Fictional Strategies and Metatext in B.P. Hasdeu's *Duduca Mamuca*

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B. P. Hasdeu displayed a Romantic creative structure, illustrating what Virgil Nemoianu calls High Romanticism (Nemoianu, 1998), and he was one of the few cases in Romanian culture of overcoming Romanticism in its hybrid, Biedermeier form. He was viewed by his age, as well as by the majority of the subsequent literary histories, as a gifted writer, but less so than as an encyclopaedic scientist and author of utopian scientific projects.

While being a collateral component of his activity, Hasdeu's literary work covers several distinguishing moments in the development of Romanian literary prose genres, a special place being held by a gem of refined play with artistic structures called, in its first version, *Duduca Mamuca*.

One may say about Hasdeu that

> a fost un amator şi nu un scriitor profesionist, în înţelesul că nu şi-a propus să se dedice exclusiv (sau în principal) inventării de lumi – simulacru şi cizelării răbdătoare a expresiei. Pentru un spirit cu curiozităţile, anvergura şi ambiţiile sale, literatura nu putea însemna un scop în sine, ci doar un expedient sau un paliativ [he was an amateur, not a professional writer, in the sense that it wasn't in his intentions to dedicate himself exclusively (or mainly) to inventing simulacrum-worlds and to the patient polishing of expression. For a spirit with his curiosities, with his range and ambitions, literature could only be an expedient or a palliative, not a purpose *per se*] (Cornea 1990: 265).

In the case of the above mentioned short-story, however, all the important critical voices, concerned with the state, the direction and the effects of Romanian literary prose in the 19th century share in the recognition of its innovative character in the context of the 6th decade of that age and, therefore, its increased chances of being well received by the contemporary public. Particularly remarkable is the intertextuality of the piece and its parodically-metatextual relevance – which is a mark of the nonconformist authorial ideology with regard to the literary genres in circulation, validated by the public and enjoyed as such – the refined technique, the strong notes of licentiousness and the procedural resources we would today place *mutatis mutandi* under the heading of deconstruction. For Eugen Simion, Hasdeu

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nu scapă, aici şi în întreaga naraţiune, nota de umor, stilul, într-adevăr, subtil ironic, băieţesc, de-i putem spune astfel, pe care îl întâlnim şi în jurnalul intim al lui Hasdeu. Eroul din «Micuţa» care este, în prima parte, şi naratorul acestei istorii, foloseşte un limbaj livresc-persiflant. Citează într-o convorbire despre bucătărie din Hegel, face aluzii răutăcioase la C. A. Rosetti, trimite într-un stil echivoc la literatura lui Alecsandri, în fine, introduce în epică teorii provocatoare despre «meteorologia amorului» într-un limbaj lăudăros şi erudit [keeps, here and in the entire narrative, a humour, a style which is subtly ironic, boyish, if we can call it so, that defines Hasdeu's private diary. The protagonist of *Micuţa/ The Little One*, who is, in the first part, the narrator of the story, uses a bookish-derisive language. He quotes from Hegel during a conversation about cooking, he makes unkind references to C. A. Rosetti, he alludes equivocally to Alecsandri's literary works; finally, he imbues the narrative with provocative theories on the "meteorology of love" in a boasting and erudite language] (Simion 2007).

On the same note, Nicolae Manolescu states that:

ca şi Diderot, Hasdeu e un savant care se recreează scriind o poveste strălucitoare, în primul rând prin *inteligenţă tehnică*, în care licenţiozitatea erotică, cinismul şi celelalte grozăvii trebuie considerate din perspectivă ludică. *Jocurile dragostei* trec în cele ale literaturii şi-şi dobândesc savoarea abia astăzi, în condiţiile unei intertextualităţi generalizate. Referirile, aluziile, citatele, numele de autor şi titluri puse pe tapet de naratorul hasdeian depăşesc cu mult media obişnuită dintr-o bucată de ficţiune [just like Diderot, Hasdeu is a scientist who reinvents himself by writing a story which is brilliant, first of all, in its *technical intelligence*, and where the erotic licentiousness, cynicism and the other 'enormities' should be approached from a ludic perspective. The *games of love* slide into those of literature and they reveal their flavour only now, in the context of a generalized intertextuality. The references, allusions, quotations, names of authors and titles displayed by Hasdeu's narrator are far above the normal rate for a work of fiction] (Manolescu 1990: 297).

