
INTERDISCIPLINARITY
OF THEMES
AND ARTISTIC MEANS
IN **MATEI VIȘNIEC'S**
DRAMA FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract: Matei Vişniec's drama for children is built around the idea of interdisciplinary artistic creation and is dedicated to a highly receptive audience. Matei Vişniec is the investigative journalist who questions the truth of the plot through his characters; he is the philosopher who speaks about the ephemerality of earthly life; he is the moralist who analyses the transfer of guilt from the culprit to the vengeful victim; he is the sociologist who addresses the children left behind by their parents who have gone to work abroad; he is the political scientist who speaks about tyranny and war; he is the man of theatre who comments on his work through metatheatrical insertions. This thematic interdisciplinarity of Matei Vişniec's drama is also found in the children's theatre performance, where the actor relates to the puppet, the theatre play combines with the clown tradition, where the spectator and the character interact directly, advise, and educate each other. Starting from the five dramatic texts by Matei Vişniec published by Arthur Publishing House, we will analyse² the sets of masks that the playwright puts on, aiming to provide an overview of the interdisciplinarity of themes and artistic means found in his drama for children and the configuration of motifs and cultural references that make up complex worlds open to interpretation on several levels.

Keywords: Matei Vişniec/Matei Visniec, thematic and media interdisciplinarity, dramaturgy for children, mask, metatheatricality, clowning, fairy tale, initiatory journey.

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Introduction

The emergence of a dramatic work dedicated to children, such as that of Matei Vişniec, could not have happened without the generation of a current among people of culture that would give legitimacy to such an enterprise and remove prejudices about the audience's comprehension possibilities. This niche of Matei Vişniec's dramaturgy is the offspring of a series of works of the 1960s which, as Margareta Niculescu observes, "succeeded in crystallising the particularity of an aesthetic conception of theatre for children and for puppets and marionettes" (Niculescu, 1967). Gellu Naum with his *The Book with Apolodor*, Nina Cassian, Alexandru Popescu, Alecu Popovici with dramatizations of classical fairy tales, or Valentin Silvestru are the pioneers who, through their work dedicated to young audiences and the art of puppetry, laid the foundations for the possibility of a creation such as that of Matei Vişniec. It is through this generation of authors that the transition in the nature of theatre for children will take place similar to what

² Article presented in the conference "Relevance of Matei Vişniec's dramaturgy in the context of interdisciplinary artistic research," organized by I.L. Caragiale UNATC in Bucharest on the playwright's birthday – January 29, 2023 – as part of the event of awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Matei Vişniec (January 30, 2023).

Carol Lorenz will observe in the children's theatre of the United States. According to him, specific to this theatrical species, which has become an artistic mode of self-expression with aesthetic value, is the transition from "primarily a didactic theatre with integrated propaganda to one that becomes a dialectical theatre of ideas" (Lorenz, 2000). Having become a theatre of ideas, it also becomes a space for complex debate on the great problems of humanity, a place where the symbol becomes a construction mechanism and where the partner, the child spectator, is respected as a receiver with a vast repertoire of symbols that allows him to decipher the meaning of the work. Through this mutation at the level of construction, Matei Vişniec will find a conducive creative environment in which essential themes can be presented without compromising on potential levels of understanding, thus paving the way for the possibility of thematic interdisciplinarity and artistic means in the composition of his creation. This liberation from the prejudices that limited children's theatre will lead to the emergence of a set of motor premises in the dramatic writing of the Romanian author.

