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**DOCTORAL THESIS
HUMOR AND PLAYFULNESS IN SILVIU PURCĂRETE’S THEATRE
Summary**

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INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Topic

Given my background as a stage manager, I have worked with numerous directors and encountered a wide range of theatrical visions and worlds. Among them all, it is the world, working methods, and relationships with both people and the stage of director Silviu Purcărete that I have felt, and continue to feel, closest to my own. This is why, among the many possible directions, I have chosen to explore his artistic world more deeply, and from the rich repertoire of mechanisms that define his work, to analyze two particular elements — humor and playfulness — as well as the connection between them.

In my paper, I seek to identify the sources of humor and presumed playfulness present in Silviu Purcărete's productions, and to determine whether there exists a direct relationship between humor and playfulness in these performances. In other words, when we witness a humorous scene, does it sometimes carry a playful charge, and conversely, can humor be detected within playful solutions? Although this second proposition — the coexistence of humor and playfulness — may appear tangible, almost self-evident, I assume, based on my chosen focus, that this is not necessarily the case, not so straightforward.

The reason is that I look for playfulness in Purcărete's productions only insofar as it serves as a counterbalance to any form of cruelty. Based on the performances I am familiar with, I assume that there exists a particular method employed by the director that somehow offsets the violence present in the text of the play. I refer to this directorial approach — any solution that counterbalances manifestations of violence within the performance — as playfulness.

Thus, by discussing playfulness alongside onstage violence, its clear and direct connection with humor is, first and foremost, dissolved. Consequently, the question arises as to whether such a connection can exist under these circumstances at all. In absolute terms, humor and cruelty are very distant from one another. This is why, in the analytical phase of my research process, I address the two aspects — the humorous and the playful qualities of the same performances — in separate chapters.

It is also important to clarify here that, according to the analytical framework I have chosen — one element of which is *The Context of the Performance* — this context appears separately in both analyses but refers to the same thing. Clearly, one cannot speak of two distinct contexts within a single performance. What happens instead is that, from the available critical material, I have selected those descriptions that best reflect the tone relevant to each aspect: in the chapter on humor, the ones closest to a humorous atmosphere, and in the chapter on playfulness, those approaching a playful one. The textual relationships and the reviews themselves always make it evident that they refer to the same performance.

On the Applied Method and the Analyzed Material

The thesis is built upon the analysis of Silviu Purcărete's productions based on two guiding criteria: humor and playfulness. Some of the performances I attended live, while others I

watched in recorded form. I also personally took part in the staging of three of Purcărete's productions. In *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, I participated from the very beginning of the rehearsals as an assistant director, while I joined *Viktor, or Power to the Children* at a later stage of the process.

In addition to the performances analyzed in detail in this thesis, I have seen several other productions as well. The limitation in the number of works included here was determined primarily by constraints of length. Nevertheless, in certain sections, I refer to productions not analyzed in full where relevant. Overall, the only selection criterion for including a performance was its accessibility. Therefore, the thesis covers those productions directed by Purcărete between 1990 and 2022.

For the analytical framework, I chose the Philther method as a useful starting point, primarily due to its clarity and its relative ease of application in practice. I did not follow its rules strictly but rather worked inspired by its structure. The method is well-organized, highly practical, and operates with a limited number of analytical variants. From these, I selected three criteria, which I applied consistently across all performances analyzed: The context of the performance; The actor's work; Theatrical visuals and sound. It can therefore be said that my approach was partly modeled after the Philther method. In addition, I incorporated other methodological approaches such as comparative analysis, case study, observation, and personal participation in the creative process.

Alongside the Philther method, Patrice Pavis's work *Analyzing Performance* also provided valuable support and guidance for my research.

According to Árpád Kékesi Kun (Kékesi Kun, 2014: 28–32), the essence of the Philther method is as follows: Philther functions simultaneously as a research method and as an online platform presenting the results of that research. Moving beyond the one-dimensional scope of traditional manuals, it becomes a three-dimensional approach through the combination of photographs, videos, and texts. By incorporating both visual and textual documentation—often complemented by personal recollections—Philther focuses on the most influential theatrical productions of recent decades.