Dicţionarul General al Literaturii Române /*The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature* clearly shows how

un autor-narator pornit să demitizeze, să arunce în aer regulile îmbină ingenios tiparele romantice şi parodia lor într-un joc ironic, polisemantic, care trimite la procedee ale intertextualităţii din naraţiunea modernă [an author aiming to de-mythicize, to dismantle the rules, ingeniously combines the romantic patterns with their parody in an ironic, polysemantic game, that announce the mechanisms of intertextuality at work in the modern narrative] (Simion 2004: 473).

To quote once more from Paul Cornea, in his opinion *Duduca Mamuca*

e o nuvelă ivită în perimetrul literar al anilor '60 ca un meteor căzut din altă lume, o scriere fără pereche, atât prin temă, insolentă şi provocatoare, cât şi prin stilul degajat, vioi, persiflant, încărcat până la saturaţie de gaguri, «witz-uri», şotii verbale, calambururi, având aerul ambiguu al *unei improvizaţii* care se *pune mereu în discuţie*. La distanţă de un secol şi un sfert, textul ne pare încă piperat şi «tare», frondeur pe toate laturile, dinamitând cuvintele, nu o dată ipocrite, ale unei literaturi ce se voia edifiantă, aruncând un văl pudic asupra realităţilor neconvenabile, totuşi cotidiene [is a short-story which appeared in the literary context of the '60s like a meteorite from another world, a writing like no other, both in terms of its theme, insolent and provocative, and in terms of its informal, brisk, mocking style, overflowing with

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> quips, wits, verbal pranks, puns, with the ambiguous air of *an improvisation* that *keeps bringing itself into discussion*. After more that a century and a quarter, the text still seems spicy and 'intense', rebellious on all fronts, undermining the often hypocritical words of a literature identifying itself as illuminating, while throwing a prudish vale over aspects of reality deemed inconvenient, although common-place] (Cornea 1990: 280).

Beyond the scandal that broke at the time, the accusation of offences against morality – and the public trial during which the author defended himself and his text by invoking, besides the principle of the autonomy of the aesthetic, the entire secondary history of licentious-erotic literature – the text of the short-story is open to the reception of a contemporary reader who is simultaneously free of inhibitions and well informed.

While being a landmark component of a possible alternative history of Romanian secondary literature – mocking its institutionalized forms, *Duduca Mamuca* should be listed among such texts as *O alergare de cai / A Horse Race*, by Costache Conachi, *Istoria unui galben* / *The History of a Gold Coin* or *Călătorie în Africa / A Journey to Africa*, by Vasile Alecsandri, all of them displaying the advanced stylistic and metatextually-procedural awareness of the above mentioned authors. Moreover, with some of these texts Hasdeu's short-story is either in direct dialogue, by mentioning the title, or indirect, by insertions or intertextual allusions. Similarly, he is in a dialogue with famous illustrations of Balzacian realism, with the instruments of the sentimental and melodramatic short-story, with the inventory of the popular novel or, as we will show, with the enduring tradition of Romanticism.

Narrated in the first person singular, the short-story is built around a dominant narrative voice and a character-narrator, Toderiţă, a law student *at a random Russian university*, who sets himself, successfully, to stage a complicated seduction plot for a young actress, in only three days, employing the human resourced placed at his disposal by an ambiguous chronotope, as well as a generous style of writing exploiting the literary strategies in use by means of the renowned *ostranenie* of the Russian formalists. Secondly, the short-story displays an inventory of narrative techniques and mechanisms of diegetic construction, incredibly close to what we would today term, while keeping the proportions, *textual engineering*. Thirdly, in the final part of the texts, since Toderiţă commits suicide, the reins and the functions of the narrative are taken and assumed by another narratorial voice – an absent factual character, but in whose care the deceased had left the manuscript of the short-story and the task of writing its ending.

In being a writing *for two hands*, the short-story follows the time's principles (and expectations) of literariness, conforming to the convention of confession and, implicitly, sincerity, since they go together in the narrative, as a mark of authenticity adopted as a principle of aesthetic relevance from the poetics of Romanticism.