Matei Vişniec's theatre for children is built around four initial premises that are essential in shaping his dramatic universe. I. The first premise is that the young audience has a high capacity for perceiving the unrealistic theatrical convention in which dream, magic and fantasy combine with realistic data. This premise starts from the observation of the power of theatrical illusion through "what we call the willing suspension of disbelief" (Schonmann, 2006, p. 14). II. According to the second premise, the fourth wall should be eliminated in favour of an unmediated relationship with the audience through direct addresses and the request of an active presence of the viewer. The essential relationship of theatre, as Jerzy Grotowski saw it as the encounter between actor and spectator, is enhanced by this idea of inter-determination and direct relationship between the two. For Matei Vişniec, "Theatre is an encounter" (Grotowski, 1998, p. 35) and the meeting must be direct. Characters hide among viewers and get up from their seats to intervene in the plot, without it being clear which of the two parties in the theatrical relationship (actor-viewer) they belong to. III. The third premise is that of the palpable contemporaneity of the dramatic action. This temporal localization is generally manifested by the insertion in dialogue of technology and tools that have become widely used, mentioning apps (WhatsApp, YouTube, video games), gadgets (phones, consoles, GPS), activities (selfie, face-lift) without necessarily being requisite for the construction of logic and plot development, having rather a comic purpose. IV. The last premise places the "song" as a defining element of the dramatic universe with the purpose of describing difficult concepts of human existence such as the problem of time or love, but also with a simpler pedagogical role such as learning the order of the planets in the solar

system. Inspired by Brechtian technique, this device is intended to emphasise and highlight the central problem of the point the characters have reached and to comment on the social or life situation that is going through the preceding scene or the one to follow.

Starting from these premises, this niche for children of Matei Vişniec's dramaturgy evolves towards a series of works in which the idea of thematic interdisciplinarity and artistic means is widely approached. The opening of convention and the mutation at the dramaturgical level, together with the still present mission of educating the audience, without a propagandistic character, opens the theatrical text to dialogue on several levels. Themes and symbols are layered within the same work to leave room for the possibility of different understanding depending on the psychological age and level of education and knowledge of the spectator. As the American theorist Shifra Schomann observes of children's theatre audiences, "the mental age of a child does not always correspond to the biological age" (Schonmann, 2006, p. 10), therefore the receptive capacity of the mass of spectators can vary significantly from one individual to another. In this way we are confronted with a multiplicity of themes in the body of the same dramatic work. In the specific case of Matei Vişniec's dramaturgy, the themes addressed vary significantly in terms of areas of interest: from educational and moralistic themes such as educating the theatregoer in good manners, to profound problems of existence such as the imminence of death. Starting from this grid of themes, the playwright assumes a number of masks, specific to each one: Matei Vişniec appears to us as the investigative journalist, the philosopher, the moralist, the sociologist, the political scientist, the man of the theatre, etc.

The variety of artistic means emerges from the loose convention of the dramatic universe in which animals, humans, aliens, suns speak, ships sail among the stars, goats go to do their "soul-cardiograms" on the psychoanalyst's couch of the bears. The playwright's detailed captions punctually call for mixtures of means, from the insertion of projections (which are mentioned in almost every one of the texts analysed) to puppets. This grid of themes and variety of artistic means, gathered around the concept of interdisciplinarity, will be elaborated, punctually.

In order to provide an overview of Matei Vişniec's dramaturgy for children, we have analysed the five dramatic texts for children published up to the time of writing in the Arthur Publishing House collection: *The snowman who wanted to meet the sun*; *The alien who wanted pyjamas as a souvenir*; *The tale of the king angry at the clown*; *With the ship among the stars*; *The Goat, the Little Goatling and the Goody She-wolf*. This analysis is not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive. The key to

each analysis lies in the masks identified and listed at the beginning of each subchapter and the observable themes in the complex construction of the dramatic score. It should be noted that Matei Vişniec's drama for children is not limited to the texts addressed, an example being *Guffi's Country*, published last century, outside this series.

The variety of themes and masks of the playwright

Each of the five dramatic texts analysed contains an entire thematic universe that differs according to the author's intention of philosophical, social, political, or pedagogical commentary. The playwright assumes differentiated masks that align with each main theme addressed to help demonstrate the thesis assumed. In order to provide a structured view of the themes of interest and the masks worn by the playwright, we have chosen to take the five texts in turn and identify the specific authorial masks based on them. Each analysis combines elements of the overall plot of the text with explanations of the themes, motifs, devices, and masks that make up Matei Vişniec's repertoire for children. The critic's "fatal bet", as Serge Doubrovsky called it, in this analysis is to consider that Matei Vişniec's drama can be read in the key of this set of masks.

