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁹ Dumitru Solomon, “Bunul meu preiten,” *Teatrul azi*, no. 1/2 (1997): 53.

A spider web
 Is hanging from the ceiling
 Just above my bed.
 I daily notice
 How it sinks lower and lower.
 They are even sending me
 A ladder to heaven—I say to myself,
 They are throwing it for me from above.
 Though I've grown terribly thin
 And I am just the ghost of he who I was before
 I reckon that my body
 Is still too heavy
 For such a frail ladder.
 "Will you then lead the way, my soul?
 Gently! Gently!"⁶⁰

But Sorescu's spirit, as well as his attitude toward the theatre world, is perhaps more clearly seen in a much earlier poem published in 1965, "Shakespeare," which has been called Sorescu's first masterpiece.⁶¹

Shakespeare created the world in seven days.

On the first day he made the sky and the mountains and the ravines of the soul.
 On the second day he made the rivers, the seas, the oceans as well as
 the other feelings and
 gave them to Hamlet, to Julius Caesar, to Cleopatra, Ophelia,
 Othello and others, to
 reign over them with their children and later descendants
 for ever and ever.

On the third day he summoned the whole of humanity
 to teach them the diverse tastes:
 the taste of happiness, that of love, the taste

⁶⁰ Marin Sorescu, "A Ladder to Heaven," trans. Dan Mateescu, quoted in Ion Murgeanu, "In Aeternitas: Marin Sorescu," *Curierul românesc* 9, no. 12 (December, 1996): 23.

⁶¹ Fănuș Băileșteanu, *Marin Sorescu: Studiu monografic* (Bucharest: Editura Steaua Procion, 1998), 152.

of despair, of jealousy, fame etc.,
 Till there were none left to distribute. But then
 a few people came who were late.
 Sorry for them, the creator patted their heads and informed them
 there was nothing left for them save
 to become literary critics and
 debunk his work.

.....
 On the seventh day he made sure that nothing was left undone.
 Already theatre managers had plastered
 the whole world with their playbills, and
 Shakespeare thought that after so
 much work
 he would deserve to see a play,
 but, first, as he was very tired
 went to die a bit.⁶²

Sorescu's death at the age of sixty came as a blow to many in the theatre world.⁶³ It will never be known whether he would have returned to dramatic forms later in life. However, it must be noted that, although his powerful, universal plays deserve to be more widely known throughout the world's repertory, the dramatic form was clearly not Sorescu's primary focus: he published only eleven plays over his thirty-five years of playwriting. It was clear as early as 1990 that those few works would be an important element in the repertories of the National Theatres in Romania. He will now undoubtedly rank alongside I. L. Caragiale, Vasile Alecsandri, Lucian Blaga, and Mihail Sebastian as a leading figure of Romanian drama.

⁶² Marin Sorescu, "Shakespeare," trans. Michael Hamburger, in The Golden Bough (Supplement of the ARC Magazine of Arts and Letters, Romanian Cultural Foundation), ed. George Bălăiță, no. 1 (1994): 58.

⁶³ Director Mircea Cornișteanu's elegy, for example, bore the title "It isn't right!". "Nu e drept!" Teatrul azi, no. 1/2 (1997): 53.

The outline of his story also stands as a cautionary tale. The long-sought-after freedom obtained in 1990 left Sorescu frozen for some time, unable at first to return to artistic creativity. Once freed from artistic stasis, his political and administrative involvement reduced his ability to devote time to creative tasks, just when his works—new and old—were in highest demand.

Dumitru Radu Popescu: Continuing to be Uncomfortable

Unlike Iosif Naghiu after 1989, Dumitru Radu Popescu did not write plays directly dealing with contemporary political issues or exploring the actions of the past regime. While remaining reticent about current events, Popescu did expose the new manifestations of greed and hypocrisy allowed to flower after the revolution. Dumitru Radu Popescu's plays written since 1989 also demonstrate a return to experimentation in form.

As an author who had written works apparently in support of the previous regime (such as Două ore de pace, Muntele, and Piticul din grădina de vară) and who had served on the Central Committee, Popescu was considered “suspect” by the theatres and public following 1989. Some referred to Dumitru Radu Popescu as a “nomina odiosa” [an odious name] and denounced him as a “nomenclaturist” and “colaboraționist” [a member of the nomenklatura and a collaborator with the regime].⁶⁴ In a published interview, Popescu refused to condemn the censorship of the past, even

⁶⁴ Constantin Stănescu, Interviuri din tranziție (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1996), 122.

going so far as to say that man has been censored since God forbade the fruit of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, implying that the past censorship was nothing new or particularly egregious.⁶⁵

Productions of Popescu's plays did not fare well in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution. Even his most popular plays which criticized the status quo, such as Acești îngeri triști and Studiul osteologic..., were withdrawn from repertoires. Silviu Purcărete's 1989 production of Piticul din grădina de vară was considered by the designer to be one of two most strongly moving works in the repertory of the National Theatre in Craiova.⁶⁶ Despite the anti-communist interpretation given by the director and cast, the play was stained by its original billing as a work staged in honor of the forty-fifth anniversary of the overthrow of the fascist regime in 1944, and was not successful with Romanian audiences after 1989.⁶⁷ Piticul din grădina de vară was, however, performed at a major European theatre festival in Luxembourg in 1995.⁶⁸ The National Theatre of Craiova's production was the first contemporary Romanian play to be performed after 1989 at "un festival de asemenea anvergură" [a festival of this scale of importance].⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Vianu, 83.

⁶⁶ Ștefania Cenean, interview by Ioana Florea, Teatrul azi, no. 1/2 (1998): 20.

⁶⁷ Silviu Purcărete, interview by Marian Popescu, Semnal teatral, no. 1 (1995): 84.

⁶⁸ "Viața teatrelor," Semnal teatral, no. 2 (1995): 71.

⁶⁹ Emil Bosoghina, interview, Rampa și ecranul, no. 3/4 (1995): 5.

Popescu continued to write at his usual meteoric pace, completing at least five plays in the seven months between October 1990 and April of 1991. These new works, however, were not published until 1994 in Mireasa cu gene false.⁷⁰ Productions were likewise delayed. His first play written after 1989 to be produced was Robespierre și regele sau Îmblinzirea dreptății [Robespierre and the King or The Taming of Justice], which broke three years of “tăceri mai mult sau mai puțin voluntară” [more or less voluntary silence] from Dumitru Radu Popescu.⁷¹

Robespierre, Revolution, and Guilt

Robespierre și regele demonstrates Dumitru Radu Popescu’s continued interest in human, universal, and historical issues as they connect to the present. In this respect, the play is not directly about the Romanian situation, but can be considered a commentary on the events of 1989. The play—absurd, comic, and tragic by turns—is primarily a dialog between Robespierre (The Incorruptible) and Goupilleau de Fontenay over the fate of Philip Ludovic, the child King, who is present under the guardianship of Goupilleau. Popescu sets the action in a cathedral. The majesty of the setting is enhanced with “heavenly songs” and organ music, but also undercut by the sounds and defecation of doves, chickens, ducks, and guinea fowl.⁷² Ludovic, also known as

⁷⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Mireasa cu gene false (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1994). Popescu provides completion dates at the end of each play.

⁷¹ Stănescu, 119.

⁷² Dumitru Radu Popescu, Robespierre și regele sau Îmblinzirea dreptății, in Dumitru Radu Popescu, Mireasa, 7.

Louis Charles de France or Louis XVII, is only eight years old, increasing the moral dilemma faced by Goupilleau: whether to follow God and morality or the political realism of Robespierre; to protect the innocent young boy or to preclude the boy's possible future role as the leader of a reactionary political force.

The dramatic action of the play consists primarily of Robespierre's attempts to convince Goupilleau that Ludovic must be killed. Their discussion ranges broadly over the topics of royalty, leadership, the necessity of power, the role of the church, and even the existence of God. To Robespierre, God is whoever is in power, whoever has the power of life and death. Goupilleau resists Robespierre's heresy, comparing the temporary nature of law to the eternal nature of ethics:

Robespierre: . . . Puterea e în mîinile noastre.

Goupilleau de Fontenay: A fost și în mîinile regelui. Și nu i-a folosit la nimic.

[Robespierre: . . . The power is in our hands.

Goupilleau de Fontenay: It was also in the hands of the king. And it was of no use at all to him.]⁷³

Goupilleau argues that the child is just a child, not a king. Robespierre responds by asking Goupilleau to crown the child, which is done with minimal ceremony while dogs bark and chase ducks across the stage. Ludovic is told "Să aduci pace bisericii și supușilor... să înlături nedreptatea... să lupți împotriva Dușmanilor lui Dumnezeu... Să domnească în Franța pacea și mizericordia..." [May you bring peace to the church and its subjects... may you remove injustice... fight against the enemies

⁷³ Ibid., 17.

of God... May peace and compassion reign over France...]⁷⁴ His inability to actually function as protector and provider is made evident by Robespierre, who gives grain to the Prince and tells him to go feed the chickens.

Robespierre speaks of revolution, France, the ideals of the Jacobins. His discussion gradually widens from the French revolution to any revolution, then to totalitarian regimes. Revolution, says Robespierre, legalizes a shift of power from one set of holders of the means of violence to another set of holders. Robespierre expresses regret that St. Just lost sight of the revolutionary ideals, but shows no remorse for his execution. Robespierre now sees himself as the person in charge of maintaining the revolution by any means necessary. “Nu se poate domni fără vină” [You can’t rule without guilt], he states.⁷⁵

Goupilleau continues to argue for the innocence of the child, saying that killing him would be ungod-like behavior and would undermine the ideals of revolution. Finally, after Robespierre makes it clear that Goupilleau will be killed himself if he sets God and church above the needs of the regime, Goupilleau takes the boy out of the cathedral to his death. (Louis actually died in prison at age 10, according to official records.) Robespierre wonders at Goupilleau’s ability to be swayed from his principles by the fear of death. If Goupilleau can strangle the child but not kill Robespierre despite his sense of ethics, he could do anything to live, even kill his mother or wife.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

To save his life, Goupilleau buries himself in shame, placing life above honor, nation, everything. This final monologue, however, ends with the increasingly loud and frequent sounds of the falling guillotine, a reminder of the fate soon to befall Robespierre himself.

The play, written in 1990, clearly invites comparisons between the French and Romanian situations, and continues Popescu's habit of raising uncomfortable questions without providing consoling answers. Parallels could be drawn between the Jacobins and the Romanian Communist Party, in the sense that bloodshed and repression was perhaps necessary and inevitable, or the parallel could be made to the summary execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu after a secret "trial" by those who possessed the physical power of life and death, if not the legal authority to impose it. Either interpretation raises ethical and practical dilemmas for anyone involved in the events of December, 1989. Additionally, since Robespierre was soon to die by the guillotine himself, the play suggests that the cycle of bloodletting could continue—hardly a comforting thought during the uncertainties of Romania in 1990. As is typical of Popescu's works, the play, although set in a specific historical context, invites comparison to other times and places. But Popescu distances himself from "journalism" by emphasizing the universal and metaphorical aspects of his plays. He responded to a question about the topicality of *Robespierre și regele* by stating, "Piesa mea nu dă răspunsuri actualității, tocmai fiindcă acest conflict este etern." [My play is

not a response to current events, precisely because this conflict is eternal.]⁷⁶

Robespierre și regele, despite its unfettered political content, is stylistically a debate, an essay in dramatic form, a model Popescu praises in ancient Greek tragedy, G. B. Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, and other authors.⁷⁷ The customary, even old-fashioned form of Robespierre și regele was highlighted by a revival of the 1968 work, Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor, just a month earlier in Piatra Neamț. Victor Parhon reviewed both plays together in Teatrul azi and commented on audience expectations about style and content for plays written after 1989:

Amatorii de compartimentări și delimitări—pe cât de categorice, pe atât de false—între literatura scrisă înainte și după (evenimentele din decembrie '89) vor fi inevitabil descumpăniți: dacă Robespierre și regele (1990) poate să pară scrisă înainte, și aceasta mai ales prin insistența circumscrierii în datele epocii, Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor (1968) pare scrisă—datorită gradului ei de generalizare—mai curînd după.

