

SATIRE AS PHILOSOPHICAL SPECULATION IN AUGUSTIN BUZURA'S NOVELS

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Abstract: In Augustin Buzura's novels satire generates a climate of uncertainty that annihilates the negative pathos of a discourse. The fight against depersonalization, however, gains status of an absurd, useless confrontation. Since the poetic theme "world as a theatre" denotes the intolerance towards the bad drawing of things, towards chaos and falsity that dominates society, it becomes akin to the motive of "the inverted world", that reflects a parody vision – the natural order of the things becomes an occasion of irony and philosophical speculation. In this way Augustin Buzura's characters can be divided into two basic categories: those who are looking for the truth and receiving the positive characteristics and the exponents of social evil, comic or grotesque figures, so called, negative characters. Entering the grotesque world, a nonconformist takes a jester's masque as far becoming an incapable of authentic human sentiments and feelings. As a result, satire created an artistic unity of a variety of characters, carrying out the ethical conception of the writer who managed to rise above the spiritual and psychological absurdity of the described life.

Keywords: Augustin Buzura, satire, novel, character, protagonist

Satire is a genre of literature, and something graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, and society itself, into improvement.¹ So far, satirizing vices and human shortcomings is one of the basic features, characteristic for the realist method of creation. In the realistic-psychological novels the reflector characters, that are the only capable for internalizing the action itself are in charge of radicalizing the negative aspects of the social life. Surprisingly, in Mihail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* this function is assigned to Voland, a wired foreigner, endowed with the characters necessary for a philosopher, otherwise, the Devil itself. He reveals the physical ugliness, interior vulgarity of the Muscovites, irreversible degradation of the human species.

As far as Augustin Buzura's novels are concerned, one can observe that the character's bibliographies are related in terms of the main characters. Usually, the epic substance is organized around the interior obsessions and individual experiences. The aim of these narrators is not to be situated besides the events; on the contrary, they participate very actively in the unfolding plot. The danger of depersonalization make them to concentrate their efforts on the rejection of the incoming attack from the aggressive majority, hostile to the manifestations of the free, creating sole. Referring to the novel *Voices of the night*, Artur Silvestri mentioned that "Eliminating Stefan Pinteia with something immature, wild, unforeseeable, the others are some homogeneous, robust psychologies, when they are out of

¹ En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satire#Etymology_and_roots

the deforming sphere of the principle optics»². The action of satirizing the exponents of the social evil, performed by the rebellious protagonist from *Voices of the night*, suggests the absurdity of principles imposed by the grotesque collectivity. Psychological surveys proved to be useless in the case of some unscrupulous persons like Filipas, Stanculescu, Ionescu whereas the same as such brutes as Socoliuc, Rafiroiu, or Oituz from the following novel *Refuges*. Subsequently, satire takes a general character of denounced flows rather than the identity of the portrayed one and so far embraces the profoundness of the philosophical vision.

The similar situations could be found in the novels of Marin Preda, Alexandru Ivasiuc or Constantin Toiu. Crises, as a whole, is the consequences of some misfortune events, like the case of Ilie Moromete whose sons left the native village or of Chiril Merisor when he found the diary or of Ion Marina's wife with an incurable disease. The effected characters are cloistering themselves for the interior clarification. The character's failure doesn't seem to appear during the narration; likewise, it contains a condition felt along an interminable number of years rather than a consumed action, provoked by some concrete motives. The characters don't screw up within the plot's evolution: they seem to be familiarized with the bitter taste of failure from the early childhood. Being born in the modest families, they are forced to confront the material difficulties and social injustice since being little children. While growing up, they discover the new aspects of social evil for being transformed in convinced pessimists, incapable of evading the confusion state and a profound despair that takes in time a permanent character.

So far, the mentioned characters manage to morally survive vicissitudes of fate only due to the always present sense of humor. "Humor could be considered as the highest manifestation of the defensive processes of the mental faculty"³. The excessively practiced irony will make them immune to the aggressive mediocrity attack and will offer them the possibility to undergo the automatism of the daily life, to evade the mental emptiness. Being thirsty for humanity with frustrating feelings and outraged dignity, they feel a vague satisfaction at the idea of associating the exterior world with a slapstick theatre performance. The atmosphere of false and suspicion, present in intellectual circles, featured in the novels, creates the impression of a "restored world" that has lost completely the notion of the true values.