What Hasdeu's short-story submits to the contemporary reader is, we believe, a set of strategies for the deconstruction of the age's literary prose, in its essential components, a disarticulation of the model-text/texts, which emphasizes the articulation mechanisms and which targets the structure of the narrative, its functions and the typology of the narrator, the techniques employed in the diegetic construction of the characters. On the basis of a (relatively) simple two-stroke

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mechanism of disarticulation – creating the illusion of the real with the literary instruments in use and disassembling it by inserting certain extra-procedural sequences – the text is re-written in a parodic, ironic and self-destructive grid, validating self-reflexivity as a means – compatible only with the trained eye of the contemporary reader and outside any supposed authorial intention – of revealing and discrediting the mechanisms employed to fictionalize events which can be connected to biography – or not.

The short-story begins amid total spatial and temporal ambiguity, with an almost complete suspension of the chronotope and under the mark of a well-staged duplicity of the narratorial language (Hasdeu 1973: 99).

Juggling with stylistic registers and types of discourse, being a master of persuasion and manipulation by exploiting the polysemantic resources of words, the character-narrator plays the author under the protection of the *confession convention*. In other words, he stages scenes with two or three actors, casting himself and others according to narrative scripts whose motivations are revealed by equivocal statements, allusions, or the frequent shifts in stylistic register. Here is an example where the naivety act is combined with the phallic-licentious allusions:

> La masă, găsii în adevăr, pe cucoana Ana şi pe duduca Mamuca şezând cu şervetele pe genunchi.
>
> – Am auzit, domnule, c-ai fi având o natură foarte rece, începu duduca.
>
> – Natura mea nu vi place?
>
> – De fel.
>
> – Atunci nu sunteţi femeie.
>
> – Daţi-mi voie a nu vă înţelege, domnule filozof.
>
> – Străbunei d-voastre, Evei, plăcuse şarpele, cel mai rece din toate fiinţile însufleţite. În orice caz, dacă natura mea nu vi place d-voastre, am fost destul de fericit pentru ca ea să placă neneacăi matale. Să fi văzut azi-dimineaţă cu ce ochi dulci…
>
> Cucoana Ana, lângă care şedeam, m-a pişcat de genunchi.
>
> – De ce mă pişcaţi, cucoană?
>
> Întrebarea mea a fost pronunţată cu o naivitate perfectă. […]
>
> [At the table, I found indeed Madam Ana and Miss Mamuca sitting with napkins in their laps.
>
> – I heard, sir, that you are of a very cold disposition, the Miss started to say.
>
> – You don't like my disposition?
>
> – At all.
>
> – Then you are not a woman.
>
> – Your meaning evades me, Mister Philosopher.
>
> – Your ancestor, Eve, liked the snake, the coldest of all beings. In any case, if my disposition is not to your liking, I was happy enough to receive the appreciation of your mammy. You should have seen, this morning, what sweet looks…
>
> Madam Ana, next to whom I was sitting, pinched my knee.
>
> – Why do you pinch me, Madam?
>
> The question was uttered with perfect naiveté] (Hasdeu, 1973: 108–109).

The romantic couple of lovers occupies a central position in the narrative and in the diegetic universe, but the deconstructive strategies are clearly at work and it all ends up with the marriage of the beautiful Maria to the dreadfully ugly baron von

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R., which will be read by the contemporary reader not so much as an irony addressed to the romantic tradition – "s-o faci s-admire caracterul şi generozitatea ta, să-i apari ca un ideal sublim îmbrobodit într-un real urât" [make her admire you character and generosity, you should appear to her a sublime ideal enveloped in an ugly real] (Hasdeu 1973: 106) Toderiţă says to the baron who is in love with Maria – but rather as a well staged deviation in the narrative script which includes the salvation of the innocent victim from the unscrupulous seducer's grip by the one whom she loves. As for the central female character, we may say that the (de)constructing mechanism in two stages functions programmatically. For example:

> Ce-i dreptul, era frumoasă! Era frumoasă ca o româncă! Avea nişte ochi… culoarea şi mărimea nu-mi aduc bine aminte! Avea un păr… de seama ochilor. Avea o guriţă… dar de atunci au trecut nouă ani, şi-n nouă ani am uitat mai multe feluri de guriţe! n-am uitat numai că Mamuca mea mi se părea a fi foarte frumoasă, nespus frumoasă, neînchipuit frumoasă, frumoasă straşnic! [The truth is she was beautiful! She was as beautiful as a Romanian! She had such eyes... I can't remember well their shape and colour! She had such hair… just like her eyes. She had such a mouth… but it's been nine years since then, and in nine years I've forgotten many kinds of mouths! What I haven't forgotten is that my Mamuca seemed very beautiful to me, indescribably beautiful, unimaginably beautiful, tremendously beautiful!] (Hasdeu 1973: 99–100).