[Those who prefer categorizations—the more categorical the falser—between the literature written before and after the events of December 1989 will be inevitably disappointed: if Robespierre and the King, (written in 1990), can seem written before because of the insistence on circumscribing the dates of the epoch, Caesar, the Pirate's Fool may seem, due to its degree of generalization, written after.]⁷⁸

Although the plays differ stylistically, the themes are similar: “va fi vorba de tiranie și libertate, de putere și de ‘justificările’ crimelor ei, mergînd pînă la condamnarea la

⁷⁶ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Stănescu, 120.

⁷⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by author, 26 November 1996, Bucharest, tape recording.

⁷⁸ Victor Parhon, review of Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor, by D.R. Popescu (Teatrul Tineratului, Piatra Neamț) and Robespierre și regele sau Îmblînzirea dreptății (Teatrul Toma Caragiu, Ploiești), Teatrul azi, no. 11/12 (1992): 39.

moarte a unui om pentru ceea ce ei ar putea să devină.” [they speak of tyranny and liberty, of power and the ‘justifications’ for its crimes, going as far as death penalties for people for what they could become.]]⁷⁹

Robespierre și regele, like many of Popescu’s plays, was hurt by poor acting in the original production. A second staging in 1996 by the National Theatre in Iași was singled out as a “lectura regizorală violent epidermică” [an extremely shallow violent directoral reading] among otherwise judicious choices for the I. L. Cargiale National Festival that year.⁸⁰ The script was criticized by some as being an “eseul dramatic” [dramatic essay] and full of “dezbaterii” [debates], but nevertheless powerful.⁸¹ Despite the reservations, the original staging, still in the repertory at Ploiești three years later, was listed by critic Mircea Ghițulescu as the best production of a Romanian play for 1995 (although it should be noted that 6 out of 14 critics did not select a play in that category!)⁸²

Robespierre și regele raised moral and ethical questions connected to the use of power but, like Popescu’s earlier plays, did not target any specific political figure, party, or regime for criticism. As can be seen in his novels and other plays, Popescu’s world is full of flawed human beings, and no political system can override the passions

⁷⁹ Parhon, 39.

⁸⁰ Ludmila Patlanjoglu, “Ofertă artistică generoasă, organizare defectuoasă,” Teatrul azi, no. 8/9 (1996): 31.

⁸¹ Irina Andone, review of Robespierre și regele, by Dumitru Radu Popescu (Teatrul Național, Iași), Teatrul azi, no. 4/5 (1996): 32.

⁸² “Cei mai bun... cea mai bună...,” Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1996): 32-33.

and imperfections of individuals. His insistence on truth and uncovering of hypocrisy extends from his early plays such as Damen-vals and Acești îngeri triști to his most recent works. He takes the role seriously. In response to a call from author Fănuș Neagu asking authors to get back to the writing table, Popescu stated, “Eu n-am o masă la care scriu: eu scriu pe genunchi.” [I don’t have a desk at which I write: I write on my knees.]⁸³

The Society with False Eyelashes

Written at nearly the same time as Robespierre și regele but not produced until 1996, Mireasa cu gene false [The Bride with False Eyelashes] marks a return to the pointed social criticism contained in earlier plays (such as Acești îngeri triști or Studiul osteologic...) and novels (such as The Royal Hunt).⁸⁴ As was the case in Popescu’s works from before 1989, the focus is on the corruptibility of human beings rather than on the specific political or economic system in place. The initial production of Mireasa cu gene false, in 1996 at the National Theatre in Cluj, was, like Robespierre și regele, nominated by one critic as the best production of a contemporary Romanian play.⁸⁵

The lengthy play (in eight acts and a prologue) is a complex tale of flawed individuals adjusting to the world of post-1989 Romania. Part love story, part critique

⁸³ Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Stănescu, 125.

⁸⁴ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Mireasa cu gene false, in Mireasa cu gene false (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1994), 117-262.

⁸⁵ “Cel mai bun... Cea mai bună,” Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1996): 32-33.

of materialism, part expressionistic homage to durable values, the text is nearly overrun by allusions to other plays from the world theatre. The script can be seen as a return to the “magical realism” Popescu employed in his early novels, “the mixture of realistic detail and hallucinatory vision that we often associate with Latin American writers in order to suggest the image of a sick and disordered society.”⁸⁶

Five key characters are followed: Rița, an older woman hoping to remarry and to marry her daughter off for money and position, by force if need be; Frusina, the idealistic, poetic archaeologist daughter who doesn’t know what she wants from love or marriage; Sotir, the new capitalist who consumes culture for profit; Bebe, the “grasshopper” who hops from one bed to another and seems more interested in getting a motorcycle from Rița than her hand in marriage; and Zeno, the painter who, like his classical namesake, tries to live in harmony with nature and whose idealism is difficult for others to comprehend or follow.

The play opens with a storm aboard an oil platform in the Black Sea. Reminiscent of the opening scene in The Tempest, this storm is literal and metaphorical: the terror is not only from the waves and wind but from the realization of how transient life is and how difficult it is to maintain courage in an insecure environment. The past plays a role immediately: when the boss offers to stay on the platform and tells the others to go, he is accused of wanting to boast about how he

⁸⁶ Michael H. Impey, “The Romanian Novel, 1947–1989: Historical Compromise or the Triumph of the Human Spirit,” Romanian Review, no. 1 (1996): 34.

stayed while others went “abroad” as “traitors to their country.” The boss’s answer addresses the political question rather than the immediate situation: “eu am rămas în țară... și m-am predat celor veniți peste noi... și-am muncit pe brînci, fără să crîncnesc... Eu mi-am trădat țara, nepunînd mîna pe bîță . . . Eu sînt din categoria acelor lași... care au pactizat cu puterea.” [I stayed in the country... and I surrendered to what came over us... And I worked on all fours without protesting... I have betrayed the country, by not laying hands on a billy club . . . I am from that category of cowards who have collaborated with those in power.]⁸⁷

The danger and philosophical tone of the prologue is quickly changed to a darkly comic, domestic world of greed and material gain. Instead of a magical isle ruled by Prospero and his books, we find a land peopled with Calibans or, more accurately, with Trinculos and Stephanos who have had the benefit of ethical education but have turned their backs on the rules of civil society. Sotir is busy trying to set up a chain of hotels in the Danube Delta. He thinks he knows what foreign tourists want and plans three-day cruises for women featuring vampire stories and tall, dark men to entertain them. He invents a historical character who will lead the planned cruise, and hires a painter, Zeno, to paint the wall of a house in imitation of a famous painting. Sotir then plans to hire people to dress like the painting to create a historical atmosphere in the town. Sotir consumes culture: he scans Romeo and Juliet while in the cellar for a few minutes eating pickled carrots, only to ask, “Cine azi mai este în

⁸⁷ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Mireasa, 123.

stare să moară din iubire?” [Who is able to die of love today?]⁸⁸

Indeed, love seems to be replaced by personal gain. Rița, her black market false eyelashes aflutter, tries to get Bebe to marry her by buying him a motorcycle. She also wants to marry her daughter, Frusina, to Sotir, believing that Sotir will be rich soon: “Milionar ajunge! Și părinții lui nu sînt niște burjui, să n-ai ce discuta cu ei decît despre filme și Dumnezeu!” [He will become a millionaire! And his parents are not bourgeois people with whom you can only talk about movies and God!]⁸⁹ Frusina, however, is more interested in going to work on archaeology in China than in her mother’s plans. Although she is intellectually and emotionally repelled by Sotir’s shallowness, she is sexually drawn to him and has his child. Her poetry, filled with nature imagery and themes of love, contrasts sharply with the patchwork songs with forced rhymes hastily created by Sotir for tourists. Her love of poetry and idealism draws her to Zeno and she recites a poem to him, ending with the romantic line “Oprîți moara, oprîți clipa cea repede!” [Stop the mill, stop the moments so quick], evoking the desperation of Faust in the minutes before his damnation.⁹⁰ Eventually, Zeno and Frusina marry, but Frusina continues her affair with Sotir. When Zeno catches them in bed together, Frusina recognizes that she does not love Zeno anymore and wants her daughter to be adopted by Sotir, the actual father of the child.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 138

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 167.

Death overtakes several of the people drawn into Sotir's plans. Bebe dies on board one of Sotir's ships in a confused delirium. Rița and the others can't find his grave, his cross, or his body in a surreal scene in a cemetery. The giggling of a naked couple chasing one another through the cemetery and the arguments over present and past actions serve to trivialize the otherwise grim task. While this action continues, the dead quietly take their place on a bench looking out toward the Danube: Dănilă, a ship-mate who died during the action of the prologue, Bebe, and then Jigurcă, a man Sotir hired to be a eunuch/stripper for the tourists, who also dies in a delirium.⁹¹

The series of deaths has some effect on Sotir. He decides to leave for the sea and never come back, leaving Frusina to Zeno. Frusina realizes that her mother is pregnant with Bebe's child. Meanwhile, Zeno has finished his mural. His composition, of pure and beautiful women and flowers, elicits varying responses from the remaining characters. Most react against the idyllic serenity and purity of the vision, arguing that there is no such place, no world centered around women and flowers. Zeno tries to persuade Frusina that they can live in a world like the one in his painting. He gets in a carriage and offers to take her there. When she declines, he whips the horses and drives the carriage through the painting. The colors disappear

⁹¹ These deaths are perhaps an allusion to the large numbers of syphilis cases unreported to world health agencies before 1989 and then spreading to epidemic proportions in Romania after 1989. "Romania Faces Syphilis Epidemic," AIDS Weekly Plus, 19 February 1996, 31; InfoTrac Searchbank, A18139775. UNAIDS/WHO Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STD Surveillance, Romania: Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Geneva, Switzerland, WHO: 1998, 7; available from www.who.org [accessed 11 December 1998].

and the wall becomes white and chipped, as it was before the mural was painted. Art and idealism depend on belief; if there are no believers, the ideal and true art disappears. Prospero's magic has vanished. The play ends with Frusina holding her head in her hands, repeating "Totuși... Totuși..." [However... However...]⁹²

The post-communist society portrayed by Popescu is carnal, materialistic, limited in vision, self-centered, and based on ignorance. Sotir's concept of what foreigners want to see in Romania is based on simple-minded stereotypes rather than on real information. His attempts to create instant culture for tourists parallels Rița's attempts to become a beautiful bride by pasting on false eyelashes. The cultural and artistic death inherent in this process is symbolized by the actual deaths which occur in the play. Beauty and art have no purpose except as billboards and attractions for the tourists. Love is replaced by calculation and self-interest. Even friendship is a negotiation and these characters are not able to forgive one another for past wrongs or political allegiances. On the other hand, Zeno's alternative of escaping into fantasy does not seem viable in the real world either. Unlike Măria in Studiul osteologic... or Ion and Silvia in Acești îngeri triști, none of the characters in Mireasa cu gene false have even a partial vision of how to reconcile truthfulness and integrity with the imperfect and hypocritical world.