I. *The snowman who wanted to meet the sun* – *the mask of the philosopher who is concerned with the problem of the passage of time, death, the immortal soul, the dream, or friendship.*

Through the story of the snowman, the Romanian author creates a modern fairy tale in which the initiatory journey of an anthropomorphized being towards the encounter with the sun is used as a parallel for the human journey in life. *The Snowman Who Wanted to Meet the Sun* is heavily laden with philosophical substance and full of cultural references. The plot follows a classic narrative thread based on an initiatory journey, with a concrete driving purpose of the protagonist: a snowman whose entire existence has been spent during the past winter learns of the inevitability of his melting. A swallow, a springtime symbol, offers him two options: either he saves himself by going to the North Pole where the cold will preserve him for eternity, or he dares to confront the Sun, demanding his right to exist. The winter-sun duality, a reference to the opposition of ignorance and knowledge, recalls the Platonic cave myth, in which, in the nuanced way of Matei Vişniec, winter represents the shadow on the cave wall, and the sun the light outside it, the world of ideas, of knowledge. Choosing to meet the sun, the snowman sets off on the path of decomposition. We are dealing with

a decomposition both intentional and circumstantial. Intentional, because with every other anthropomorphised character he meets the protagonist gives up a part of his body, gives away part of himself. By accepting the gift, the characters become adjuvants, repaying the gift received with a help that pushes him towards the desired goal. Circumstantially because of the heat that causes him to melt.

From the point of view of the thematic variety in the author's philosopher's mask, the modern fairy tale of the snowman brings to the fore, in addition to the idea of knowledge, the problem of the passage of time, death and the eternity of the soul. The snowman's time literally and visibly slips away with each passing second. The water droplets dripping from his snow symbolically replace the hourglass sand. But meeting the sun gives him one last option, that of survival as a dream. By renouncing the Schopenhauerian will to live and becoming a dream, he renounces external being in favour of a higher existence. The aim of the initiatory journey for the snowman is to learn, through successive encounters, the sacrifice of self in order to reach the absolute.

Matei Vişniec, as a philosopher, thinks eternity in the form of astral dreams, explaining to the audience the possibility of life after death in this key from which stories are born. Like Prospero's words, "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep." (Shakespeare, 1944, p. 50), the snowman will return to existence as a dream, ending sleep. The sun smokes and out of his pipe comes soap bubbles that encompass the heart, the last remnant of the snowman, and carry it to the infinite sky. The snowman's journey can also be likened to the Htonian myths of the descent, to Dante's journey into purgatory, through liminal space, to the final destination. His journey to the land of the rising sun finds its final stop at a river where he is forced to pay for crossing. The beaver, the boatsman of this river Stix, is the only one of the supporting characters who asks for payment, the rest of the animals receive their gifts out of the pure kindness of the snowman.

It is the raven, symbol of death, but also of dreams, like Edgar Alen Poe's Nevermore, that announces his death, warning him of the coming spring. Another parallel that arises from the snowman's journey to learn to die and his innocence is with Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. Like the Little Prince, the snowman's life is locked in a state of childhood, dominated by innocence and kindness, giving up his possessions to help his friends and sacrificing himself, asking nothing of the Sun but only to help his friends in turn. *The Little Prince's* kindness and innocence, along with his love for his flower, parallels the Snowman's kindness and dedication.

II. *The alien who wanted pyjamas as a souvenir* – the mask of the sociologist who observes the impact of seasonal work on children left at home; the economist who explains the seasonal work system; the astronomer who talks about the solar system; the biologist who observes the characteristics and peculiarities of animals.