The novel *The Absents* opens with such an image of the disguised collectivity that is a bizarre projection of a mental invaded with obsessions and nightmares. At the beginning of the book in a grotesque wandering, gradually appear the colleagues and the superiors from the Institute, whose figures are aligned on an imaginary clown's body, who "had gathered slowly, methodically, unobserved, all the character's obsessions."⁴ The image of Mihai Bogdan's dream contains a symbolic expression of the "kitsch" environment and denounces the abnormality of the relations between a person and society. As well, where is a very colorful and vivid presentation of a "restored world" in Mihail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* at Variety theatre. Voland's suite demonstrates different wonders and the contact

² Artur Silvestri, *Romanul neorealist*, in *Luceafarul*, XXIV, nr.19, may 1981, p.7.

³ Sigmund Freud, *Scieri despre literatura si arta*. Translated and notes by V.D. Zamfirescu, preface by R. Munteanu, Univers, Bucuresti, 1980, p.282

⁴ Mircea Iorgulescu, *Rondul de noapte*, Cartea Romaneasca, Bucuresti, 1974, p.212

with fantastic reveals human vices. To the spectators 'admiration', during the cards' trick it is announced that the cards could be found between a bank-note of three rubles and an auction at trial for subsidies non-payment to the citizen Zelikova, at the citizen Par-cevsc place, sitting in the seventh row. One of the most highlighted moments is the "money" rain. At once, money starts to fly under the dome everywhere. Someone is looking for them on all fours in the corridor, someone is putting his legs on the armchair and starts catching the bank-notes. People are jumping one over another, trying to pick up as much money as it is possible. Moreover, there appears a women's shop on the stage. A little shy at the beginning, but after being taken on the wave, women are gathering as much cloths as they can from the fantastic shop, regardless size and taste, without trying them on. Unfortunately, all the acquisitions are getting melted, so that the body nakedness signifies the soul nakedness, that proved to be miser and greedy.

Iustin Olaru from *Refuges* in one of the letters addressed to his ex-wife, outlines a terrifying picture of deindividualization, that includes the intellectuals from Magura village: "As far as food is concerned, it is better: I eat at the priest's house, where, lunch lasts till dinner and the later gets on until breakfast, in case there are no funerals no baptisms. Some of the village intellectuals are gathering at his place, more of them are female- hair curlers, hair curlers, hair curlers, needles and perfume Sea breeze!- that after using drugs according to the ancestor's traditions, start singing in Romanian and end up with lumping dirty texts..."⁵. The author refers to irony and mimicking; one could follow the intention of sketching such representative figures as villains and upstarts with immeasurable social ambitions through alternating the direct style with the indirect one. The template language and stereotypical reactions of the characters denote the highest grade of formality of individual life within an acutely politicized environment. Social relations degrade and power relationships become the true ones. In this respect appears the portrayal of Ioana Oituz, the director of Magura school, that is impressive as an artistic realization. "... Ioana Oituz, a teacher, is keen just on the plans, lessons, the presence at the auctions and at the artistic formations. And doesn't forget to underline that there where is no order lacks discipline. She is tall, bony, with a round clean face, has a charming smile and two blue eyes that watch innocently the light sky of Motherland but never watch you. And at the moment one can be sure he can talk to her, she is waked at once and with her organizer's spirit throws into your face a :''How do you do, comrade!''"⁶. Character rigidity that is the basic behavior of all adaptable suggests the transformation of human relations in a grotesque, absurd and puppet performance at the same time.

From the old times, irony as a rhetoric figure, expresses the contrary of one idea and represents, as a fact, a simulation. Its definition predicts a contraposition of two value codes and intends to demonstrate falsity of one of them. Comics is based on the contrast between these two visions reproduced by the ironist. Iustin Olaru oscillates between the father Benedict's assertions with a prophetic character who announces him that animal instincts has already defeated him and those "false" intellectuals from Magura: "If I'm not content with his advises, there could be found some others, I can choose, I can hang around without any