Popescu also dares to portray characters who long for a return to the former regime. Bebe, for example, suggests that the people didn't know what they were doing

⁹² Dumitru Radu Popescu, Mireasa, 262.

in 1989, when he sings “Ceașescu să ne ierți... În Decembrie am fost beți!” [Forgive us, Ceașescu... In December we were all drunk!]⁹³ He also compares the economics of the new system to the old: “Fiecare femeie care gătește este în opoziție cu guvernul” [any woman who cooks is in opposition to the government {i.e., can somehow afford the government-induced high cost of food}], a rewording of the older saying that any woman who has food on the table is in opposition to Ceașescu (i.e., not starving from the food shortages as he seemed to intend.)⁹⁴ Bebe quips that the difference between Romania and America is that America has a communist party and Romania does not. Everyone seems to be out of work and only foreigners have any money. Rița also reveals that she had a chance to go off with extraterrestrials. Calling them “comrades” and describing how they would eat grapes, her descriptions evoke the unannounced visits by Ceașescu, who was often photographed in vineyards and orchards.

In sum, Mireasa cu gene false continues Dumitru Radu Popescu’s tradition of “uncomfortable” works, and shows little sign of compromise or concession to the circumstances of Romania in 1990. The sad angels of 1968 have become pitiable brutes. As Bebe says, they live in “O lume plictisită, chit că zice c-a făcut revoluția—care revoluția, bre?—o lume în care pînă și amintirea raiului e amorțită... Nimic sfînt! Atunci de unde să se mai nască Rița, copii sfînti?... Dacă nu din iubire, de unde să vină copii sfînti.” [A bored world, which claims to have made a

⁹³ Ibid., 132.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

revolution—what revolution, hey?—a world in which even the recollection that there is heaven is numb... Nothing is sacred! How can you have innocent children then, Rița?... If not out of love, from where will the innocent children come?]⁹⁵ The loss of the sacred leads Rița to propose a solution to the country's economic malaise:

Acuma cînd fabricile nu merg, cînd nu se-nghesuie lumea la muncă... pe ce să scoți valută? Ce să vinzi? Putem să ne vindem morții! Cum se să facă cu ei?... Experiențe! N-ai citit că morții trăiesc... vorbesc! Așteaptă învierea de apoi! Și secrete de stat nu ascund ei în pămînt!
 [Now that the factories are not producing, when people are not going to work, how can you get any hard currency? What can you sell? Well, we can sell our dead! What can you do with them?... Experiments! Haven't you read that dead bodies still live... and speak! They look forward to the resurrection! And they can't hide state secrets in their graves!]⁹⁶

The production by the National Theatre of Cluj emphasized the loss of the sacred and the beautiful by producing the script in a sordid, naturalistic style which offered visual and aural shocks to the audience.⁹⁷ There is much in the play to anger Romanian audiences of all political inclinations, but the return to a more eclectic, less naturalistic style seems to fit Popescu's content more comfortably than the restraints of the modified socialist realism which prevailed from 1971 to 1989.

A Dream Play

One of Dumitru Radu Popescu's recent works, which vividly demonstrates his

⁹⁵ Ibid., 139.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 156-7.

⁹⁷ Magdalena Boianțiu, "Zile cu teatru și politică," Teatrul azi, no. 1/2 (1997): 9.

renewed interest in stylistic experimentation in drama, is an expressionistic play titled Dafnis și Chloe [Daphnis and Chloe].⁹⁸ The play offers a kaleidoscopic view of modern and historic Romania in fragments of dream-like scenes, pivoting on allusions to the 1816 pastoral Mirtil și Hloe [Myrtle and Chloe] by Gheorghe Asachi, the first original play presented in the Romanian language.⁹⁹ Asachi's play was in turn adapted from pastoral works by the Swiss writer, Salomon Gessner, and Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian of France. The original source of the story is the third century Greek novel, Daphnis and Chloe by Longus, who appears as a prime character in Popescu's play.

The play is as yet unpublished and unproduced but offers a fascinating view of Popescu's stylistic virtuosity and, perhaps, a glimpse into the future of his dramaturgy. Just as one of the characters complains that "today it is very difficult to stage a play...that communicates ideas through myth and metaphor," it is difficult to describe this play, filled with myth and metaphor.¹⁰⁰ It is often self-reflexive and is saturated with historical, political, and literary allusions and interpolations. Even the sources of the story, as outlined above, are analogous to the chaotic, convoluted, and multi-national origins of modern Romania.

The play opens with screams and the descent from a helicopter by Longos

⁹⁸ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Daphnis and Chloe or The Republic of the Sexes, English version by Alina Carac, TMs [photocopy] December 25, 1995. Provided to author by Dumitru Radu Popescu, February, 1998.

⁹⁹ Simion Alterescu, ed., An Abridged History of Romanian Theatre, trans. anonymous (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1983): 34.

¹⁰⁰ Dumitru Radu Popescu, Daphnis, 48-49.

[Longus], the post-classic Greek author, and Irina, a Romanian living in Berlin who claims to be the great-granddaughter of Hangerliu, a prince of Wallachia killed by the Turks in 1798. The opening evokes images of modern warfare, from Vietnam to Bosnia as well as the escape by Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu from Bucharest by helicopter in December of 1989. The descent from the helicopter also recalls the device of deus ex machina, inverted by appearing at the beginning of the action instead of the end. A parade of invading armies marches through the scene—Romans, Turks, Gypsies, Huns, Russians, and Germans in turn. Longos has created this fictional world for Irina, complete with Daphnis and Chloe, two naive and virginal herders of goats and sheep who come to symbolize the earthy roots of Romania, as well as the Mayor, General, Priest, and a dissident intellectual (who also turns out to be a member of the secret police), who generally act as representatives of their social functions. Irina takes full advantage of her control over this theatrical world, using her wealth to fulfill every whim.

The second act is a retelling of the story of Hangerliu, one of many Greek princes installed on the throne of Wallachia by the Turks to rule as a local surrogate for the Ottoman empire. Hangerliu taxed the common people heavily to pay the needed tribute to the Sultan, but spared the boyars (nobles) in order to gain their loyalty. Despite his efficiency, he fell out of favor with the Turkish court.¹⁰¹ And, irrespective

¹⁰¹ The Phanariot princedoms of the eighteenth century were bought with bribes which provided revenue for the Porte, creating an escalating cycle of larger bribes financed by heavier taxes on the population. The result was not only increasing hardship on the Romanian people but also an incentive for the Porte to change local

of his treatment of the boyars, no one raised a hand in his defense. The sultan's representative, Osman, brings a Moor to cut off Hangerliu's head and return it to Constantinople. The Moor half-seduces, half-rapes Hangerliu's wife, who bears his daughter. Irina plays her ancestor, while the other characters portray Osman, Hangerliu, boyars, and court officials.

Act three, set in the present, inverts this story, although still in dream-like form, and evokes the tabloid allure of Western capitalism. Irina has come to Romania from abroad to rebuild a ruined monastery and to perform her celebrated circus act. She is revealed as a woman of great sexual appetites. Her tryst with the General exhausts him completely, and she also attracts the attentions of the Mayor and Priest. Chitac, the dissident poet who never published his works but memorized them as an act of political defiance, turns out to be a policeman who wants to arrest Irina's secretary for being a homosexual and Irina for being a bisexual and a fraud who is not Hangerliu's descendant at all. Irina in turn claims to be the daughter of an Arab who killed her father in Munich, just as Hangerliu's daughter was fathered by the Moor who killed him in 1798. She also claims to have killed a priest in Munich after confessing to keep him from turning her in to the police. The act ends with the Priest dying after a mimed killing by Irina. He cries out against "the maculation of the [B]olshevik sex!" only to rise again and follow Irina out, her stocking in his hand.¹⁰²

rulers often. Kurt W. Treptow, ed., A History of Romania, 3d ed. (Iasi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1997), 205-6.

¹⁰² Popescu, Daphnis, 106-7.

The final act shows the carnivorous side of capitalism, opening with Irina's lions and tigers feeding on human flesh. Daphnis and Chloe want to see the circus woman, but are removed by the watchmen since they have no money for tickets. Boris Yeltsin proposes drunkenly to Irina in a video telephone call, but is rejected. The mayor and his wife agree to be blind and deaf to each others' indiscretions with Irina and her secretary, and the priest is turned from an accuser into an idolater after being given a new script by Longos. Irina's power over the others is graphically shown when she levitates them all, then has sex with Daphnis in a bed surrounded by television screens. Daphnis runs off to teach Chloe about this new experience. The other characters turn against Longos and Irina in a sequence of actions filled with literary allusions. Irina is to be walled into the new monastery, an allusion to Lucian Blaga's Meșterul Manole [Master Builder Manole], a 1927 play based on a Romanian legend of an architect who buries his wife in the foundation of a monastery wall in the belief that it would give it strength. The Priest, General, and Mayor throw a net over Longos and Irina (echoing Agamemnon's death), and Chitac pours something into his fellow author's ear (as Claudius did to his brother in Hamlet) before throwing the two into the foundation pit while the blue shadow of a huge vulture hovers overhead (an image drawn from Prometheus). Suddenly, the lights change, the dead rise, animals come forward peacefully, and the world is in bloom as Daphnis and Chloe enter, holding hands. Longos and Irina rise from the pit. Longos says he has killed the vulture and is Zeus, Prometheus, and Homer. His words end the play:

But please do not
 Despise the small mercies
 Offered to you instead of happiness! Praise
 Love, the only light
 That may dissipate the blue shadow
 Of the vulture, rotten
 For thousands of years!¹⁰³

The words are appealing but unconvincing. No route to the innocent power of Daphnis and Chloe is revealed. The greed and hypocrisy of the other characters is unchanged. As in Mireasa cu gene false, this play contrasts a nature-based idealism with materialistic drives, but the materialistic side is seen as so far out of control, so far from the simple joys of nature, that it is difficult to see much hope for the world.

The play works on many levels. Although the historical tale of Hangerliu dominates the action, his death is ultimately seen as rather meaningless to everyone except his great-granddaughter. Rulers, governments, and invaders have changed over the centuries, but all are dust now. Parallels to the summary execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the sudden influx of Western money, culture, and fashions following 1989 are clearly present. Although Romania seems doomed to its role of “strumpet” to the great powers, core values remain which can revitalize the nation.¹⁰⁴ The layering of authorship, self-conscious metatheatricality, and mythological allusions add to the message that much of worldly existence is illusory.

Most notable, however, is the return of Dumitru Radu Popescu to the dream-

¹⁰³ Ibid., 150. “Small mercies” was to be replaced by “joys,” according to a marginal note on the TMs.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 38.

like, expressionistic style of his earliest plays. The departure from naturalistic content and causal plot has more in common with Damen-vals and Cezar, măscăriciul piraiilor than with most of his plays written in the twenty-seven years following.¹⁰⁵ Just as Maria's vision of freedom in Damen-vals turns out to be illusory, so does the quest for wealth and power in Daphnis and Chloe. Maria and Irina both end up ensnared by self-created forces—Maria by her pile of laundry, Irina by the characters she has helped to create and power of mythology. Although the later play has a happy ending, it is in the form of the miraculous, unexpected power of Daphnis and Chloe, paralleling the deus ex machina opening of the play.

Added to the older techniques, however, is a postmodern awareness of the recycling of ideas, which parallels the cycles of history. The metatheatrical tone maintains an aesthetic distance from the action, while the rich tapestry of literary and historical allusions reinforces the notion that Romania's history has been cyclical and influenced by many cultures, and that life is temporary. Classical references include situations from Prometheus, Agamemnon, the lives of Caesar and Cicero (indeed, most of the characters have names alluding to similar Greek or Roman personalities), the poisoning scene from Hamlet, a quote used as a subtitle for act two taken from Love's Labours Lost,¹⁰⁶ references to the Arabian Nights, Mirtil și Hloe, and Lucian Blaga's

¹⁰⁵ Popescu has continued to experiment with intertextuality in other recent works, such as Bufnița roșie [Red Owl]. Dumitru Solomon, "Altceva," Teatrul azi, no. 1/2 (1998): 2.