Deeply rooted in his knowledge of the social problems of Romania and Europe as a journalist and political commentator, Matei Vişniec tries to explain the effects of the phenomenon of seasonal migration of Romanians and the serious repercussions that this departure, often perceived as abandonment or even guilt, can have on the children left behind. With this text, the author joins playwrights such as Elise Wilk, whose play, *Paper Airplanes*, also attempts to portray the effects of this social phenomenon through one of the characters. According to data from the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions (ANDPDCA), the number of children with parents who have left the country in December 2020 was 75,136, down, however, from previous recorded data (Situăția copiilor ai căror părinți sunt plecați la muncă în străinătate, 2020). This information is relevant to contextualise the environment in which the text appears, as it is published in 2020.

Matei Vişniec's characters, the three brothers: Eliza, Adrian and Manuela are exponents of the whole group of children who dream of maternal love not mediated by the screens of their phones or laptops. The three siblings, whose parents went to work in Italy to save enough money to build a family home and buy a car, are facing the loss and disappointment of separation. Every promise of a permanent return is broken because of a new desire to save money for something else. The grandmother dehumanized and defined as "Grandma' is when your parents have nowhere to leave when they go to work in Italy..." (Vişniec, 2020, p. 40) proves an insufficient substitute. The situation of the three seems unbeatable. *The alien who wanted pyjamas as a souvenir* (endowed by the children with the name Dănuț), with his magical appearance, will prove to be a way to solve, at least for the moment, the longing that dominates them. With this text, Matei Vişniec demonstrates in a practical way one of the significant technical possibilities specific to drama for children. By inserting a dramatic device in the form of a character with supernatural attributes, he is able to undertake a conventional demonstration on a topical theme. Magical, serial events over the course of one night will lead to the resolution of the family's problems. Hailing from the planet Arret (meaning "stop" in French, a meaningful name choice to support the idea of frozen time), the alien stops time in its tracks, time-space distances become irrelevant, and the entire action is directed towards fulfilling the family's desire

for reunification. In exchange for three wishes granted, Danut will ask for three memories, as a reward for the countless memories that will be built as a result of the help. He offers the children lumps of time; materializations of time capable of distorting it.

In addition to the mask of the sociologist who chooses to analyse a large-scale phenomenon case by case, the author assumes a set of related masks. Through Eliza, the playwright explains for different understanding levels (even writing two such descriptions) seasonal work as an economic phenomenon, looking at the differences in the sizes of economies (like the different sizes of planets) that determine the earning power of individuals. By inserting an alien as a dramatic device, the thematic location in the area of science fiction and astronomy automatically appears. In this way, the order of the planets of the solar system is easily learned through song. By going out into the garden in the middle of the night and meeting various animal characters, endowed with the ability to speak, who describe their characteristics, children and the audience are introduced to the animal world. An important source of inspiration for the three-eyed, three-handed, three-legged alien Dănuț is Steven Spielberg's film *E.T. the extraterrestrial*, where Manuela's wish to see her mother for a few seconds by flying to Italy is reminiscent of the famous bicycle flight scene.

III. *The tale of the king angry at the clown* – *the mask of the political scientist analysing power, abuse, tyranny, and war; the sociologist observing the impact of video games on children's behavioural development and their new cultural consumption trends; the theatre man mixing theatrical convention with reality; the journalist questioning the audience about the origin of the red nose of the clown act.*

This political fresco by Matei Vișniec, reminiscent of the Romanian tradition of political dramatic fairy tales, such as those by Vasile Alecsandri in the 19th century or Victor Eftimiu in the 20th century, develops the author's technique of thematic and analytical combinatorics in order to offer the audience a vision of the nature of democracy and the social responsibility of politicians. The intergenerational transition of power raises the issue of the conflict between tradition and novelty. The young prince newly on the throne, exasperated by the clowns' endless ridiculous pranks and games, decides to get rid of them and condemns the old clown, the old king's advisor, to death. But a powerful institution like the clown in the kingdom of Alandala (meaning the kingdom „All over the place”) cannot be destroyed by a simple attempt at a paradigm shift; it is ingrained in the constitution and nature of the state. The young prince believes that the throne gives him absolute power, but no power is above the people (of clowns) who willingly give it to him. Like