⁵ Augustin Buzura, *Refugii*, Cartea Romaneasca, Bucuresti, 1984, p. 67.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.10

effort, like a football ball, between numerous “visions” that are at my disposal: the Socoliuc’s shaft, the strictly local of Ioana Oituz, the father Giurgea’s housewife and the Dobrota’s national-traditional, who discovered that those good as well as those bad take their origins from Dacians”⁷. Augustin Buzura’s novels are considered to be a kind of documents of the protagonist’s feelings, of their individual way of understanding the surrounding world. Satirically exploded situations are placed over dramatic ones, devoted to inner struggle, in this way the novels are placed in a transition area from tragic to comic. If protagonists appear as pathetic and solitary characters like the characters from tragedies, the fundamental characters form, as usually, a grotesque collectivity, aggressive and intolerant so that their multiplication represents an eloquent prove of deindividualization.

The despotic and ambitious bureaucrat’s type that is very frequently met in the literature of the totalitarian period is the exponent of the official power and is a part of the adaptable category. So, those are academician Poenaru (*The Absentees*), the investigator Varlaam (*Pride*), the engineer Filipas (*Voices of the Night*), the activist Radu Gheorghe (*The faces of Silence*), the Mayer Socoliuc or the enterprise director Rafiroiu from *Refuges*. They are surrounded by coward and obsequious subordinates, eager to follow them everywhere. Lacking individuality and being mediocre, these impostors are in high positions and jeopardize the professional career of more able colleagues using very diverse challenging methods: from intrigues to torture and crime. Being intensely negative characters, they don’t reveal themselves during their engagement in the action and they are ironically characterized by the narrators-protagonists.

Due to the satire effect, the comic situations represent a great interest, being less valuable in terms of veracity. The author appeals to the comic situations that provoke mislead and anxiety among involved characters. In the same situations the produced confusion generates a spontaneous, explosive laughter. A such kind of frame-up takes place at the professor Poenaru’s exam. Mihai Bogdan decides to take the identity of Bogdan’s son, a well known personality among city “celebrities”. Taking the occasion, he writes a great number of enormities that were overlooked, otherwise, by the misled academician. The identity loss that is the bases of the persons’ substitution procedure, besides the danger of anonymity, denounces the absurdity of the coexistence principles suggesting that it is the position and not the person that truly matters. The student named Bogdan can take the highest grade just due to the fact that he is the son of his “father”.

Therefore, one of the obsessive motives, invoked in the confession of the protagonist Mihai Bogdan from *The Absentees* is represented by the identity loss. The talented scientific researcher, whose merits are attributed to the performances of the “great” scientist Poenaru with an increased acuity feels the incapacity to perform something in order to change the situation. So far, he makes fun of the duplicitous existence applying to satire as well as taunting himself: “Clean like a tear and idiot like your boot, you have honor, but you haven’t courage, you have courage for one, for two, three, four, you cure others but you couldn’t heal yourself from fear, you know this and run, cold, berries...”⁸. Taking up the buffoon’s masque the character enters a hostile world, populated with grotesque monsters. Fear excludes the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 387.

⁸ Augustin Buzura, *Absentii*, Dacia, Cluj, 1970, p. 15-16.

probability of some harmonious relations. Drama of impossibility of communication appears in a parody perspective.

The consciousness plan is substituted by the action plan so that the action in an empty space, enrolled in the period of a continuous dramatic present that will be suddenly interrupted. A hilarious, carnival reality that is alike Bulgakov's opera, invades the interior life of the individual, operating irreversible changes in his destiny. "The carnival language, that is the constitutive element of vision and *teatrum mundi* atmosphere that is released from the novel *Voices of the Night* is, as I said, a masque that is capable to disguise multiple intentions"⁹, notices Constantin Parfene. The open space of human comedy and psychology of interior crises are overlapping. The protagonist comes to be the action participant instead of being a disappointed "spectator as in the theatre". The carnival world absorbs him in a tumultuous heat of events and his voice is lost in a uniformed quire of the voices of' night".

The inexhaustible ludic spirit of protagonists entertains the carnival atmosphere. The action, as a fact, takes a parodic signification. The character will mime an active participation at the event's development, but will not be devoted to action. Generally speaking, in the novels *The Absentees*, *Voices of the Night*, *Refuges* nothing important is happening, excepting some incidents between the chiefs and the subalterns. Memorable events are a part of the past. The private life of protagonists is placed between the two diametrically opposite poles: the past, painfully experienced, represented in an analytical realism manner, cultivated in a psychological prose and a vivid present that fits into a grotesque performance of the collective life. Besides the state of "the underground prisoner"¹⁰, the character incorporates the attitude of the super lucid ironist, intolerant towards amorality and corruption.