¹⁰⁶ "The German Clock," and later in dialogue, "Time no longer shows the hour, it's always broken, it's like a German clock, like a woman." Popescu, Daphnis,

Mesterul Manole.

Dumitru Radu Popescu in the Post-Communist Era

Although Dumitru Radu Popescu has continued to write and be published since 1989, he has had few productions of his dramatic works, whether new or old. The lack of production is not unusual for Romanian authors since 1989, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Theatres are producing fewer Romanian plays, especially new works, but many of Popescu's plays written during the 1980s did not receive a great number of productions either. In addition to his "suspect" status as a popular writer before 1989 and his position on the Central Committee, Popescu's plays in the past two decades have tended to be more generalized and idealized and less concerned with the development of characters. The three plays discussed from the post-1989 period do not contain characters that most people could identify with. Frusina from Mireasa cu gene false comes the closest to being a sympathetic character, but her moral and emotional confusion is so great that she becomes very difficult to like. The other two plays offer no models to emulate at all. This lack of empathetic characters makes it difficult to find audiences for his more recent works. Dumitru Radu Popescu remains a stubborn advocate for truth, regardless of where that stand will lead.

32, 48. Compare with "A woman that is like a German clock,/Still a-repairing, ever out of frame,/And never going aright, being a watch" from Love's Labours Lost, 3.1.190-92.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

The three playwrights followed in this study demonstrate the tenacity and flexibility needed to survive as a creative artist under totalitarian censorship and to make the transition into a climate of free expression. Although they pursued different lines of artistic, social, and political interests, the careers of the three writers intersect at many points, as has been seen in this study. In this chapter, I trace and compare the broad outlines of the careers of the three authors, look at the fortunes of other Romanian playwrights in the post-1989 era, explore why Romanian playwrights face difficulties in getting works staged and, finally, discuss some positive indications for improvement of conditions for dramatists in the future.

Three Interwoven Careers

The relative freedom experienced before 1971 allowed the three authors to experiment with style, form, and content and to create works which established them as major dramatists in Romania. Iosif Naghiu created allegorical works drawing from the theatre of the absurd, such as Week-end and Celuloid; Marin Sorescu developed an abstract, poetic style of his own with Iona and Paracliserul; Dumitru Radu Popescu experimented with absurd and expressionistic elements within his socially-engaged

plays, as in Visul and Cezar, măscăriciul piratilor.

Experimentation with form ended abruptly with the publication of the “July Theses” in 1971. All three authors were publicly rebuked for writing plays which would have previously been acceptable. The Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă made it clear that directors, theatre managers, and even actors would be held accountable for deviations from the government’s mandates. The example made of the Bulandra’s production of The Inspector General underscored the reality that even artists of the international caliber of Liviu Ciulei, Lucian Pintilie, and Toma Caragiu were expected to stay within the boundaries of prescribed artistic expression, regardless of how vague and changeable those boundaries might have been.

The years between 1971 and 1989 were extremely difficult for Romanian playwrights as well as for other authors and artists. Many chose to emigrate if given the opportunity; an estimated eight hundred Romanian musicians (who, unlike authors and actors, could easily continue their artistic careers in a foreign language) left the country, for example.¹ For those who stayed, artistic creation became a balancing act between artistic integrity and the demands of the censors and party functionaries. Plays were especially vulnerable to censorship, since scripts had to be approved before publication or before the start of rehearsals, and stage productions had to be approved

¹ Virel Cosma, interview by Ion Murgeanu, Curierul românesc 5, no. 8 (August 1993): 13.

before public performances could be offered.² Apparently, the regime deliberately nurtured a climate of uncertainty and fear that led to a self-censorship on the part of authors, editors, directors, and theatre managers which was often more potent than official censorship. On the other hand, a system of “lizards,” an author’s symbols understood by a reader or spectator, but which were hoped to pass through the censors, created a secret bond between authors and their audiences. As critic Marian Popescu wrote, “the continuing attempt to speak truth through art developed an original imagery: stage images in Romanian theatre gradually became a code based on a living tension acquired through the interaction of one[‘]s own sense of reality and the fiction-reality imposed by the extremism of politics.”³ The public felt that the theatres were the only public places where truths could be spoken out loud, if only indirectly. (Or, in the more cynical view of director Silviu Purcărete, the theatre provided “the illusion of a place where truth can be said.”⁴)

Despite these obstacles, the three authors examined here, as well as many of their peers, were able to create works of artistic worth for the stage during this period

² On the other hand, some small level of dissent may have been tolerated to create an “escape valve” for public sentiments, as Jonathan Dollimore has theorized to have been the case in Elizabethan England. Jonathan Dollimore, “Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, and the New Historicism,” in Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism, 2nd ed., ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 10-11.

³ Marian Popescu, “Extremism in Politics and the Search for a New Theatre,” Semnal teatral, no. 1 (1995): 91.

⁴ Quoted by Eric Pourchot, review of Les Danaïdes, by Aeschylus (Teatrul Național of Craiova, performing at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York), Slavic and East European Performance 17, no. 3 (1997): 73.

of restrictions. Iosif Naghiu was able to adapt some of his themes to a more realistic style acceptable for production, as in Într-o singură seară, as well as to publish works displaying his more typical, absurdist style. Marin Sorescu turned to historical themes, rooting his poetic visions in concrete and nationalist environments. Even so, he had to wage exhausting battles with censors to get plays such as A treia teapă and Răceala onto Romanian stages. Dumitru Radu Popescu, although moving away from the abstraction of his early works, produced an outpouring of dramatic and other works in a variety of styles during the period. Even plays which seemed to be virtually “commissioned” by the Communist Party, such as Piticul din grădina de vară or Rugăciune pentru un disc-jockey, display a respect for the complex motivations of imperfect humans which lift them far above simplistic propaganda pieces. Indeed, as previously outlined, Piticul din grădina de vară was even produced in a 1989 interpretation as a play against the contemporary abuses of the Communist Party in Romania rather than as an elegy to its struggle in 1944. Studiul osteologic... and Acești îngeri triști can also be viewed as plays that advocated the need to recognize the human elements within any political structure and the need for truthfulness and self-criticism, regardless of the righteousness of one’s cause.

The revolution of 1989, although culturally liberating, was in some ways more difficult to deal with artistically than the oppression of the preceding years. All topics were open for expression in any style, but the sudden changes in audience tastes and competition, from satellite television to protests in the streets, from night clubs to a thirst for all things from the West, left Romanian playwrights largely without

audiences. Iosif Naghiu found a new stylistic combination of abstraction and contemporary issues; Dumitru Radu Popescu returned to his intertextual and expressionistic roots while retaining his engagement on social issues. Neither author saw significant numbers of productions of their new or old works, however. Marin Sorescu became swept up in political and cultural battles and responsibilities. His public duties and desire to revise and publish his poetry precluded him from writing new dramatic works, although he had publicly promised at least one new play.⁵ Virtually all of Sorescu's previously written dramatic works have been staged since 1990; the national theatres in particular have elevated him to a place of prominence in their repertoires. Despite this attention, even Sorescu's plays suffered from the change of circumstances. Director Mircea Cornișteanu spoke about the difficulty of resuming work on Vărul Shakespeare in January of 1990: "What had seemed great to us before didn't ring the same any longer. We were trying to squeeze through a labyrinth that was no longer there. In addition, the addresses we knew were being changed, and our letters and messages reached their destination no more."⁶ This was but one of the challenges facing playwrights after 1989.

The Playwright's Position in Post-Communist Romania

Following 1989, the old tactics of survival used by playwrights and other authors

⁵ Rodica Mandache and Marin Sorescu, in "The Knights of the Round Table: The Landscape of Contemporary Romanian Drama," roundtable discussion, Romanian Review 6/7 (1993): 96.

⁶ Mircea Cornișteanu, in "Knights," 93.

in Romania became unnecessary, but the public continued to view writers through a political lens. This political screening, perhaps as arbitrary and as unfair as any formal censorship during the Ceaușescu era, can nevertheless be seen to divide contemporary authors in Romania into four broad categories: the dissident heroes, collaborators, exiles (internal or external), and enigmas.

Iosif Naghiu and Marin Sorescu fit the pattern of dissident heroes. Applauded for their continued resistance under the past regime, they were appointed to juries at drama festivals, invited to lead roundtable discussions and, in Sorescu's case, even selected for high government offices. Similarly, playwright Dumitru Solomon, who had several of his works banned, emerged as the new editor of the Ministry of Culture's journal, Teatrul azi. Plays by these authors and others who had made their marks in the brief window of relative theatrical freedom in the late 1960s, such as George Genoiu and Mihai Ispirescu, were published and occasionally produced after 1989.

Those authors too closely associated with the old regime in the public's view, although sometimes assisted by their former network of patrons, ultimately found it difficult to reintegrate into the theatre world. Plays by "suspect" writers were pulled from the repertory, regardless of the quality of the production.⁷ Paul Everac, despite some early productions, became tainted by his association with the old regime.⁸

President Ion Iliescu appointed Everac as head of Romanian Television in 1992 "to

⁷ Leopoldina Bălănuță, in "Knights," 119.

⁸ Alexandru Darie, interview by Marian Popescu, Semnal teatral, no. 3/4 (1995): 118; Andrei Manolescu, "Nemulțumiri la TVR," Curierul românesc 5, no. 5 (May, 1993): 10.

placate the new right and to reintroduce explicit chauvinism to public airwaves. Everac was another of the genre of collaborating, self-described 'dissidents,' which in Orwellian Romanian means aparat who has been demoted or fired, as many had for initially opposing Iliescu."⁹ The public's judgement of such authors was harsh and of long duration. Poet and children's author Nina Cassian, despite receiving political asylum in the United States in 1987, was violently hissed by Romanian spectators at a panel discussion in New York in 1996, apparently for the laudatory verses she composed for the Ceaușescu regime years earlier.¹⁰

Most exiles, however, whether they left Romania by choice or by compulsion, have been welcomed back. The plays of Eugène Ionesco have been widely produced since 1989 in Romania. Likewise, several plays by George Astaloș, whose name was effectively removed from Romanian theatre history when he emigrated to Paris in 1972, have been staged. There has also been a group of "internal exiles" who did not try to get plays published or produced under the old regime who have now emerged to public and critical acclaim.¹¹ Among the most notable of this younger generation of authors is

⁹ Harry Carey, "From Big Lie to Small Lies: State Mass Media Dominance in Post-Communist Romania," East European Politics and Societies 10 (Winter, 1996): 27.

¹⁰ Eric Pourchot, "After Ceaușescu: A Discussion of Romanian Arts Issues at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts," Slavic and East European Performance 16, no. 2: 48.

¹¹ One such author championed by the Unitext publishing house is Ștefan Zicher, a doctor living in Transylvania who, although born in 1939 and writing plays since 1969, had no dramatic works published before 1989. Marian Popescu, interview by author, 21 November 1996, Bucharest.

Matei Vişniec, winner of the first UNITER prize for drama for his play, Angajare de clovn, [Clown Wanted] and Vlad Zografi, who had three plays published by Unitext in 1996.¹² Vişniec, born in 1956, had some success as a poet and playwright before moving to France in 1987. In an action typical of the Ceauşescu era, his play Caii la fereastră [Horses at the Window], although in rehearsal at Teatrul Nottara, was not allowed to open following his defection.¹³ His works have received far more premieres since 1989 than any other Romanian author and, by 1992, were in the repertoires of virtually every Romanian theatre.¹⁴

Not all authors fall conveniently into these categories. Even Marin Sorescu came under fire for accepting the position of Minister of Culture under Iliescu's government. Dumitru Radu Popescu, given his former role as head of the Writers' Union and his party membership, proves to be an enigma. Popescu is silent about his politics, allowing his works to speak for themselves. He has stated several times that he wrote the truth and that attempts to connect his works to temporary political situations are futile. Offering no rationalizations or apologies, he continues to write critical and uncomfortable works which contravene political expedience. However, in a society which has divided its institutions, politics, and culture into "before" and "after," as

¹² Matei Vişniec and Alina Mungiu, Cea mai bună piesă românească a anului... (Bucharest: Unitext, 1993); Vlad Zografi, Isabela, dragostea mea (Bucharest: Unitext, 1996).