Sigismundo in Calderon de la Barca's *Life is a Dream*, the prince of the kingdom of Alandala is tested by the king and put in a position of leadership to see if he is ready to take on this heavy burden and, like Sigismundo, proves himself, at first, tyrannical and inhumane. The situation of the clown and the theme of the clown, an obsessive image in Matei Vişniec's overall drama, play a key role in this text. The clown becomes a popular and rhinocerosizing factor, an exponent of power, of justice. Inspired by the Shakespearean clown/fool, he is the representation of the people in all its irrationality and of the essence of democracy in *The tale of the king angry at the clown*. This Shakespearean-inspired collective character is joined by another from the same background of dramatic archetypes. The cook, who has become a deputy prime minister, is a reinterpretation of the nurse character from *Romeo and Juliet*.

In the kingdom of Alandala, the binomial of king and clown holds the powers of state. The king-clown relationship, meaning the relationship between political authority and the people, is a relationship based on the principle of separation of powers in the state: checks, balances, and boundaries. The two poles of power, in which the existence of the latter legitimises that of the former, are well demarcated in terms of personality: "It is natural for a clown to be / Grumbling, boastful, / But kings are not allowed / To become clowns on the throne". (Vişniec, *Povestea regelui supărat pe clown*, 2022, p. 60). This characterisation is not limited to the comic comparison between a king and a clown, but to the political truth that populism is incompatible with legitimate authority. Under the auspices of the first mask, the political scientist Matei Vişniec analyses the relationship between power and the people, the danger of tyranny and authoritarianism, so relevant to today's socio-political context in which the two tendencies, democracy, and authoritarianism, are at open war. In the case of the young prince, the old clown will be replaced by an equal substitute, the clowness Lița, who combines her character as an exponent of the people with a feminine vision whose relationship with the prince leads to his rhinocerosization through the red nose that ends up being worn by the prince. The prince thus becomes in turn an exponent of the people, as an element torn from them to lead them. The dynamic construction of the relationship between the prince and the clowness Lița reaches its climax with the appearance of the children of this love, like a transition from a regime broken from society to one rooted in love for it. The separation between king and clown dissolves in this way.

The sociologist Matei Vişniec appears again this time to analyse another contemporary phenomenon with yet unquantifiable effects on children. The prince's inability to chase away the clowns and his refusal to continue in his role as ruler leads to his momentary retreat into the world of violent video games in

which the player deforests and destroys galaxies. The issue of video games and their effects on children is still uncertain. Studies talk about “concern that exposure to the extreme violence that is commonly found in video games can desensitize teens and young adults to such violence” (Grinspoon, 2020). It is precisely this desensitisation that Matei Vişniec tries to talk about in his portrayal of the Prince of Alandala. In the dramatic construction they become a cause of his attitude towards the outside, identifying the destructive possibilities without repercussions in video games with his violence towards clowns. It is important to note that this empirical analysis is not conclusive but starts from a possible causality. In addition to the desensitization effect, the author observes a shift in the cultural consumption tendencies of new generations, with video games taking the place of theatre or circus performances. The cook, the nurse, an exponent of the mother figure, tries to provoke the prince to give up this activity and become familiar with and accept the reality of his situation. However, the apparent authority in the virtual environment and the illusory possibilities of video games that make him a “king of video games” give him more pleasure than the hardships of real leadership can provide.