The status of useless, absurd confrontation takes the fight against depersonalization. So far, satire annihilates the negative pathos of the discourse through its uncertainty climate. Comic situations reproduced in the novel *Pride* are quite representative in this sense. The adventures of the laboratory assistant, forced to spy on the professor Ion Cristian, end up lamentably, producing every time a special satire effect. He is unmasked and picked up regularly by Anania, a devoted professor's assistant. An unhappy "sneaker" goes on accomplishing his mission besides the amusement and outrage of the researchers in the laboratory. Observations from his journal represent the prove of the ignorance and cowardice characteristic for the employers that defame the true ministers of the society interests. So-called behavior deviations of Andrei Cristian represent ridiculous reasons invoked by the professor's opponents for discrediting his reputation. Moreover, they illustrate the decay of the relationships established between the intellectuals that distances more and more from their real task and as a result become some common intriguers.

The rhythm of the objective narration is disturbed by the impression of false that is insistently suggested during the text. Incapacity to influence the events' evolution make the protagonists to compare the exterior world with a performance of bad taste: "...I know the play by heart, it's repeated for too many times so that I don't consider it anymore"¹¹, replies

⁹ Constantin Parfene, *Text, intertext, personaj, umor in "Vocile noptii" de Augustin Buzura*, in Collegium, Societatea de stiinte filologice din RSR, Iasi, 1988, nr. 4, p. 113

¹⁰ Dan Grigorescu, Sorin Alexandrescu, *Romanul realist in secolul al XIX-lea*, editura Enciclopedica Romana, Bucuresti, 1971, p. 143

¹¹ Augustin Buzura, *Fetele tacerii*, Cartea Romaneasca, Bucuresti, 1974, p.286.

in *The Faces of Silence* Carol Magureanu, losing any interest for “fighting” with the activist Radu Gheorghe. The poetical theme “world like theatre” denotes intolerance towards the bad organization of things, towards chaos and falsity that govern society. Regret that appears together with the situation awareness is usually followed by sarcasm or irony and the theme “a world like theatre”¹² combines with the satirical theme. “Watching her, the house, the village, I have a feeling of being the owner on disaster, an absolute owner, and in some moments I manage to contemplate it in all its splendor”¹³, Justin Olaru from *Refuges* will confess to his ex- wife. The impression of false coming from the relation with the priest’s daughter, Codruta Giurgea, inferior to Ioana from the intellectual point of view but full of vitality and practical spirit that emphasizes his detest towards “kitsch” environment made up of intellectuals from Magureni that he has to accept by all means. Relationships established between the members of this community are based on unmotivated aggression and treachery. It would be impossible for someone to find a logic explanation for their aberrant behavior, totally inadequate for a healthy ambient. Talking about this grotesque society, Constantin Sorescu underlined:” It is characterized by a hunger of power and possession and it has been invaded by a primary sexuality that stains everything”¹⁴.

The motive of the ” restored world “ is related to the motive “a world like theatre”. The “restored world” theme reflects a parodic vision, that is an inversion of the natural order of things that becomes an occasion of irony and philosophical speculation. Augustin Buzura’s characters could be divided into two basic categories: those who are looking for truth and beneficiate of the accentuated positive characteristics and the exponents of the social evil, comic or grotesque figures, otherwise negative by excellence. Unlike the characters from the novels written by Marin Preda, Alexandru Ivasiuc or Constantin Toiu, the misfits from *The Absentees*, *Voices of the Night*, or *Refuges* don’t have a constant passion or a certain difficulty that would cause an inner disequilibrium. Their continuous suffering is generated by a series of consciousness phenomena , that tends to be placed outside the normality. The crises space, organized around outraged consciences, convicted for a perpetual oscillation between drama and comedy shows the agony of a “restored” world. “Rugby clenching alternate with monumental parties”¹⁵, the conflicts between the two classes of characters are dramatic and grotesque at the same time.