The absolute superlative of feminine beauty resides only in the virtual character of the romantic image of the *donna angelicata* which can be traced not so much on the first level of the parodic text, as we would expect, ready to be re-written, but in the mind of the reader who is familiar with the literary pattern alluded to. In other words, being provided with the appropriate beginning, the chosen feminine model will be able to function on its own, counting on the complicity and the ludic-ironic availability of the reader.

In what concerns the character-narrator, beyond the self-characterisation by nick-name – and by its three interpretations[1] – one may notice immediately his flexible identity, supported by a narrative which is just as a-typical, not only in its mockingly-comic bookish references, but also in the digressing sequences which lack any motivation in the absence of the text's licentious component. As an illustration of the author's anti-literary rebellion, we select a sequence that we quote *in extenso*, for its special flavour, for the associations which can be made with important moments in the development of allusive-erotic writing in Romanian literature and since it functions like a device allowing the de-structuring of the male pattern of unscrupulous seducer, as well as that of the disabused cynic:

[1] "Pe mine, bunăoară, tovarăşii mă numeau «spiţer», zău nu ştiu din care cauză, sau pentru că iubeam parfumurile şi pomăzile, sau pentru că aveam cam adese nevoie de felurite doftorii, ca unul ce mă deosebeam din copilărie prin slăbiciunea constituţiunei; sau pentru că curtenisem pe d-na Benedeck, frumoasa spiţereasă văduvă, de la care mi-au rămas pân-acum, ah! drept suvenire, treizeci şi şepte şipuşoare, mari şi mici, colorate şi necolorate..." [my mates called me, for example, "the barber," I honestly don't know why, or maybe because I loved perfumes and pomades, or maybe because I needed various medicines quite often, since I had been frail ever since childhood; or maybe because I had courted Mrs Benedeck, the beautiful widow of a barber, and in whose memory I have kept, ah! even now, thirty-six vials, large and small, coloured and uncoloured…] (Hasdeu, 1973:103).

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> Trecui lâng-o casă cu două rânduri al cărei *rez dechaussée* era ocupat prin cinci blănării! În rândul de sus, la cele două fereşti din capăt, am şezut eu trei luni fără patru zile. Celelalte odăi ocupa proprietăriţa, femeie frumoasă, dar de patruzeci de ani, văduva unui bogat neguţitor, stăpâna a cinci… ba a şese blănării. Am iubit-o două luni; şi m-am jurat de atunci a nu [mai] iubi în veci o femeie de patruzeci de ani, sau în genere o blănăriţă: ele nu se mai încălzesc! […] Iat-o casă care nu voi uita-o niciodată. Sus şezusem eu, jos Enrieta, modistă franceză, creatură oftigoasă, dar atât de încântătoare, încât mă făcea a crede că oftiga e boala îngerilor. Am mai spus o dată, că locul ei era dedesubt, al meu deasupra. Într-o seară trimite la mine, rugându-mă a nu face vuiet, d-ei fiind bolnavă. Aşa s-a început cunoştinţa. O, zeilor! ce izvor de voluptăţi, pururе nouă şi din ce în ce mai fermecătoare. Ea a murit sau, mai bine zicând, s-a stâns peste şepte săptămâni pe braţele mele. Enrieta a fost singura femeie pe care mă pot lauda a fi iubit până la moarte. […] [I passed by a two-storey house whose *rez-de-chaussée* was taken by five furrieries! I used to live on the upper floor, the two windows at the end, where I lived four days less than tree months. The other rooms were occupied by the owner, a beautiful woman, but forty years old, the widow of a rich merchant, mistress of five… no, six furrieries. I loved her for two months; and I've sworn to myself since then never [again] to love a forty-year-old woman, or, in any case, a furrier: they don't heat up any more! […] Here's a house I won't ever forget. I used to live upstairs, and downstairs Enrieta, the French milliner, a phthisical creature, but so lovely, that she would make me believe that phthisis was the disease of angels. I have said it before, that her place was below, mine was above. One evening she sends for me, asking me to make no noise, since she was ill. And that's how we started knowing each other. Oh, gods! what stream of pleasures, ever new and ever more entrancing. She died, or, better said, her flame extinguished in my arms after seven weeks. Enrieta was the only woman I can boast to have loved until death] (Hasdeu 1971: 111–112).