The appearance of the clowness Lița not only dynamites the prince’s relationship with the outside world and leads to his rhinocerization, but also the dramatic structure, revealing the theatre man Matei Vişniec who breaks the convention of the fourth wall and openly discusses the problem of the division of characters in terms of importance in the dramatic action. The Prince, Lița, the King, the Cook, the Old Clown, each one of them announces to the audience, at one point or another, that he is the main character of the play. The characters break the classical barrier between the dramatic and the real world, are aware of their situation and fight for primacy in the world to which they belong. Their struggle ends, however, with a conclusion that refers to the purpose of theatre in general. The conclusion they arrive at regarding the “main character” is that “Without a doubt / The main character / Is the audience in the hall / Just as for the soul / Laughter is a window / We have only one king / The audience in front of us” (Vişniec, *Povestea regelui supărat pe clown*, 2022, p. 97). The audience and its shaping, the ultimate mission of theatre, becomes the main character. The spectators are questioned by the characters of the text, who have become investigative journalists (another of the author’s masks), about the origin of the red nose, the element of rhinocerosisation, and in this search they leave the confines of the auditorium through projections.

The breaking of the limits of Aristotelian dramatic convention reaches its climax when the logical sequence of events is broken to signal a false improvisation: ‘The Old Clown: This scene is out of the show..’ / The King: It’s not written by anyone. / The Old Clown: If Mr. Vişniec is in the audience, he can confirm. /

The King: Mr. Vişniec! Are you in the audience?” (Vişniec, *Povestea regelui supărat pe clown*, 2022, p. 70). This fracture, which aims to transform the theatrical act into performance, a popular trend in the modern theatrical horizon, refers to the difference in nature between the two performing arts. The defining characteristic of performance is uniqueness, the unique and unrepeatably experience, but theatre is precisely about repeatability and keeping the act at a certain level reproduced at each performance. The proposed fake improvisation seemingly breaks these barriers by giving the man of the theatre Matei Vişniec the opportunity to break down walls and educate the audience about the coordinates and characteristics of these two different artistic species.

IV. *With the ship among the stars* – *the mask of the philosopher exploring the concept of “love at first sight”; of the mathematics teacher; of the educator of good morals.*

The use of the clown character in Matei Vişniec’s work varies significantly from one iteration to another. In the text previously discussed, for example, he is endowed with a dramatic and thematic charge of prime importance in the construction of the plot and its meanings. However, its use can also take the form of a breakdown of its mechanisms, gags, and tricks. Through the apparent destruction of magic, comic effects are in turn created. Even mimed failure is one of the clown’s means of expression. The illusionist Mumulino, the exponent of the clown, is absolved of the crucial role of the Shakespearean fool and remains only a father figure whose purpose is to entertain and educate. In *With the ship among the stars*, the issue of love at first sight plays the causal incident that prompts the whole series of lies and faulty magic that led to the interstellar voyage of the title. Pagalina, Mumulino’s niece, falls in love with Captain Tronito’s cap and together with her sister, Cincinela, infiltrates the city-sized ship. The two clownesses, similar in their playful style to Lița, however, lack the substance and her transformative and moralizing role. They only bring about the destruction of the uncle’s magical objects and the sabotage of the act for which he was hired. Matei Vişniec chooses to respond to Pagalina’s love with that of the captain, who in turn falls in love with her ankle. Through this seemingly implausible game of love, the author makes a substantial analysis of the irrationality of love and the possibilities of its birth. The antics of the two girls, endowed with playfulness and childishness, become opportunities for educating the audience. Under the guise of a teacher, the author teaches the audience simple mathematical operations of subtraction and addition. Dressed in the garb of a horse, each helper from the audience tries to maintain the proposed lie with the aim of saving Mumulino from shame. The audience is an integral part of the stage action being cast as a

collective adjuvant character. This game of learning is not just about maths but also about the right ethics for the spectator. A ringing phone in the hall provokes the rage of the illusionist who is eager to crack an egg on the perpetrator's head. A reversal of tradition occurs in this dramatic episode. Where the actors were greeted with eggs by spectators dissatisfied with the artistic act, in this case it is the spectators who are threatened with injury and humiliation.