¹³ Biographical note in Vişniec and Mungiu, 8.

¹⁴ Val Condurache, "Resurse scriitoriceşti nevalidate scenic," Teatrul azi, no. 5/6 (1992): 5.

Iosif Naghiu pointed out, it has been difficult to maintain such a neutral position.

The "Crisis" in Romanian Theatres

As was seen in chapter seven, relatively few works by Iosif Naghiu, Dumitru Radu Popescu, or Marin Sorescu were produced following 1989. Their situation reflected the condition of the Romanian repertory in general, especially from 1990 to 1993. Regardless of the political overtones involved, there is no question that the works of Romanian playwrights have received far less attention in recent years than was the case from 1971 to 1989 or even during the 1920s and 1930s. The repertory of the National Theatre in Bucharest demonstrates this change. In the 1925-1926 season, Romanian works comprised ten of the twenty four plays (42%) in the repertory.¹⁵ In the 1935-36 season, thirteen of nineteen works (68%) were Romanian.¹⁶ The 1971-72 season included fourteen Romanian plays of twenty-seven in the repertory (52%).¹⁷ Under the "cultural revolution" of 1971, native works were expected to occupy at least half of the repertory. The success of this directive, especially in the theatres outside of Bucharest, can readily be seen in the 1971-72 repertories throughout Romania (tabulated in appendix 1). The proportion of Romanian plays to total repertory in the provincial theatres averaged 57%; the five national theatres averaged 53%, and the seven Bucharest theatres averaged only 41%.

¹⁵ Ioan Massoff, Teatrul românesc: privire istorica (Bucharest: Editura Pentru Literatura and Editura Minerva, 1961-81), 6:11-25.

¹⁶ Massoff, 7:230-244.

¹⁷ "Repertoriul 1971-1972," Teatrul, no. 10 (1971): 4.

The ratio of native works to total repertory remained at or above fifty percent throughout the Ceaușescu era.¹⁸ Given the number of theatres and their need to offer new productions for their relatively small audience bases, theatres actively sought new Romanian plays, often at the expense of quality.¹⁹ In the 1986-87 season, most theatres reported at least two-thirds of their repertory to be from Romanian authors.²⁰ In 1990, however, even the National Theatre in Bucharest, which had promoted new and classic Romanian works, turned its back on native plays. Of the four new works and three plays continued from the 1989 repertory, only one (a compilation of music, dance, and drama by students at the Academy of Theatre) could even remotely be considered Romanian. Since 1990, under pressure from the Ministry of Culture, the balance has been restored to some extent, as table two demonstrates. Despite the increasing number of premieres, it should be noted that Romanian plays have been less likely to be retained in the repertory of the National Theatre in Bucharest than foreign works. Only three of the fourteen Romanian plays first staged between 1990 and 1994 were in the repertory during the 1996 season (21%), versus a 32% retention rate for foreign works. Romanian works are also more likely to be staged in the studio theatre, which seats between 100 and 250 patrons, depending on the configuration, rather than the Sala Mare

¹⁸ Constantin Măciucă, "Gong '75-'76," *Teatrul*, no. 9 (1975): 3-17; "Indice bibliografic," *Teatrul*, no. 1 (1979): 92-94.

¹⁹ Mircea Cornișteanu, in "Knights," 94.

²⁰ "Realizări în 1986, proiecte pentru 1987 (I)," *Teatrul*, no. 1 (1987): 25-33; "Realizări în 1986, proiecte pentru 1987 (II)," *Teatrul*, no. 2 (1987): 3-7.

TABLE 2
PROPORTION OF ROMANIAN PLAYS TO TOTAL PREMIERES
AT TEATRU NAȚIONAL, BUCHAREST, 1990-1996

Year	# of Premieres	# of Romanian Plays	% Romanian Plays
Shows from pre-1990 continued	(3)	0	0%
1990	4	1	25%
1991	12	5	42%
1992	7	3	43%
1993	6	1	17%
1994	12	4	33%
1995	8	4	50%
1996	9	4	44%
TOTAL	58	22	38%

Source: repertory lists provided to author by Liviu Dorneanu, Literary Secretary of Teatrul Național, Bucharest, 25 November 1996.

Notes: figures are combined for all three auditoriums, which range in size from 100 to 1000 seats and are recorded by calendar year rather than by theatrical season.

[Great Hall] seating 1000 or the Sala Liviu Rebreanu seating 400.²¹

The move away from Romanian plays was even more pronounced at the other major theatres in Bucharest and, to a lesser extent, in the regional theatres. Table three summarizes the premieres at Teatrul Nottara, one of the leading but more “commercial” or “boulevard” theatres in Bucharest. Only 16% of the premieres at Nottara from 1990

²¹ “Program de repetiții: stagiunea 1996-1997,” TMs [photocopy] provided to author by Liviu Dorneanu, Literary Secretary of Teatrul Național, Bucharest, 25 November 1996.

TABLE 3
PROPORTION OF ROMANIAN PLAYS TO TOTAL REPERTORY
AT TEATRUL NOTTARA, BUCHAREST, 1990-1996

Year	# of Premieres	# of Romanian Plays	% Romanian Plays
1990	4	1	25%
1991	5	1	20%
1992	3	0	0%
1993	5	1	20%
1994	4	0	0%
1995	6	1	17%
1996	5	1	20%
Total	32	5	16%

Source: repertory lists provided to author by Marinela Tepuş, Literary Secretary of Teatrul Nottara, 25 November 1996.

Notes: figures are combined for studio and main auditoriums, and are recorded by calendar year rather than by theatrical season.

through 1996 have been Romanian works. One extremely durable Romanian production has been a musical version of the 1945 political comedy, *Asta-i ciudat* by Miron Radu Paraschivescu, which opened May 27, 1990 and remained in the repertory through 1996. Generally, theatres in Bucharest have been more reluctant to stage Romanian works than their provincial counterparts. Of the premieres staged early in 1995, for example, Bucharest theatres, although under criticism for their lack of support for native dramatists, still listed only six Romanian works out of twenty premieres (30%), while

theatres outside of Bucharest opened nine Romanian works out of twenty-six premieres (35%). The national theatres were far more supportive, with seven of fifteen new productions written by Romanian authors (47%), although many of these plays were drawn from classic works by I. L. Caragiale, Vasile Alecsandri, Lucian Blaga, and other authors.²²

The lack of Romanian plays may seem to be a natural outgrowth of a free-market economy, but it should be noted that box office revenues account for only ten to twenty-percent of a theatre's revenues. National and local governments subsidize forty-three professional theatres throughout the country.²³ Variations in ticket sales, although of concern, do not represent a dire threat to the financial health of a theatre. The calls for an increased proportion of native writers in the repertory are therefore based on what would seem to be an appropriate use of government funds as well as a sense of artistic and national duty.

There are several reasons for the decline in production of Romanian works, which was especially pronounced in the first three years of freedom. Six primary and interlocking causes can be traced to explain the rush to include more foreign plays in the

²² Data drawn from "Viața teatrelor," Semnal teatral, no. 1 (1995): 65-70. Figures omit puppet theatres and theatres and sections performing in languages other than Romanian.

²³ Forty-three "teatre dramatice" [dramatic theatres] were government funded as of 1996, with an additional eleven opera and musical theatre institutions, three street and variety theatres, one circus, and nineteen puppet theatres. Direcția instituțiilor de spectacole, "Instituțiile profesioniște de spectacole subventionate de la buget," TMs dated 20 June 1996, provided to author by Nicolae Munteanu, Theatre Secretary, Ministry of Culture.

repertory. Certainly, theatre directors, managers, and audiences participated in a well-deserved rebellion from past quotas mandated by the government and from the small pool of repertory choices safe from censorship. The old repertory reminded audiences of the Ceaușescu years and provoked angry responses from theatre-goers.²⁴ The government's insistence that half, then two-thirds, of the repertory be Romanian plays led to staging plays that were not of high quality, as well as hastily-assembled programs of poetry readings which consumed minimal resources but which could be counted as Romanian works.²⁵ Theatre managers and directors therefore were strongly against any reimposition of government-mandated quotas for Romanian plays.²⁶

Second, there was a pent-up audience demand for and curiosity about European and American plays and literature, including previously banned authors. New productions in 1990 ranged from plays by Dario Fo, Václav Havel, Eugène Ionesco and Caryl Churchill to Murray Schisgal and Georges Feydeau.²⁷ In addition to a natural curiosity about these authors, there was a widely-expressed desire for Romania to become part of the greater European community once again after its years of enforced

²⁴ Alexandru Darie, interview by Marian Popescu, 118.

²⁵ Mircea Cornișteanu, in "Knights," 94; Marian Popescu, interview by author, 21 November 1996, Bucharest.

²⁶ Dumitru Solomon, Alina Mungiu, Christian Hadji Culea, interviews by Olivia Șireanu-Chirvasiu, *Teatrul azi*, no. 1/2/3 (1993): 7-9; Dumitru Solomon, "Teatrele, piesele, legile," *Teatrul azi*, no. 3/4 (1991): 5.

²⁷ "Unde fugim de-acasă?" *Teatrul azi* 9/10 (1990): 61.

isolation.²⁸ In November of 1997, 67% of Romanian voters said that, if a referendum were to be held on the next day, they would vote for joining NATO, a greater percentage than seen in any other country eligible for membership. In contrast, in the Czech Republic, which had been invited to join NATO just months earlier, only 36% of the electorate said they would vote for membership.²⁹ Similarly, Romanians were much more strongly in favor of EU membership than the voters of other countries in the region.³⁰ The reluctance to accept Romania into NATO is seen as a continuation of policies and secret deals which have cut Romania off from Western Europe and left it under the “sphere of influence” of Turkey or Russia in the past.³¹ Economic, military, and cultural ties to the West are therefore strategies to ensure the continued independence of the Romanian nation. The enthusiastic participation of Teatrul Bulandra in the Union of European Theatres, including hosting the 1995 Festival de l’Union des Theatres de l’ Europe, is emblematic of the desire to integrate Romania into the mainstream of Western Europe.³²

²⁸ See, for example, Andrei Pleșu’s section of essays, “Spre Europa, cu spatele...,” in Andrei Pleșu, Chipuri și măști ale tranziției (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 217-89.

²⁹ European Commission, Central and Eastern Eurobarometer no. 8: Public Opinion and the European Union (10 Countries’ Survey) (Brussels: European Commission, March 1998), annex figure 35.

³⁰ Ibid., annex figure 32.

³¹ Tudorel Urian, “Cine nu ne vrea în NATO?” Curierul românesc 9, no. 3 (1997): 3.