As for Pavis's *Analyzing Performance*, its structure, content, and methodological guidance can be partly interwoven with the Philther approach, while also complementing it. Pavis provides tools and perspectives that allow for a more nuanced exploration of certain analytical questions. Among other aspects, he offers detailed examinations of the actor's work, stage imagery, music and sound, space, makeup, and costume.

To all these theoretical and methodological components are organically connected my own stage experience and practical insights, the conclusions drawn from my direct involvement in theatrical work.

In terms of structure, the thesis begins with a table of contents and an introductory section, which includes the justification of the chosen topic, an outline of the research methods, and a description of the structure of the work. This is followed by the main chapters: I. Elements of Theatrical Performance Analysis; II. Humor in the Productions of Silviu Purcărete; III.

Playfulness in the Productions of Silviu Purcărete; IV. Elements that Strengthen and Connect Humor and Playfulness; Conclusions; Bibliography.

The first chapter consists of fifteen subchapters and serves as a general theoretical overview and summary, outlining the main principles and perspectives of performance analysis. This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the subsequent practical, research-oriented sections.

The second chapter begins with a general introduction to the concept of humor, offering definitions and presenting various theories related to it. It then proceeds to the detailed analysis of specific performances from the perspective of identifying humor. The backbone of the analysis is formed by the three criteria derived from the Philther method, further supported by additional approaches such as observation, comparison, and case study. This chapter examines twenty productions, some of which I saw live, while others I viewed in recorded form.

The third chapter opens with an introductory discussion of the concept of playfulness, providing its definitions and relevant theoretical frameworks. The main body of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of performances from the standpoint of playfulness. As in the previous chapter, the analysis follows the Philther model, complemented by additional methodologies. In this chapter, I analyze nineteen productions.

In the third and fourth chapters, each performance analysis is accompanied by a section titled “Highlights”, which contains my personal observations regarding the productions. Through these highlights, I aimed to provide practical examples that illustrate and support the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier, which were grounded in relevant literature. In other words, for each performance, I sought to present specific examples of humorous and playful elements, particularly in relation to the actor’s work and theatrical visuals and sound.

Since the identification and incorporation of these examples into the thesis are the results of my own research and observations, the number of bibliographic references naturally decreases within the “Highlights” subsections. However, the use of scholarly sources is not entirely absent from these sections. The “Highlights” subsections may at times give the reader an impression of fragmentation, which is natural, as their purpose—consistent with their title—is to highlight characteristic scenes relevant to the research, rather than to present a continuous, linear narrative.

The fourth chapter constitutes a complex section of the thesis, divided into eight subsections. Its complexity lies in the fact that it partly synthesizes the findings of the previous chapters, while also introducing new elements that support the established hypotheses. These newly incorporated aspects represent the most defining characteristics of the viewed, analyzed, or occasionally referenced performances — features that also embody the distinctive traits of Purcărete’s directorial style.

The final part of the thesis is the Bibliography, which includes the works cited and those that have shaped the intellectual framework of this research. It is organized into four sections: Monographs; Studies published in edited volumes; Articles and studies published in periodicals; Online sources

Within the relevant chapters, the analyzed performances are presented in chronological order according to their year of direction.

I. THE ELEMENTS OF THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

I.1. The Theatrical Sign

The signs largely depend on the person who understands them or attributes meaning to them. Therefore, signs can also be classified according to who they mean something to. Generally speaking, in representations, statements correspond to symbols. Symbols are meaningful statements, and the signs are the names contained within them. The names, or signs, merely denote; it is the symbols that possess meaning. Natural signs lie outside social convention, while artificial ones make clear the socially dependent nature of signs. In theatre semiotics, signs are generally divided into three categories: iconic, indexical (pointing), and symbolic signs. These three seemingly distinct categories in fact form a single artistic reality. A balanced combination of them is one of the measures of a successful performance. As for theatrical language, two closely related layers can be identified: the verbal and the nonverbal layers. The former is linked to spoken language and primarily refers to the text created by the playwright and performed by the actor on stage.

I.2. The Description of Space

Since space, time, and action are practically inseparable, they must be analyzed together. Their combination proves more tangible than analyzing an actor's gestures, voice, or the rhythm of their diction, which are known to be elements of an intangible presence. As for the trio of space–time–action, its components can each be analyzed relatively easily. The difficulty lies in observing how they influence one another. However, this is precisely how they must be studied, since none exists without the other two.