The relation restoration with society is a way that helps the non-conformist character to overcome the crises. However, entering the grotesque world, he’s forced to mime an adequate behavior. The necessity for disguise, dictated by the circumstances, determines him to take a buffoon’s masque. The buffoon’s existence, as a fact, will be reduced to a “reflection of some other existence”¹⁶. The status of a “ comedian of life”¹⁷ gives him the possibility to identify himself with the comic characters that surround him and to temporary

¹² Tudor Vianu, *Din istoria unei teme poetice. Lumea ca teatru*, in *Studii de literatura universala si comparata*, Editura Academiei RSR, Bucuresti, 1963, p.128

¹³ Augustin Buzura, *Refugii*, Cartea Romaneasca, Bucuresti, 1984, p. 269.

¹⁴ Constantin Sorescu, “Refugii” de Augustin Buzura. *Un moment al prozei*, in *Tineretul liber. Supliment literar-artistic*, II, nr.1, 6 ianuarie 1990, p. 4.

¹⁵ Cornel Ungureanu, *Simbolistica “Refugiilor”*, in *Viata romaneasca*, 1989, nr.1-2, p. 59

¹⁶ Mihail Bahtin, *Probleme de literatura si estetica*. Translated by Nicolae Iliescu. Preface by Marian Vasile, Univers, Bucuresti, 1982, p. 381

¹⁷ *Idem*, p.381

give up the original ego. Numerous comic situations caused by the protagonists getting the role of the joker, come to confirm with a great deal a sad historical truth, like "...communism offered the Romanians not a doctrine, but an "acrobatics"¹⁸. The party at Filipas house, evoked in a parodic light in *Voices of the Night*, shows the attitude of a profound disregard of the protagonist Stefan Pinteas towards the mediocre bureaucratic group, governed by dominating instincts. Miming candor and survivability, the young man manages to disregard openly those "chiefs" lacking intelligence as well as humanity. After more glasses of wine the guests started to confess and the character assisted at the really shocking scenes. Mocking ignorance, mercantilism and temperamental aggressiveness characteristic for Filipas friends, are being satirized as false principles for advancing in social hierarchy. The professor's Stoian answer for the innocent Pinteas's question about the title of "PhD" conferred to the impertinent Isaia Stanescu is "PhD in what? In Life's experience! Don't bother. He can be everything. Tomorrow, if he considers it necessary, viva Academy. It's not normal for him not to understand why you are not of the same title? What's so difficult to obtain a diploma, there?"¹⁹, and after he concludes with a philosophical tone: "Actually, do you believe that we are people? Rubbish! We are called so because of... zoological reasons. You and me are losers..."²⁰.

Irony and sarcasm won't have an expected "therapeutic"²¹ effect in a world of inverted values. Ironic communication is often blocked because of "receptor's opacity"²². A limitation of ironic communication intervenes, a situation that in some cases is due to the fact that the speaker overappreciates interlocutor's competence and in others, on the contrary, because it's rationally based on the opacity of the receiver, taken like a stake of irony. The protagonist from *Pride* will try in vain to convince his adversaries in an ironical way of the absurdity and ridiculous of his son's misbehaviors, the same is with the revolted protagonists' tricks from *The Absents* and *Voices of the Night*. The normality of an ironic dialogue is often excluded in social environments where only power relations are ones that count.

Isolation and marginalization are the attributes the ironist in the most of the cases is threatened with, cultivating a state of fear that will force him to comply without any discussion with others. The characters stay stiffened in their sufferings until the end of the action.

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¹⁸ Octavian Paler, *Don Quijote in Est*, Albatros, Bucuresti, 1994, p. 167.

¹⁹ Augustin Buzura, *Vocile noptii*, Cartea Romaneasca, Bucuresti, 1988, p.322

²⁰ Idem

²¹ Ovid S. Crohmalniceanu, *Al doilea suflu*, Cartea Romaneasca, Bucuresti, 1989, p. 130

²² Nicolae Cretu, *Statutul ironiei in perspective relatiei: comunicare-cunoastere, in Cunoastere, creativitate, comunicare*. Supplement to the volume XXVII of *Analele stiintifice ale Universitatii "Al. I. Cuza", seria III b*, vol. I. Sectiile filozofie, Logica, psihologie, pedagogie, Iasi, 1981, p. 102

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