V. *The Goat, the Little Goatling and the Goody She-wolf* – *the mask of the moral philosopher analysing the transfer of guilt through revenge, pondering the value of traditional folk wisdom in the modern age; of the psychologist talking about depression, fear, and obsession; of the journalist analysing the truth of facts.*

The rewriting of classic fairy tales in the key of updating them to modern sensibilities and to bring the subject closer to the 21st century audience is a trend also observable in drama for young audiences, “in the modern children’s theatre we watch this tendency for adaptation of popular fairy tales in the cutting off or change of scenes, episodes and characters”. (Malafantis & Ntoulia, 2011) In *The Goat, the Little Goatling and the Goody She-wolf*, Matei Vişniec starts from Ion Creangă’s fairy tale, continuing it, psychologizing it and combating it through a philosophical and moral analysis.

The text recounts the events following the goat’s revenge on the wolf that ate her children. The Romanian author, assuming the mask of a psychologist, observes the effects that the loss of the children and the murderous act in revenge have on the mother and the remaining child. The little goatling suffers from nightmares and fears typical of a post-traumatic experience. The goat is stricken with remorse that escalates to severe depression and paranoia. The two characters in turn become victims of their own actions. Psychological analysis is proposed as a mechanism for dramatic action from the introduction. The goatling comes out in front stage with a stool, like a member of a focus group, and begins to relate his experiences and traumas. This structure of testimony is maintained throughout most of the events, with the goatling breaking the sequence of actions in stages to reflect and comment. References to psychological treatment techniques go as far as having a comic effect. The goat goes to a psychoanalysis session in the bear’s office for the purpose of obtaining a “soul-cardiogram”. As in classic fairy tales, the characters’ journey is an initiatory one, making the transition from a difficult time in life to awareness and healing.

From the point of view of the philosopher, who seeks to add to and enhance the technique of psychologizing, he examines the morality of the act of revenge and the moral actuality of traditional folk wisdom invoking unwritten laws.

In this way, the story of the Goat becomes a reinterpretation of one of the earliest themes in the history of drama, that of the transition from the talion law, “a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye.” (Vişniec, *Capra, Iedul cel mic și Cumătra Lupoaică*, 2020, p. 13), still existing in the popular consciousness, and the objective judgment of the court. Matei Vişniec takes Aeschylus’ ideas from his *Oresteia* and, adapting the argument to the story of *The Goat with three goatlings*, offers a tangible demonstration of the consequences of revenge. As in the ancient tragedy, the Goat is haunted by manifestations of her remorse, similar to Aeschylus’ Furies. Orestes’ guilt at having spilled his own blood is preserved in the goat’s case as well. The murderous wolf is the godfather of the goatlings, thus becoming a spiritual relative. The refusal to accept the wolf’s apology from the burning pit reveals even more strongly the blinding force of hatred and revenge. The goat will engage in a healing process. Like Sophocles’ Antigone, she will fulfil ancestral traditions of caring for the dead. She will bury the wolf and build him an honourable grave to mourn him. The appearance of the Goody She-wolf and the friendship that develops between the two shows the possible finality of healing from guilt and breaking the chain of revenge.

In this dramatic, highly charged play, the last significant mask is that of the journalist who mediates and reports, alongside the goatling, the actions that have taken place. The journalist becomes a mediator not only between the facts and the spectator, but also between the characters of the action. The wolf burns in the pit and a journalist tries to record his last words and relate them to the goat while waiting for answers. He thus becomes a dynamic force in the action. The final scene turns on the problem of journalists and journalism itself. The goatling is left alone with the Goody She-wolf, two journalists have two different versions of the events that took place. Either the Goat has returned and found the kid ready to be cooked, or he sleeps peacefully while the Goody She-wolf prepares goodies for him. These two vastly different variants hint at the stakes contemporary journalism has in relation to the ethics of the craft. One of the two stories is false, and the choice of truth is thus left to the viewer. This open-endedness fits the key to modern demonstrations in which the concepts of right and wrong are eliminated to make room for nuance in the grey types of reality.