When we want to define any element of this trio, it must always be considered in relation to the other two.

The space-time is simultaneously concrete—the space and time of the theatrical performance—and imaginary, representing a fictional place and temporal plane. As a result, the action can sometimes be concrete, sometimes imaginary. Another term for the stage is the space where the *mise en scène* takes place. Speaking of theatrical space, two kinds of experience are possible: empty space and invisible space.

Objective space is a location that can be filled with all sorts of objects. It is easily experienced visually and therefore relatively easier to describe. Pavis divides this space into three categories.

The stage space is the visible playing area along with the connected scenery, that is, the area of movement for both performers and technical staff. In contemporary practice, it extends to include the auditorium and essentially the entire theatre building.

The liminal space is difficult to define due to its permeability. Theoretically, it refers to the area that separates the auditorium from the stage, and the stage from the scenery. This space can be delineated using footlights or other lighting techniques.

Objective space is easily accessible and interpretable, so describing it poses no difficulties. It could also be called the “clear stage,” as it is in full harmony with the story being presented. To interpret this type of space, however, it is also necessary to recognize that the performance could take place in a city square, or within a theatre building, in the lobby or another room.

Gestural space is created by the actor through their presence, stage positioning, and movement. Gestural space is in constant transformation, as it is generated and radiated by the actor’s body. Gestural space has several characteristics (Pavis, 2003).

Every theatrical work created for performance communicates, in some form, about the space in which its action occurs. This is called dramatic space. Dramatic space refers to the playwright’s use of space. In a given play, dramatic space involves the study of space as a semiotic system. Unlike scenographic or architectural space, which are examined from a static perspective, dramatic space as a system of signs is a dynamic area of analysis, as it attempts to study the mechanisms of space from one scene to the next (Issacharoff, 1981: 211–224).

From the perspective of space analysis, textual space is particularly important. Textual space refers to the viewer’s own mode of relating to the space (Grigely, 2011: 119).

The depiction of a dream or a hallucination represents internal space. In such cases, the space detaches from reality, making the mechanisms of the dream visible. This phenomenon is characteristic of Noh theatre, where the performance on stage evokes a hallucination or a dream (Kokubu, 1984: 34).

I.3. The Object

Any tool or item that an actor can move or hold in their hand is considered a **prop**. It is not identical to the concept of a *stage property* (kellék).

Stage properties are tied to specific actions.

To avoid the pitfalls arising from the vast variety of objects, the number of categories used to classify stage elements should be limited. Objects are generally categorized from the shown object to the evoked object—that is, from materiality toward spirituality.

Objects may retain their original form and be used according to their original purpose. However, they can also be adapted to meet the needs of the performance: they may be resized, have their proportions altered, or take on a stylized form.

Analyzing objects or tracking their stage journey only makes sense if it is connected to the overall performance. This approach guides the description and reports on their symbolic use or transformation. Thinking in terms of unity allows the tracing of an object’s trajectory.

Like space, objects often function as a unifying system. Careful analysis of them can thus illuminate the story.

I.4. The Costume

One of the keys to a successful theatrical performance is creating illusion. Through the character, a new world comes into being, and costumes are an important component of this world. A well-designed costume allows the actor to approach the role effectively and to portray the character convincingly. The basic requirement of a costume is that it does not restrict the actor, while remaining faithful to the script and the director's vision.

Typically, the script provides the costume designer with sufficient references. At the same time, the designer has their own ideas about the costumes, which can all be overridden by the director's concept (Crist, 2014: 4–30).

Among the factors determining costume design, the most important is the character's physical form. The script, the director's concept, the historical period, and the geographical setting define general parameters, which the designer interprets to determine how the costume should appear in broad terms (Smith & Smith, 2012: 5).

The major roles of costumes within a performance can be grouped as follows (Pavis, 2003: 155):

They characterize the social environment, the historical period in which the events occur, and the style, while also reflecting personal preferences.

Costumes effectively indicate the dramaturgical circumstances of the action and serve as tools for identifying or concealing a character.

The costume and its wearer are inseparable. The costume carries the body just as much as the body carries the costume. A well-designed costume greatly aids the actor in finding their character's identity. Conversely, an improperly made costume can alter the character's stage appearance and mislead the interpretation.

