Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov • Vol. 3 (52) – 2010
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies

SEDUCTION GAMES IN *DUDUCA MAMUCA*– AN IRONIC APPROACH TO THE FEMININE ROMANTIC CHARACTER

Andreea PETRE*

Abstract: *Haşdeu seeks to demolish the romantic cliché of the angelic naïve virgin looking for the perfect love and the happy marriage to a yong man capable of heroic deeds.* Ghiţă Tăciune, the narrator in *Duduca Mamuca*, *behaves according to a seduction ritual a strategic game locking all relationship to emotions. Haşdeu avears the mask of irony in Duduca Mamuca and he cynically keeps aloof from the model of angelic feminity. In this respect Haşdeu acts as Caragiale's forerunner.*

Keywords: *story, irony, conflict, romantic patterns, realist notation, love theme.*

1. Introduction

Over thirty years lay between *Duduca Mamuca (Missy Mamuca)*, later on renamed *Micuta (The Little Missy)* (*Three Days and Three Nights of a Student's Life*) and the publication of Caragiale's "moments". Published in 1863, the short-story *Missy Mamuca* aroused a loud lawsuit in the epoch, and Haşdeu was accused of promiscuity. Although he pleas brilliantly and wins the suit, the novelist changes the title of his story (from *Missy Mamuca* in *The Little Missy*), the place of action and takes out all the passages which could offend the moralists, as well as those which made much too transparent hints to certain contemporary persons or realities in the city of Iaşi.

2. Text Structure

The first to acknowledge the writing's value is Caragiale, who published it in 1896 in "Epoca literara" (The Literary Epoch), enthusiastic about the "funny Little Miss", but the true appreciation of the text came latter on, with the critical appreciations of our contemporaries. Nicolae Manolescu considers the sort story to be "a small indiscreet and intertextual jewel" (Manolescu, 2008, 331), Paul Cornea appreciates that we are dealing with an "unmatched work" for its "insolent and provoking theme" (Cornea , 1991, 7) and Mircea Zaciu notes the erudite chaaracter of the text, which is inspired from a real feast of sources: Haşdeu had read Hegel, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny, but also Gogol.

The text is organized entirely around a narrator which introduces himself in the

* Dept. of Foreign Languages, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

BDD-A20209 © 2010 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:55:35 UTC)

middle of the action, wearing a demonic mask. Thus, he becomes Ghiță Tăciune, a young student of the Laws in a German University, a lucid and cynical seducer, like Kirkegaard's Johan, with whom he shares the curiosity for "the interesting" of the act of seduction, for the image of the woman who is "substance, while the man is reason" (Kirkegaard , 1997, 64). The initiation of the action belongs to the uninvolved narrator, who contemplates retrospectively the efforts of the hero, Ghiță Tăciune, to conquer / get rid of the young Marie, or, as he was called, the Little Missy, a young child in her sweet sixteen, the daughter of the lodger Ana Pacht. The feminine silhouette is fade compared to the masculine protagonist. In fact, all the other characters act according to the 'scenic directions' of Ghiță Tăciune, who dominates all of them with a touch of irony. The courting and seducing of the Little Missy is, in fact, the deconstruction of the romantic cliché of the angelic maiden. The girl's beauty is portrayed with a heavy hint of parody:

"To admit frankly, she was beautiful! She was as beautiful as a picture! The colour of her eyes….a colour and a shape I cannot manage to remember precisely." (Haşdeu, 1968, 123).

The action is placed in the very middle of the slums, in the world of the small business, among whom the mother of the Little Missy, Mrs Ana Pacht, a "former actress", over 40s, but ready at any moment to "bring back to life" her charms. At her lodging house arrives Ghiță Tăciune, a "troubadour" of the outskirts, a great lover of widow lodgers, of young midinettes ill with consumption or pretty little maids. The young Marie is the rose of her neighbourhood, barely came out in the world and already noticed by the "public great lover of……young ladies". As any of the suburbs beauties, the Little Missy aspires to become an actress, but she is too naïve, in the eyes of Ghiță Tăciune who. For a story teller who sees art in a way that reminds us of Poe, the passion of the young actress is too much. Or, the voice of Ghiță Tăciune defines the artist:

"… the artist should always be tempered, as jurisprudence, cool as the law." (Haşdeu, 1968, 124).