VI. *Special features*

The playwright’s masks, observed and analysed during the present demonstration, are by no means indisputable. A different reading of these texts may in turn give rise to the observation of other possible and valid masks. The analysis not being complete, there are still some elements worth mentioning and highlighting regarding Matei Vişniec’s drama for children from the point of view of thematic interdisciplinarity and of artistic means.

There are dramatic transitional motifs that evolve from text to text. It is important to note that these motifs generally make the connection between two texts, starting in one and finding a possible ending in another. One such example is the clown, which begins as a Shakespearean-inspired device only to be deconstructed to its comic essence and de-substantiated. Another motif is that of the heart whose symbol represents existence, but essentially for Matei Vişniec, it also represents time. The snowman, stripped of his corporeal form, remains only in the form of a heart to save him from death and the passage of time. For Eliza, Adrian and Manuela, the lumps of time received from Dănuţ are also in the form of hearts. However, in these two cases a third meaning of the motif of hearts as a dream can be observed. The snowman's heart is inserted into the soap bubble coming out of the Sun's pipe and rises to the sky to be saved in the form of a dream. The three children's time bubbles are meant to fulfil each other's dreams. The dream thus appears in both its meanings, as a fable and as a wish.

The role of the evening story is another recurring and important motif for the playwright. The dramatic assumption about the story is that when the child is not told a bedtime story, he is forced to create his own stories, thus creating the pretext for stage action. The absence of the goodnight story from the grandmother causes a whole series of events to take place during the night with the alien Dănuţ. In the case of the little kid, this omission leads to a frightening nightmare in which the wolf finds him and devours him. Thus, the idea of a necessity of the story emerges, without which the children's capacity for fabulation gives rise to potentiated substitutes.

Comic puns are a recurrent feature in the linguistic construction of the texts analysed. The most commonly used mechanism is that of fixed-root word chains constructed by letter derivations or agglutination, thus extraterrestrial becomes for Manuela repeatedly: extraterestru – extraterestru extrarestru; extrarexstru; extraterestru restru; extrateretextului; extrareştrii; terestruextra. Other examples would be, war is for bloodthirsty generals: război – bărzoi, zărboi; Mumulino initially defines her magic-destroying nieces who consider themselves clowns after a day's study as: Clowns / clownicomics / clownish clowns / clownish clowns; underclowns / clownish clowns / anticlownish clowns / unclownish clowns / clownish clowns. Through these, the author characterises characters, energises the action, educates, and entertains the audience.

Conclusion

The possibilities for interpreting Matei Vişniec's texts for children are varied. This analysis is an attempt to draw a unified line between the texts of a dramatic niche that is little addressed in the history of local drama. The present study is intended as an opener to the dialogue, without claiming to be a complete analysis. Seen through the key of interdisciplinarity of thematic and artistic means, the value of this set of dramatic texts is that, through their open and imaginative structure, they offer countless possibilities of adaptation by different directors eager to take on this type of performance. This possibility is observed and commented on in a comic way by the author himself through the captions of his texts. The comments dedicated to directors are recurrent. For example, on how to represent the extraterrestrial Dănuţ, the author tells the director: "The author of this play warns the director that he will get very angry if he does not respect the number of eyes, hands and feet attributed to the extraterrestrial... sorry, alien. Otherwise, the director can imagine it as he sees fit." (Vişniec, *Extraterestrul care îşi dorea ca amintire o pijama*, 2020, p. 20). Therefore, the author, aware of the infinite possibilities of interpretation and perversion of the original, tries to advise in turn on fixed elements.

As well as opening up the text to the possibilities of montage, they are sources of inspiration for possible research in the arts. This dramaturgy is an unlimited source for research into linguistics and the role of the word in the theatrical act, or for research into the dramaturgical mechanisms and the mix of conventions, the limits of the theatrical act. The value of Matei Vişniec's drama for children lies in this openness and invitation to philosophical, social, psychological and journalistic analysis, like the masks he himself wears.

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