³² In keeping with the European emphasis, the Bulandra presented only one Romanian play out of its five productions in the Festival. Union des Théâtres de

Third, many theatre artists had a laundry list of projects, primarily foreign, which had been impossible to undertake before 1990. It is understandable that they would wish to direct and act in these plays after obtaining the freedom to do so. After 1989, theatres were able to compete more freely for the services of leading directors, but these guest artists often arrived with projects in hand.³³ Directors who had been in exile abroad were not usually familiar with contemporary Romanian scripts, as Iosif Naghiu pointed out in a roundtable discussion.³⁴ Some critics and authors regarded this change of repertorial control from the literary secretaries and theatre managers to guest artists as the “tyranny of the director.”³⁵

Fourth, the participation of the intelligentsia in the Ceaușescu regime, their public political squabbles following 1989, and their inability to respond quickly and coherently to the changes of 1990 may have served to discredit the Romanian intelligentsia and literary endeavors in general. There were few “star” authors remaining to draw audiences into the theatres. Director Silviu Purcărete spoke of the abrupt change in taste made in December of 1989: “Este evident că tot ce s-a scris înainte nu mai poate părea viu, interesant.” [It is clear that everything written before can

l'Europe, 4. Festival de Théâtre, Bucarest 17 octobre - 26 novembre 1995, program book (Paris: Union des Théâtres de l'Europe, 1995).

³³ Tudor Popescu, interview by Olivia Șireanu-Chirvasiu, Teatrul azi, no. 1/2/3 (1993): 6.

³⁴ Iosif Naghiu, in “Knights,” 117.

³⁵ Iosif Naghiu, interview by author, 20 November 1996, Bucharest, tape recording. Margareta Bărbuță and Ion Caramitru, interview by author, 19 November 1996, Bucharest, tape recording.

no longer seem full of life, interesting.]³⁶ Iosif Naghiu's play, Celula poetului dispărut, as well as the revival of Gluga pe ochi, as discussed in chapter seven, reflected the apparent impotence of the intelligentsia in the new society. Marin Sorescu likened the writer's situation to "crossing a field full of electricity, lightning and thunder. Many are even thunderstruck."³⁷

Fifth, the sudden release from constraints meant that a new mode of playwriting had to be developed. Freed from the need to embed "lizards," symbols or allusions which might pass through the censors but which could still be understood by readers and audiences, dramatists and audiences now had to adapt to new ways of communication in the theatre. The example of Marin Sorescu's Vărul Shakespeare discussed earlier, in which the production lost its edge and ability to communicate with the audience in just a few short weeks in January of 1990, serves as a vivid case in point. The necessary change in style took time for some authors to develop. One critic pointed out the need for playwrights to "learn a new grammar of composing and drawing up the literary discourse."³⁸ Marin Sorescu spoke of going through a period of "noncreation"; both Sorescu and Dumitru Radu Popescu saw an overreaction against the use of metaphor

³⁶ Silviu Purcărete, interview by Olivia Șireanu-Chirvasiu, Teatrul azi, no. 1/2/3 (1993): 8.

³⁷ Marin Sorescu, interview by Lidia Vianu, Censorship in Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 88.

³⁸ Zigu Ornea, in "Knights," 106.

which, in their view, led to journalism rather than art.³⁹

Finally, directors and managers were eager to tour works abroad in order to gain international attention and financial support now that international travel was politically (if not economically) much more feasible.⁴⁰ Since foreign audiences are not generally familiar with the Romanian language or with Romanian plays, classic works and plays known in the world repertoires, with the notable exception of Silviu Purcărete's presentation of Piticul din grădina de vară in Luxembourg, have been repeatedly chosen to represent Romanian theatre abroad. For example, between 1990 and 1995, Romanian theatres toured England with Hamlet, Phaedra, The Bald Soprano, and Richard III.⁴¹ Silviu Purcărete has directed Ubu Rex, Titus Andronicus, The Tempest, The Oresteia, Les Danaïdes, and The Three Sisters abroad since 1990.⁴²

Although the repertory is showing signs of coming back to a balance of foreign and domestic plays, many of the factors described above are still at work in Romania. Clearly, playwrights face a much more hostile environment when it comes to getting their works staged.

³⁹ Marin Sorescu, interview by Vianu, 88, 91; Dumitru Radu Popescu, interview by Vianu, 84.

⁴⁰ Dumitru Solomon, "Dramaturgia noastră e sublimă dar...", Teatrul azi, no. 4 (1992): 12.

⁴¹ Gabriel Gafița, summarized in Eric Pourchot, "After Ceaușescu," 48.

⁴² Alan Riding, "In an Ancient Mirror, an Image of Europe Rising," New York Times, 6 July 1997, H6.

Hope for the Future

The future for Romanian playwrights does not look totally bleak, however. There are several promising developments which may create further opportunities for new theatre works to be staged. The repertory system, although somewhat diminished, will probably survive on continued government subsidies, allowing theatres to take risks on unknown plays; at the same time, a few independent theatres have been formed which offer the possibility of working outside the current repertory system to champion more experimental works; prizes and festivals rewarding new plays have been established; theatre journals, although struggling for funds, are publishing and publicizing new Romanian plays; and a few presses have championed the publication of original plays.

The massive, government-funded repertory system operating in Romania is simultaneously a treasure and a burden. Forty-three professional theatres devoted to drama operate in every urban area of the country, each with a salaried group of actors, craftspeople, and administrative staff. Even a relatively small theatre may keep twelve or more productions in its active repertory in a single season, and the schedule of plays is generally announced only one week at a time, allowing for great flexibility in programming. Excellent productions can be kept active for several years, given the traditional stability of the companies, while unsuccessful plays can be offered with less regularity until replaced. It is therefore less risky to stage an untried script than it would be in a typical American "repertory" theatre, where the number of performances

for each play is set far in advance and actors are typically hired for only one season or even for a single production. Maintaining so many theatre workers is obviously a burden upon the fragile Romanian economy—the National Theatre in Bucharest alone employed 600 people when Andrei Şerban arrived in 1990.⁴³ The Theatre Secretary in the Ministry of Culture estimated in 1996 that the population size and government resources can realistically support only about five professional theatres.⁴⁴ The lack of alternate employment or safety nets for the unemployed, however, would make dismantling the apparatus politically perilous. Marin Sorescu fought to maintain the repertory system in order to preserve a strong artistic environment, against the desires of others such as Ion Caramitru who wanted a more flexible structure.⁴⁵ Now that Caramitru has been appointed Ministry of Culture, however, he does not seem so eager to disrupt the status quo. One of his first requests was for higher funding for the arts, a promising sign for the future of government support.⁴⁶

With heavy government subsidies allowing for ticket prices to remain artificially low (generating less than twenty-percent of the actual cost of production), the creation of truly independent theatres is virtually an impossibility. However, there have been

⁴³ Marian Popescu, Oglinda spartă: despre teatrul românesc după 1989 (Bucharest: Unitext, 1997), 124.

⁴⁴ Nicolae Munteanu, interview by author, 20 November 1996, Bucharest, tape recording.

⁴⁵ Marin Sorescu, interview by author, 28 November 1996, Bucharest.

⁴⁶ ROMPRES, “Minister Caramitru Wants Higher Subsidies for Culture,” FBIS–EEU–96–247–A, Daily Report, Annex, 14 December 1996.

several theatres founded which have broken out of the repertory model, generally do not possess a permanent theatre building, and operate on government and corporate support for specific projects. As of 1992, only three independent theatres were operating in the country: Teatrul Urmuz, devoted to staging Romanian plays, arose and perished in a single season;⁴⁷ Teatrul Excelsior, founded early in 1990 to create shows specifically for young audiences in Bucharest;⁴⁸ and Masca, a vibrant movement theatre group founded in 1990 by Mihai Mălaimare, performing on the streets and in workplaces in a style reminiscent of the Bread and Puppet Theatre.⁴⁹ All three received assistance from the Ministry of Culture.⁵⁰ Teatrul Levant and Theatrum Mundi, although founded later, have proven more durable. Teatrul Levant, under the direction of Valeria Seciu, is funded on a project basis rather than for a standing repertory, and has produced international plays as well as new works by Romanian authors such as Matei Vișniec

⁴⁷ "Cel mai bun...cea mai bună..." Teatrul azi, no. 8/9/10 (1992): 33; Valentin Silvestru, in "Knights," 104.

⁴⁸ Ion Lucian, interview by Vasile Hâncu, Teatrul azi, no. 3 (1990): 16.

⁴⁹ Mihai Mălaimare, interview by author, 29 November and 1 December 1996, Bucharest.

⁵⁰ Victor Parhon, review of A murit moartea, măi!, by Teatrul Masca (Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 5/6 (1992): 28. Two groups formed in 1997 by recent graduates of the Academy of Theatre and Film are Teatrul Unu and Teatrul Toaca, but from the reviews of their initial productions, both appear to oriented toward contemporary world repertory rather than Romanian plays. Maria Laiu, review of Așteptându-l pe Godot, by Samuel Beckett (Teatrul Unu, Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 4/5 (1997): 41; Ludmila Patlanjoglu, review of Un tramvai numi dorința, by Tennessee Williams (Teatrul Unu, Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 4/5 (1997): 42; Doina Papp, review of Playboy, adapted from John Millington Synge (Teatrul Toaca, Bucharest), Teatrul azi, no. 4/5 (1997): 42.

and Dumitru Solomon. Its production of Strindberg's The Pelican was very highly regarded.⁵¹ Theatrum Mundi, despite an auspicious beginning, closed after only three seasons, but has since been resurrected.⁵² Their productions have included European works as well as contemporary Romanian plays by Tudor Popescu, Matei Vişniec, and others. Another outlet for new works may lie in projects housed within the traditional theatres. The National Theatre in Bucharest, for example, opened a drama workshop for reading new plays.⁵³

Original plays have also been encouraged through the use of national prizes for playwriting and drama festivals which recognize Romanian works with special awards. At least three organizations have either maintained or initiated prizes for theatre scripts. The Writers' Union continues to announce annual winners in the playwriting category, based on publication rather than production. UNITER, the national union of theatres, sponsors an annual playwriting competition in which the winning script is published. The Ministry of Culture also conducts a playwriting competition. Further, both UNITER and the Critics' Association announce annual awards, including best production of a Romanian play. Several theatre competitions take place annually around the country, and many of those issue awards for the best production of a Romanian play. The most prestigious festival is the "I. L. Caragiale National Festival," which

⁵¹ Ludmila Patlanjoglu, "Ofertă artistică generoasă, organizare defectuoasă", Teatrul azi, no. 8/9 (1996): 31.

⁵² Marian Popescu, interview by author, 21 November 1996, Bucharest.

⁵³ Valentin Silvestru, in "Knights," 104.

gathers top productions from throughout Romania (and often from Moldova). In 1990 and 1993, however, so few Romanian plays were present at the festival that the prize for best performance of a Romanian play was not awarded.⁵⁴ Although dormant for several years, a festival devoted solely to Romanian drama was recently revived in Timișoara.⁵⁵

Another source of publication and encouragement for Romanian authors has come from theatre journals such as Teatrul azi, published by the Ministry of Culture under the editorship of playwright Dumitru Solomon. Teatrul azi has published scripts by Iosif Naghiu, Mihai Ispirescu, and others, and has sponsored symposia exploring the issues of producing new works from multiple viewpoints. Semnal teatral, issued from 1995 to 1997 by UNITER, published synopses of new works as well as reviews of scripts from other publishers. Funds for both journals have been extremely limited. Semnal teatral, initially supported by the Fund for Central and East European Book Project, was forced to cut back the number of issues and finally to suspend publication altogether.⁵⁶ Teatrul azi similarly reduced the number of issues per year, despite support from the Soroș Foundation, corporate advertising, and the Ministry of Culture.⁵⁷ In the spring of 1998, due to lack of funds from the Ministry of Culture, Teatrul azi ceased regular publication, but the editorial staff, still headed by Dumitru Solomon and

⁵⁴ "Festivalul național de teatru: premiile," Teatrul azi, no. 11/12 (1990): 10; "Festivalul 'I. L. Caragiale': palmares," Teatrul azi, no. 12 (1993): 5.