As stated above, this will prove to be neither a pre-suicidal recalling of past loves, nor a source of masculine pride – although, at first glance, it could be a little of both – since the construction-destruction mechanism works, once again, as the main technique of (de)constructing a character which is, in essence, disarticulated, lacking inner coherence and, above all, designed this way.

There is a series of acts – culminating with the reunion of all the characters at the masked ball – that supports the image of the unscrupulous seducer. For example: Toderiţă understands that the chances to seduce Maria increased and he stages a small performance – according to established models, with a long proven effect on the public, and where Maria, an actress, would fit perfectly. Enacting the well-known melodramatic script, the expected literary types will enter the scene masked, following a well-planed strategy: the villain, "almost always young, perverted and usually of superior intelligence", role played by Toderiţă; the damsel in distress, "delicate, young, innocent" (Drăgan, 2001: 146) – Maria, in relation with the hero-villain duo: Toderiţă and the saviour of the victim, baron von R. On the other hand, since the masks and the carnival create a false space and time, where borrowed identities become interchangeable, the baron von R., believing he is addressing Maria, whom he loves, is, actually, conversing with Victoria, his *en titre* mistress.

Being a main character in the *Dumas-like vignette*, as Toderiţă presents her with (ironic) satisfaction, Victoria fits perfectly within the scenario for Maria's seduction, not necessarily in terms of typology, but as a necessary device in the

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construction of the intrigue. Through her, the main actor, a genuine *actor in fabula*, makes and breaks hypothetical couples with undisguised pleasure, bookishly fuelled – "Intriga e legată de minune, parcă într-un roman dumasian. Sărmana leşcuţă va juca rolul Mamucăi" [The intrigue is perfectly structured, as if in a novel by Dumas. The poor little Polish girl will play Mamuca's role] (Hasdeu 1973: 114) and by licentious readings –

> Crescut în şcoala poeţilor latini, adăpat la adâncele izvoare erotice ale lui Ovidie, Petronie, Properţie, etc., eu cunoşteam din copilărie, ca pe *Tatăl nostru*, *meteorologia* amorului; […].[Raised at the school of the Latin poets, watered by the erotic springs of Ovid, Petronius, Propertius, etc., ever since childhood, I knew well, like I knew *Our Father*, *the meteorology of love*] (Hasdeu 1973: 134).

After baron von R., in disguise, offends Maria, Toderiţă challenges him to a duel, simulates a head wound and, thus, the character-narrator stages, with doctor Turcia's help, his fake agony. When he *survives*, he receives Maria herself as a reward.

Another device in the ad hoc narrative scenario, employed by Toderiţă and made strange by the reversal of meaning and character roles, is Turcia, who provides him with the external evidence of agony, and, at the textual level, enables a re-writing – and re-parody, by licentious allusions – of several characteristics of Balzacian realism:

> Doctorul Tucia, un tânăr de douăzeci şi trei sau patru de ani, năltuţ, subţire, smolit la faţă, coroiat la nas, cu ochi mari, sprâncenat, cu o frunte destul de bine desemnată, avea una dintre acele figuri cari plac şi se par frumoase la întâia vedere, mai cu seamă pentru un nefizionomist, dar resping pe un cunoscător prin un nu-ştiu-ce egoistic, mârşav, viclean; un nu-ştiu-ce apăsat în liniile frunţii, în îndoitura nasului în trăsăturile buzelor, în schimositura zâmbetului, în focul ochilor; mai în sfârşit, un nu-ştiu-ce întipărit în toate deodată şi cu neputinţă de a se analiza în amănunţime. Nenorocirea femeilor e de a fi asolutaminte lipsite de adâncimea spiritului. Judecând lucrurile numai după cea dintâi vedere, ele strigau: *Monsieur Tucia est charmant* şi *monsieur Tucia* devenise, în câteva luni, doctorul favorit al doamnelor. [Doctor Turcia, a young man of twenty-three or twenty-four, quite tall, slim, with a dark complexion, a hooked nose, big eyes, thick eyebrows, a well developed forehead, had one of those faces that appeal and seem beautiful at a first glance, especially to a non-physiognomist, but repel a connoisseur due to an air of selfishness, infamy, slyness; a certain something deep in the lines of the forehead, in the curve of the nose, in the shape of the lips, in the grimace of his smile, in the fire of his eyes; finally, a certain something imprinted in every feature and impossible to analyse in detail. It is the curse of women to be completely without depth of spirit. Judging things only at their face value, they would shout: *Monsieur Tucia est charmant* and *monsieur Tucia* had become, in a few months, the ladies' favourite doctor] (Hasdeu 1973: 143).