Against the commonplaces of the literature of the 1848s, for which "the feminine beauty is a good sister of poetry" (Papadima, 1999, 89) and the innocence of young womanhood is a source of admiration, Ghiță Tăciune sees in a young lass as the Little Missy:

"*an undeveloped "something" unripe, unformed, immature, incomplete, un-ended, in-finite, unpractical, un-pragmatic*" (Papadima, 1999, 89).

Instead, baron Rosein, nicknamed 'Feldes', the possessor of considerable wealth, a 'jeune premier', ridicule due to ugliness and stupidity, sees the Little Missy at the theatre and "is smitten by her grace".

Easy pray, waiting for Love to come her way, dreaming of a successful carrier and implicitly, to a marriage to match it, the Little Missy has no chance in front of Ghiță Tăciune, a 'roué' of French tradition, as George Călinescu suggested. If an innocent child has no interest for Ghiță Tăciune, to mediate between the girl and the baron brings forth the idea of spectacle, but also of malicious detachment of the voice which grants its place to the masculine character. Ghiță is not rich as the baron, but he is well-experienced and has erudite references for the "meteorology of love", "drunk in the deep erotic springs of Ovidius, Petronius, Propertius" (Haşdeu, 1968, 127). A play, a history of the love conquest is instituted, where important are the plan and the seduction: "to seduce, to seduce always. To foil the erotic power through the urging power of play, of the stratagem… And, even from the seventh

BDD-A20209 © 2010 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:55:35 UTC)

heaven, to master the ironical ways of the inferno – this is seduction" said Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 1996, 70).Ghiță has the advantages of the seducer "who does not think of love otherwise than through the genital finality" (Bologne, 2008, 238). He knows better than anybody what are the expectations of the slum angel: an expensive gift, a mysterious whisper. The decisive facing takes place al a ball, a veritable "battle scene", as the author himself call it, the most appropriate place – for the young women of the epoch – if not to discover love, the encounter the man. It's just that the ball is *masqué*, a spectacle within a spectacle, which offers a man who likes to play practical jokes and have pure fun the possibility to hide behind a mask. At a ball masqué, the usual evolution of the encounter is not expected to fulfil at all: "the forming of the couple, the seduction, the consolidation" (Bologne, 2008, 227). Paradoxically, three of the characters are expecting just for that: the Feldes – to meet and conquer the Little Missy (to whom he had given an expensive *necessaire*), the Polish widow hopes to discover the treason of the Feldes, and the Little Missy is waiting, of course, for the big love. All three of them let themselves manoeuvred by Ghiță Tăciune. The Little Missy is a prisoner of the erotic model of the very young man, capable of bravado which defies death, she needs "a heroic somebody who enraptures and subjects the women's hearts". To forever conquer her, a daring gesture which disturbs the code of the meeting between an angelic maiden and a young chevalier is not enough; the girl needs her reputation to be defended, a ruthless criteria of the epoch. A young woman can lose her honour within a second, and, implicitly, her reputation. Ghiță contrives a heroic situation: he asks the baron to aggress the Little Missy so that he can intervene and defend her reputability. After that, to be even more convincing, he offers to defend her to his death and accepts a false challenge to a duel. Overwhelmed by the man's courage and by a pretended enheritance on her behalf, the Little Missy promises "to make a sacrifice for the remaining of her life" if death will spare her hero.

The next day, Ghiță returns home all bandaged and wearing make-up and all the lodgers find out that the young man was badly injured in an attempt to save the Little Missy. The girl faints, like a true romantic heroine, and, in the same night, she "falls into the trap laid by Tăciune". Three days later, she starts to think about her status and asks Ghiță to get engaged and set a date for their marriage.