⁵⁵ "Festivalul 'I. L. Caragiale'," (1993), 5; Ion Parhon, "Festivaluri: Timișoara, între performanțe și restanțe," Teatrul azi, no. 2 (1996): 38.

⁵⁶ "Nota redacției," Semnal teatral, no. 5/6 (1996): 118.

⁵⁷ Teatrul azi, no. 1/2 (1998): inside front cover and back cover.

using the same offices, created a new theatre journal, Scena, which has continued in much the same manner as Teatrul azi.⁵⁸

Although publishing houses do not receive the high government subsidies of the past, and obtaining paper has been difficult at times, there are still a few outlets for the generally unprofitable printing of scripts. Unitext, the publishing arm of UNITER, not only has published the “Cea mai bună piesă românească a anului...” [Best Romanian Play of the Year...] winners, but other scripts deemed worthy of wider exposure, such as Vlad Zografi’s Isabela, dragostea mea [Isabela, My Beloved], plays by Ștefan Zicher, and a volume of four plays which were entered, but did not win, the play contest in 1995.⁵⁹ Synopses of plays in manuscript form which can be read at the offices of Unitext are also made available. Editura Expansion-Armonia, with offices at the National Theatre in Bucharest, has published a series of previously unavailable Romanian plays under the title “Colectia DOR: Dramaturgia Originală Românească [DOR Collection: Original Romanian Drama]. As of 1995, twelve plays had been published in the series, with three additional titles announced for the future. The scripts include works by Dumitru Radu Popescu, Iosif Naghiu, Marin Sorescu, Fănuș Neagu, Paul Everac, Tudor Popescu, Dumitru Solomon, Mihai Ispirescu, Dan Tărchilă, as well as lesser-known authors. Another publishing house, Editura Ghepardul, has printed the

⁵⁸ “Cel mai bun... Cea mai bună,” Scena, no. 4 (1998): 17, 19; “O bizară omisiune ministerială,” Scena, no. 6 (1998): 38.

⁵⁹ Vlad Zografi, Isabela, dragostea mea (Bucharest: Unitext, 1996); Ștefan Zicher, Capcana de șobolani (Bucharest: Unitext, 1997); Piese Noi '95 (Bucharest: Unitext, 1996)

works of several young playwrights, with funding from the Ministry of Culture.⁶⁰

The structural elements needed to support Romanian playwrights are slowly coalescing: a strong network of national theatres dedicated to supporting Romanian as well as international works, the possibility of establishing new theatres to support experimental plays, recognition of and financial support for playwrights, and journals and publishing houses to distribute new works. Romanian theatre also possesses a less tangible asset: a highly-trained cohort of theatre professionals with a true passion for theatre. It was this passion, in part, which drew Andrei Șerban back to Bucharest temporarily in 1990.⁶¹

These emerging factors, combined with the artistry, honesty, and adaptability demonstrated by Romanian playwrights over the years, may create an environment for the further development of world-class dramas from the Romanian theatre. There are many economic, social, and political hurdles ahead which make any prediction of the future extremely hazardous. As Andrei Pleșu, now Romania's Foreign Minister, explained when refusing to offer any conclusions at a symposium on Romanian arts in New York in 1996, "We are in a transition period. We have been in a transition period since the beginning of the nineteenth century."⁶²

⁶⁰ Dinu Grigorescu, in "Knights," 128

⁶¹ Andrei Șerban, interview by Cristina Dumitrescu, *Teatrul azi*, no. 7/8 (1991): 10.

⁶² Quoted in Pourchot, "After Ceaușescu," 49.

APPENDIX 1

SYNOPSIS OF STUDIUL OSTEOLÓGIC AL UNUI SCHELET DE

CAL DINTR-UN MORMINT AVAR DIN TRANSILVANIA

SAU MORMÎNTUL CĂLĂREȚULUI AVAR

BY DUMITRU RADU POPESCU

The play opens in the years before World War II with a line as striking as the title: “Eu am fost operat de hemoriozi.” [I’m going to have a hemorrhoid operation.]¹ The scene quickly turns more grim, however, as two men, presumably henchmen for the fascist regime, are seen organizing a party for a group of military officers and asking seven orphan girls to dress as brides for what they euphemistically call a “fashion show.” The two also accuse the schoolmaster and his wife of being Jewish and communist sympathizers; they pull down the schoolmaster’s pants to see if he is circumcised or not. Six of the girls drink poison and kill themselves; the seventh (Marta, who reappears later in the play) is saved but the remaining orphans at the school are to be taken away in a train.

The next scene is set during the war. Măria spends a night with Gilu, a deserter from the army. When someone approaches the house, Măria hides Gilu. She hears a

¹ D. R. Popescu, Teatru (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1985-1987), 2:499.

sound in the apple tree. Gilu shoots at the tree, and a body falls out. The two bury the body in the garden. The action of the play then jumps forward to the end of the war when the communists are about to depose General Antonescu. Nicoară and Ilie speak in the garden about the coming ouster while Măria feeds them. Nicoară claims, “Noi comuniștii trebuie să schimbăm lumea! E prost făcută. [We communists must change the world! It is badly made.]”²

Unfortunately, when the communists do take power, cant and form are praised over truth and sincerity. The fourth scene, subtitled “Virginia celestă și dinozaurii” [The Celestial Virgin and the Dinosaurs] shows the preparations for the visit of a high-ranking official to the small village. The visitor is referred to as “Mămuca” [mother], perhaps a reference to Ana Pauker, elevated to power by the Soviet Union to form a sympathetic government in Romania after the war. The preparations are comically directed by two literal-minded party henchmen: Bască [beret] and Facca [an invented name perhaps derived from “fac” (do) and că (as), or “do as I’m told”]. The village is so poor that there are no carpets but a feast of pork and veal is arranged, along with poetry readings. Bască calls for more flowers and warns, possibly referring Stalin, that “Mămuca iubeste poeziile despre tătuca” [Mommy loves poetry about daddy].³ He tells the group of villagers “Voi sînteți masele largi populare, baza temeliei” [You are the large popular masses, the base of the foundation], to which one woman replies “Dar eu nu mănînc ce mănînci tu” [But I don’t eat as you do], referring to the special

² Ibid., 2:513.

³ Ibid., 2:514.

privileges possessed by Communist Party members.⁴ While banners and other preparations are readied, Nicoară discovers a vigilante mentality in the village, in which the proletariat (as ironically embodied by a worker from the Mihai Eminescu candy factory) feels it has the power to punish the peasants at will. Further, Nicoară learns that a Hungarian-speaking comrade has been jailed for unknown reasons by Bască. We later find out that the man was beaten to death. To Nicoară's protests, Bască replies,

Bască: Tu nu mai poți vorbi de-acuma cu țărani în numele partidului.

Nicoară: Atunci ce sînt eu aici, sluga ta?

Bască: Servitorul partidului.

Nicoară: Tu ești partidul? Să ascult ce zici tu?

[Bască: You are no longer able to speak for the people in the name of the party.

Nicoară: Then what am I, your servant?

Bască: The servant of the party.

Nicoară: You are the party? So I should listen to what you say?]⁵

Gilu then enters. He has risen in the party ranks, but retains his thuggish tendencies. He repeats to Nicoară his words that communists must change the world, that it was made badly, but now adds, "Și tot ce facem, facem bine." [And everything we do, we do well.]⁶ Nicoară vainly argues that those who hold the reins of power must not commit crimes in the name of working class. Gilu remains unswayed, and makes it clear that whoever is not with him personally will be considered to be against the cause.

⁴ Ibid., 2:515.

⁵ Ibid., 2:518.

⁶ Ibid., 2:518.

At this point, Gilu informs Bască that Mămuca has been delayed in Bucharest and will not be coming. Bască quickly substitutes an academic presentation on the extinction of dinosaurs, but comically keeps interrupting the professor with party-line interpretations. When the speaker translates the word “dinosaur” in French as “lézard terrible [sic],” Bască wants to know what the word is in Russian, Bulgarian, or German, “într-o limbă prietenă...Mă refer la Germania noastră, desigur” [in a friendly language...I refer to our [East] Germany, of course].⁷ Bască has the villagers take notes on the sizes of various dinosaurs, and verifies what the speaker says from a textbook in what is clearly a parody of an indoctrination session. When the speaker suggests that dinosaurs became extinct because of their small brains, Bască stops the session, saying “Aici e vorba de o provocare” [these are words of provocation] and takes the speaker off to prison.⁸

In the fifth scene, “Prețul” [The Price], Măria shows signs of a political awakening. She sings a funeral song and places a candle on the head of the Avar tomb. She tells Marta (the surviving girl from the first scene) that she is singing for the people who have passed by and died there (the Avar, the German soldier in the apple tree, and now, Nicoară). Gilu denies any responsibility for Nicoară’s death. Măria also questions Marta’s role as informant, which causes Marta to doubt her role in the summary justice of the era.

Scene six, “Moartea cului nevăzut” [The Death of the One Unseen], unlike the

⁷ Ibid., 2:521.

⁸ Ibid., 2:523.

spontaneous mourning of Măria in the preceding scene, is a scripted and conducted funeral led by Gilu and Bască for an unidentified leader (perhaps Joseph Stalin or Ana Pauker?). In scattered pieces of conversation during the funeral, we learn that Gilu and Bască are involved in even more grievous acts of corruption, including bribes received for assigning choice manager positions. Ilie questions the methods used by Gilu and Bască, saying that if they want to re-educate the people, they need to talk with them rather than use force and treat them like cattle. The fear and confusion that the methods have created are also visible, as when one funeral participant wonders if collecting antiques is a safe activity, or in a woman's plans for her children: "Le dau să se facă profesoare de geografie, cînd le-o veni vremea... O să predea o lume constituită de mult, fixă . . . nu trebuie să iei nici o atitudine." [I'm going to have them become professors of geography when their time comes... They will teach about a world made a long time ago, fixed . . . you don't need to take any attitude.]⁹ Măria comes to the funeral with a basket of apples. Whenever someone starts to speak (presumably to complain), she gives them an apple to eat. Bască ends the scene by complaining that "Prea mulți mîncăți mere și pere." [There are too many people eating apples and pears.]¹⁰

In scene seven, Măria scolds Gilu for losing any sense of humanity and tenderness. Gilu says he has only been doing what he felt was right and that those he persecuted were thieves. Măria reminds him that might does not make right and that

⁹ Ibid., 2:532-3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2:533.

he has been a thief, too. Măria has been pregnant with Gilu's child, but tells him she has had an abortion (which we later find out is not true).

Scene eight, "Mașina fericirii" [The Car of Happiness] focuses on an attempt to collectivize the farms surrounding the village. Ilie discovers that those opposing collectivization have been arrested and testimony against them coerced from frightened "witnesses." He tells Gilu that "Te-ai luptat cu toți foștii tăi prieteni care au avut îndoieli... Ai declarat război țării tale... care și ea avea îndoieli." [You have fought against all your friends who have had doubts... You have declared war against your country... which also has doubts.]¹¹ Ilie argues against Gilu's belief that there can be a perfect world, without thieves, angels, sexual problems, or any of the complexities that make up human beings. Gilu is unswayed, and uses the "car of happiness," a van with loudspeakers, to tell the people how happy they will be if they sign up for the collective. "Nu-i frumos să fugi de fericire" [It's not nice to run away from happiness], announces Bască's voice over the loudspeakers.¹² A conversation is soon heard, inadvertently broadcast through an open microphone, in which Ulă, an idiot lad, is accused of stealing his own horse from the collective and is beaten. Măria tries to intervene, arguing that Ulă only wanted to have fun riding and that Gilu was a horse thief himself in his youth. She is unsuccessful, and Ulă emerges from the beating as a member of the collective. "Uitați-vă ce fericit cîntă Ulă de cînd s-a-nscris!" [You can

¹¹ Ibid., 2:541.