Up to that moment, the narrative plan supporting the profile of the unscrupulous seducer functions within the parameters established by the literary convention of the age. Then, the narrative breaks and the second narrator enters the stage – another guarantor for the authenticity of the story as the possessor of Toderiţă's unfinished manuscript, to which he provides an ending, informing the reader, after the fashion of the age, on the fate of each of the characters. It is a

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different Toderiţă that inhabits the second part of the short story, corresponding to another type, the misanthrope:

> De aci înainte, din nenorocire, lipseşte urmarea manuscriptului lui Toderiţă NN., colegul meu la Universitatea din Harcov în Rusia şi care, într-un parosism de mizantropie, s-a împuşcat aice în Ieşi, sunt câteva săptămâni, a doua zi după ce se cununase cu o duducă înzestrată cu cincizeci mii galbeni în numărătoare [From here on, unfortunately, the rest of Toderiţă NN.'s manuscript is missing. My colleague at the Kharkov University, Russia, in an attack of misanthropy, shot himself here, in Iaşi, a few weeks ago, the day after marrying a lady endowed with fifty thousand gold coins] (Hasdeu 1973: 169).

A farewell letter, left to the impromptu narrator, guides the reading towards the psychological profile provided by misanthropy –

> Prietene, eşti compatriot şi tovarăş al meu; eşti cam literat, vei fi şi tu mizantrop ca mine, o prevăd de pe acuma; aşadar, nemene nu este mai capabil de a mă înţelege şi completa începutul acestor memorii, ce eu singur nu le-am putut sfârşi, viaţa devenindu-mi prea amară […] [My friend, you are my compatriot and my companion; you are quite the scholar and you will be a misanthrope like me, I can see that even now; therefore, there's no one else better qualified to understand me and to finish these memoirs, that I couldn't finish myself, life becoming too bitter for me] (Hasdeu, 1973: 169).

And he turns this psychological suffering into the disease of the scholars. Or a bookish fatigue.

The result is a major break in the construction of the character. If the unscrupulous seducer can be Mephistophelian, a disabused cynic, but not a *bon viveur*, as Toderiţă repeatedly proved to be, even less plausible is that this parodic version of Don Juan – the eternal lover of all women – could suffer of misanthropy. Constructed from the above-mentioned components – taken from distinct literary patterns – together with a directorial inclination, the intertextual appetite for bookishness, the irony and the mockery addressed to the established, official forms of literature, the character seems to deliberately lack internal cohesion. Because, after all, we are not presented with a character, but rather with a game of narrative designs that must end, in the good romantic tradition, with a suicide.

The bookish illness we mentioned could be associated, parodically, with the *play thing* status of *Ţiganiada*, a game with/ about/ of literature which mainly consists in translating the articulation strategies of writing on its surface level. We should also bring into discussion one last argument – the writing for two hands is, actually, the same, and the device of delegating another character, by the narrator *en titre*, meant to additionally authenticate the events and the characters, does not work. Otherwise, this second narrator would occupy a similar position to that of Le Sage's devil upon two sticks to be able to know what was said in the private encounter between Toderiţă and Madam Ana, after Maria's seduction.