What follows is a diabolic arrangement: the girl is passed over to the baron, with indifference, in the dark, going from "the mystical sublimation of the woman to the confusion making copulation of the bacchius procession" (Durand, 1998, 234). The mother is presented the 'melodrama': the Little Missy "was sold, as a phaeton very slightly used, but no longer in fashion is sold". Under the circumstances, "love becomes a sordid bargain, and the woman is put for auction" (Durand, 1998, 180). The vicinity, whose part is major in the rural universe, is reduced in the town slum to the lodgers of the house. They are summoned from Mrs. Pacht to witness the destruction of Little Missy's reputation and the negotiations for her salvation. Calculated and willing to compromise, the mother accepts to marry her daughter with an ugly but rich baron; the little Missy faints, "as the custom is in those places", when she understands that she was nothing more than a puppet in Ghiță Tăciune's hands, but she neither commits suicide, as the seduces maidens of the century used to do. She enters the negotiations and puts her angelic mask aside in order to make a bargain with Ghiță Tăciune, who is a Lucifer from the Balkans and expects that

BDD-A20209 © 2010 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:55:35 UTC)

the show he contrived would please the people, so he asks the Little Missy to get a nice amount of money from her husband in order to comfort the former mistress of the baron.

The vitality regained within the literary space is to be found in Caragiale's feminine characters as well. The story of the Little Missy sets the scene for Porția Popescu's story, which demystifies the cliché of the ingénue and angelic maiden who waits for the true love to come her way and help her marry a young brave man. It is not only the woman who is taken within the gunshot, but also the manipulation of the reality by means of the media/newspapers: Ghiță Tăciune easily makes use of his friendship with a newspaper editor who writes in the paper that he was killed in duel, with the purpose to impress the Little Missy. All that Ghiță Tăciune does can be attributed to "the immorality of the seduction", in Baudrillard's words, placing the focus on ceremonial, on the strategic game which has no connection with emotions (Baudrillard , 1998, 120).

Haşdeu falls into the category of the ironists, who keep a cynical distance from the romantic cliché of the literature of his ages which squeezes the woman within the angelic corset, and, from this point of view, he announces the writings of Caragiale. But, in the end, he ironically complies with the limits of the character he creates, while the narrative voice of his prose supports, by all the actions of Ghiță Tăciune, precisely the refuse of the conformism with the matrix of the character, although he moulds them by his own will. Demonic, Ghiță defeats his heroes with their own weapons, as some confide in the romantic pattern (the Little Missy believes in the apparition of a young hero, the Feldes believes himself to be a great conqueror), others only value the importance of the exchange and transform love into bargain (like Ana Pacht and the Polish widow).

Another important aspect that differentiates the two writers is the image of the man. In Haşdeu's prose, by Ghiță Tăciune's voice, the man is still the dominating part, who can do whatever he wants with those around him as well as with himself. This is how the final and amazing gesture of Ghiță Tăciune can be explained: he commits suicide and leaves the unfinished manuscript and the destiny of his heroes in the hands of a friend.

3. Conclusion

Duduca Mamuca stands apart through the writer's ironic link to the literary model of the moment 1848 thatt encloses the woman in an angelic corset that is no longer felt to be plausible. Haşdeu subjects the angelic image of feminity to irony and the male "voice" still represents the domineering aspect that rules both his qwn destiny and that of the people around him.

References

1. Baudrillard, J. *Strategiile fatale*. Iaşi: Polirom, 1996.
2. Bologne, J.C. *Istoria cuceririi amoroase.* Bucureşti: Nemira, 2008.
3. Cornea, P. *Postfață* la volumul *B.P. Haşdeu. Scrieri literare*. Bucureşti: Minerva, 1989.
4. Durand D., *Figuri mitice şi chipuri ale operei.* Bucureşti: Nemira, 1998.
5. Papadima L., *Literatură şi comunicare*, Iaşi: Polirom, 1999.
6. Manolescu N, *Istoria critică a literaturii române.* Piteşti: Paralela 45, 2008
7. Haşdeu, B.P., *Scrieri literare*, Bucureşti: Minerva, 1989.

BDD-A20209 © 2010 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:55:35 UTC)