¹² Ibid., 2:542.

see how happy Ulă is after signin' up!], announces Bască over the microphone.¹³

Măria asks why the party leaders are afraid of the people and afraid to speak with them. Ilie, taking Măria's challenge, invites the villagers into the schoolhouse to talk about the collectivization process.

Scene nine shows a further break between Gilu and Ilie, and also demonstrates the ignorance of Gilu and his coterie. Bască asks for guidance on whether to allow a violinist to go to Paris to play Paganini. His dossier reveals that he had also played Paganini in Berlin during Hitler's time: "...e clar. E vorba de același Paganini" [...it's clear. {The file} speaks of this same Paganini], says Bască.¹⁴ They need to send a working class performer to Paris. Ilie jokingly suggests that Bască go instead and sing "Figaro."

Scene ten, "Stele filante" [Flickering Stars] shows Ilie now in power, and many of Gilu's victims rehabilitated and apologized to by the party. Despite Ilie's acknowledgment of past mistakes, scepticism is still present. The professor who gave the speech on dinosaurs says he wants his son to study math, "doi și cu doi fac patru și la Moscova și la New York" [two plus two makes four in Moscow or in New York].¹⁵ We are introduced to the writer, Viorel, Măria's son from her affair with Gilu. Ilie addressed the wronged villagers, acknowledging that the Communist Party made major mistakes, and that their arrests cannot be blamed on the Turks, Americans, the

¹³ Ibid., 2:546.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2:548.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2:550.

bourgeoisie, or any other outside group. He believes that the party can survive, but only if the people don't allow crooks to run their lives. His optimism is greeted with shouts of support by most, but also a few who question whether the mistakes of the past won't occur again.

The eleventh scene is a domestic moment between Măria and Lavinia, her daughter-in-law, and continues the alternation of "public" and "private" scenes in the play, much in the Shakespearean tradition. Lavinia loves Viorel, but complains that he spends more time away making movies than at home. After she tells Măria that Viorel looks up to her mother, Măria tells her son how she steals from the collective by leaving a spare bag in the field at night, then filling it secretly. She gives half to the policeman and custodian and lives on the other half. Viorel is shattered to learn that his mother isn't a saint.

In scene twelve, Edward, who was a young man looking at the tombs in the first scene, returns to the school and describes the ancient looting of the Avar tombs and the argument that this proves the existence of an indigenous Romanian people before the migrations from central Asia. Gilu and Bască have also been rehabilitated by Ilie. Bască has been promoted to a post as a factory director and has apparently found religion, but Gilu is a bitter "living corpse," who has tried to escape the pointing fingers of those accusing him of being a criminal and securitate agent.

The play ends with "Nunța" [The Wedding]. More years have passed, and now Măria's grandson (Viorel and Lavinia's son) is marrying Nicoară's niece. Several of the characters have regrets about their past: Facca, who has been called upon

throughout the play to write poems, says he is ashamed and nauseated at all the stupidities he has put on paper, while Bască still argues that he was just following orders. Ilie appears, and says that they missed their chance to make a better world—they needed to understand how to make something better than it is. While the wedding progresses, Gilu has been shot and killed. Măria assumes that Viorel shot him, and tells Viorel that Gilu was his father. However, it turns out that Bască shot Gilu because Gilu did not believe in “our” logic anymore. Ilie berates Bască for believing he is the judge of everyone else, and accuses him of destroying everyone that did not look like him. Ilie charges, “Și te consideri judecătorul tuturor. Dintre toți inșii aflați la nunta asta tu ești singurul sfânt!” [And you consider yourself the guardian judge. Among all those present at the wedding today you are the only saint!]¹⁶ The play ends with a sort of eulogy for Gilu by Măria, who still loves him, but knows how many evil things he’s done and how many people he has killed. “. . . nu l-am putut ierta niciodată. Doamne, că multe a mai făcut. Și chiar dacă l-aș fi iertat eu, nu l-ar fi putut ierta pământul și iarba.” [. . . I could never forgive him. He has done so much. And even if I did forgive him, the dirt and the grass wouldn’t.]¹⁷ The curtain falls as Măria and the others sing a popular song about love.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2:574.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2:575.

APPENDIX 2

PROPORTION OF ROMANIAN PLAYS TO TOTAL REPERTORY,
1971-72 SEASON

Theatre	No. of Premieres	No. of Romanian Premieres	% Romanian Premieres	No. of Revivals	No. of Romanian Revivals	% Romanian Revivals	% of Romanian plays in total repertory
Arad ^a	10	5	50%	3	3	100%	62%
Bacău	8	3	38%	4	3	75%	50%
Baia Mare	6	3	50%	4	2	50%	50%
Bîrlad	8	4	50%	7	3	43%	47%
Botoşani	9	4	44%	4	2	50%	46%
Brăila	9	5	56%	7	4	57%	56%
Braşov	10	6	60%	6	5	83%	69%
Constanţa	8	4	50%	9	6	67%	59%
Galaţi	8	4	50%	10	6	60%	56%
Oradea ^b	9	4	44%	6	4	67%	53%
Piatra Neamţ	7	4	57%	1	1	100%	63%
Petroşani	7	5	71%	4	3	75%	73%
Piteşti ^a	13	5	38%	16	15	94%	69%
Ploieşti	8	4	50%	4	3	75%	58%
Reşiţa	7	4	57%	5	3	60%	58%
Sibiu ^b	6	3	50%	2	1	50%	50%
Turda	8	4	50%	4	2	50%	50%
Satu Mare ^b	6	2	33%	4	3	75%	50%

Theatre	No. of Premieres	No. of Romanian Premieres	% Romanian Premieres	No. of Revivals	No. of Romanian Revivals	% Romanian Revivals	% of Romanian plays in total repertory
Târgu Mureş	8	4	50%	3	2	67%	55%
Provincial theatres subtotal:	155	77	50%	103	71	69%	57%
TN Bucharest	10	4	40%	17	10	59%	52%
TN Cluj	9	2	22%	14	9	64%	48%
TN Craiova	7	4	57%	14	9	64%	62%
TN Iaşi	8	3	38%	16	10	63%	54%
TN Timişoara	9	4	44%	6	3	50%	47%
National Theatres subtotal:	43	17	40%	67	41	61%	53%
Bulandra	8	2	25%	12	4	33%	30%
Comedie	6	1	17%	7	4	57%	38%
Mic	6	0	0%	4	3	75%	30%
Nottara	6	4	67%	7	1	14%	38%
Giuleşti	5	2	40%	9	5	56%	50%
Revistă	7	2	29%	5	3	60%	42%
Ion Creanga	9	5	56%	9	5	56%	56%
Bucharest theatres subtotal:	47	16	34%	53	25	47%	41%
TOTAL	245	110	45%	223	137	61%	53%

Source: "Repertoriul 1971-1972," *Teatrul*, no. 10 (1971): 4-14.

Notes: Hungarian, German, and Yiddish language theatres and sections omitted. Adaptations of dramatic works follow country of origin; adaptations of non-dramatic works generally counted as Romanian. Figures also include works for children.

^a figures combine plays on two stages.

^b only figures from the Romanian-language section of the theatre are included.

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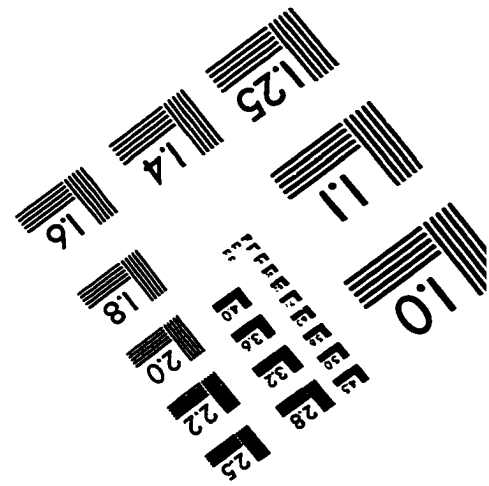
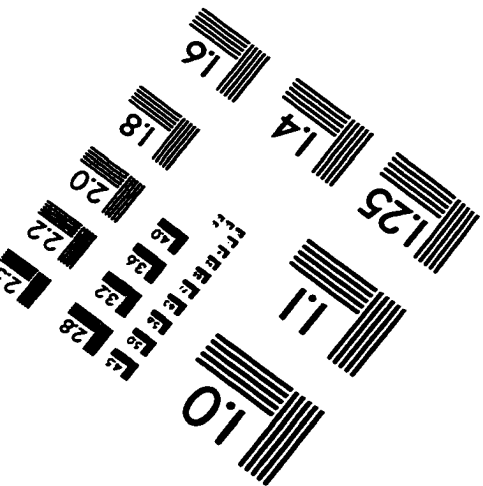
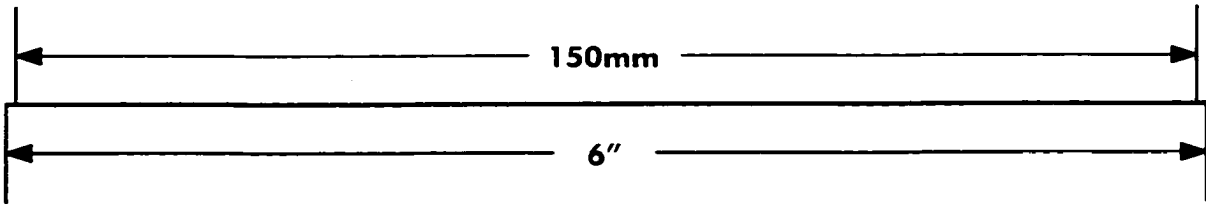
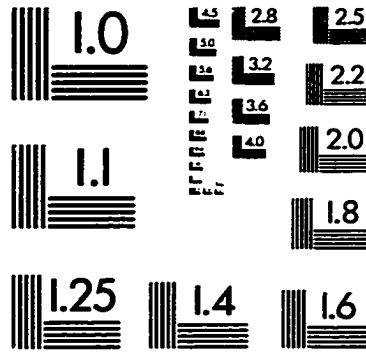
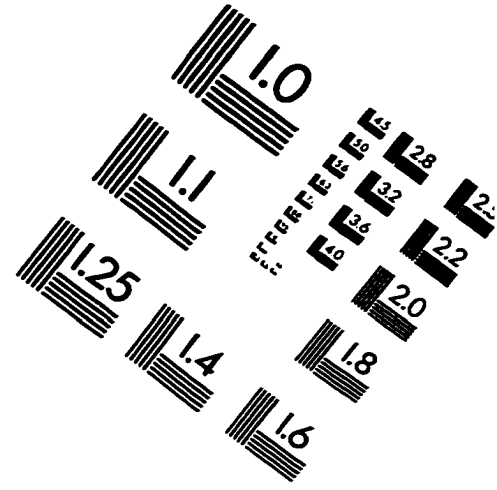
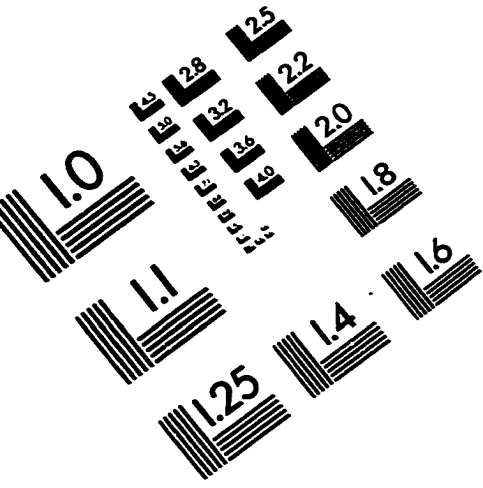
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

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