One should mention, at this point, the fact that the only one who noticed the inconsistencies in Toderiţă's traits, in the two sequences of the short-story, was Nicolae Manolescu. It is a widely known fact. Because, otherwise, the critics could

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not agree on a character typology, favouring either one hypostasis, or the other. For Paul Cornea,

> Toderiţă nu se revoltă impotriva Cerului, nici a Ordinii, e un simplu juisor, sigur de sine şi totusi fragil, dornic de plăceri şi, în acelaşi timp, dezgustat de vanitatea lor"; "suferă de «spleen»", "de un gol sufletesc ireparabil [Toderiţă does not rebel against the Skies, or Order, he is a simple sensualist, self-confident and yet fragile, looking for pleasures, and, at the same time, disgusted with their vanity; he suffers from *spleen*, from a spiritual emptiness which cannot be filled]. (Cornea 1990: 282)

In *Dicţionarul General al Literaturii Române* / *The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*, we find the following:

> "damnat mefistofelic", "libertinul seducător se simte superior mediului filistin în care trăieşte, convenţiile vremii nu-i spun nimic, iar mărimile vremii […] îi declanşează resortul sarcastic" [Mephistophelian damned, the rakish seducer feels superior to the philistine society around him, the conventions of the age mean nothing to him, and the dignitaries of the age […] trigger his sarcastic vein] (Simion 2004: 473).

As for Eugen Simion, even though he focuses on the version entitled *Micuţa/ The Little One*, his perspective is the following:

> Impresia este că prozatorul nu mai ştie ce să facă în nuvelă cu personajul său. Dacă ar fi urmat cursul logic al naraţiunii, Ghiţă Tăciune trebuia să intre în rândul lumii, să se convertească, altfel zis, după aceste văpăi ale juniei, la o viaţă casnică alături de o femeie coaptă. Hasdeu a preferat să împiedice această desfăşurare normală de fapte, nedemnă pentru eroul său doct şi teribilist. Sinuciderea este un act voluntar teribil care poate salva prestigiul unui personaj romantic [The impression is that the writer does not know what more to do with his character. If he had followed the logical thread of the narative, Ghiţă Tăciune should have settled down, converting, in other words, after these flames of youth, to a domestic life with a ripe woman. Hasdeu prefered to impede this natural development, unworthy of his learned and extravagant protagonist. Suicide is an extreme voluntary act which can save the reputation of a romantic character]

And later on:

> În fond, eroul din *Micuţa* este şi el, în spiritul vremii, o „natură catilinară", un tânăr demon care, după ce a dus o existenţă furtunoasă, nu vrea să dispară ca un individ comun. Sinuciderea este pentru el un ultim act de sfidare aruncat lumii [In the end, the protagonist of *Micuţa / The Little One* is also, after the fashion of the day, a "Catilinean temper", a young demon who, after leading a stormy existence, does not want to disappear like a common individual. Suicide is, for him, a last act of defiance against the world] (Simion 2007).

Being valid up to a point, but without covering and explaining the heterogeneity of the protagonist's traits, the perspectives presented above, except Nicolae Manolescu's, focus on the particularities of structure and meaning as they appear to the contemporary reader.

However, on the whole, it is the same Paul Cornea who correctly and completely synthesizes the features of Hasdeu's short-story:

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lipsită de orice sentimentalism într-o epocă de sensibilităţi exacerbate, reînnodând cu tradiţiile carnavaleşti ale râsului şi batjocurii, practicând o scriitură incisivă, sarcastică şi anticalofilă, într-un climat stăpânit de prejudecata clasică a protocolului lexical şi tematic, *Duduca Mamuca* anunţă o modernitate care avea să se instaureze de-abia după multe decenii. [lacking any sentimentalism in an age of excessive sensibilities, reconnecting with the carnivalesque traditions of laughter and mockery, employing a trenchant writing, sarcastic and anti-calophily, in a climate ruled by the classic prejudice of the lexical and thematic protocol, *Duduca Mamuca* anticipates a modernity that was to come many decades later] (Cornea 1990: 288).

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Abstract

Displaying a long history of problematic and complicated interpretations, the short-story Duduca Mamuca systematically de-constructs the fictional-melodramatic textual structures to metatextually re-write the 19th century narrative. On one hand, our study will reshape the literary convention and the de-constructing narrative strategies inserted in Hasdeu's text. On the other hand, it will analyze the way in which this type of functional deviation of narrative categories and marks generates a second grade fictional world – complex and appealing – in which the parodic and ludic intermingles with irony under the authority of the metatext – complicated in its forms, but malicious in its nature.

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