There is a direct relationship between the costume and the performance space. The costume often functions as a real moving set, a set reduced to human scale, or a costume-set hybrid (Banu, 1981: 23).

Some general characteristics of the costume are:

A costume serves as a signifier that can correspond to every element of the theatrical production as a whole.

From the costume's perspective, it can be observed that it uses the body to construct and fill a space.

Depending on the quality of the design, the costume can embody a particular historical period.

The costume becomes almost one with the actor's body. It participates in the action by adhering closely to the actor or by extending the energy they radiate. However, in unfortunate cases, the costume and actor can follow entirely separate paths.

The costume and stage lighting are constantly interrelated. The costume has the ability to capture and reflect light.

1.5. The Face Painting

Face painting is much more concerned with the body than with the soul, as it always conceals something, making the body more "marketable," so to speak. However, unlike masks, costumes, or props, face painting is not an extension of the body. It functions as a filter, a sensitive membrane, lying closest to the actor's body. It can assist the actor most effectively, yet at the same time, it is sometimes what reveals them most.

We speak of the autonomous work of face painting when it no longer serves to highlight or reinforce the realistic traits of a character. From that moment on, face painting becomes an

aesthetic system that obeys only its own rules. This includes, for example, the grotesque face painting characteristic of European avant-garde techniques. Face painting should ideally go beyond its role of highlighting or decorating; it should become a form of body art.

I.6. The Characteristics and Role of Emotions on Stage

During an actor's performance, emotions are present on four levels. The first level is that of personal emotions, which stem from the actor's everyday experiences. The second level consists of the so-called task-emotions, as previously mentioned. The third level develops during rehearsals, when the actor forms an internal model of the character. The emotions brought to life at this stage are already deliberate. On the fourth level, the character's emotions appear as they are visible on stage. Here, the model is based on everyday emotions, and their presentation is similar, but only intended to create the illusion of feeling, rather than representing genuine emotions.

Mastering the nonverbal language used as a tool for actor self-expression requires not only an experimental approach but also scientific knowledge that reveals and decodes the psychological and physical mechanisms underlying this language.

I.7. The Actor's Work

A description of an actor's work is somewhat easier to give from a **general perspective**, one that takes into account both Western and Eastern modes of performance. This allows the combination of psychological traditions, improvisation, and free expression with the technical knowledge required in the East, where highly codified and strictly defined forms dominate. An actor conveys a character through actions, text, and gestures according to certain rules, rather than imitating a real person.

When identifying the components and phases of an actor's work, it is important to consider that an actor following the psychological tradition builds the role according to a system. They "score" the sounds and movements, upon which behavioral and verbal signs are layered. Based on this overall composition, the audience perceives a real person on stage. A naturalistic actor presents themselves as a real person, lending their body, appearance, voice, and sensitivity to the role, which makes it easy for an outsider to identify with the character (Stanislavski, 2000: 55).

Methods for analyzing acting are not uniform. Across periods, the prescribed aesthetics of acting changes, always positioning itself in contrast to the aesthetics of the previous era and defining itself by distinct characteristics.

What are the simplest features that define acting? These can be physical or emotional in nature. Acting—the art of performance—involves pretense, simulation, representation, and personification (Kirby, 1972: 3–15).

Acting emerges at the point when emotions are “projected” for the audience. This does not mean that the speaker is insincere or does not believe what they are saying. It simply means that the actor selects and projects a particular element of the character—namely, the emotions—toward the audience.

A performer can act even while remaining still. A motionless performer can convey certain attitudes and emotions that are active, even if no physical action occurs.

The actor constructs the role from small fragments, which together create the illusion of a complete character. The same applies to improvisation: the constantly segmented and reworked details come together into a coherent whole.

Analyzing an actor’s work only makes sense when it is placed within the context of the production as a whole. Examining the details alone is meaningless if the results of this work are not visible in the overall performance.

Gesture analysis and theatrical communication are crucial building blocks for understanding a performance.

When analyzing gestures, it is important to remember that this group is only one element of a production. Gestures have three main functions: conceptual, figurative, and evocative.

I.8. The Actor’s Score and Sub-Score

The concept of the actor’s **score** is most closely associated with Stanislavski.

The score, with its many components—gesture, facial expression, voice, gaze, and others—ultimately refers only to the actor’s **external appearance**. However, this entire external

layer rests on an underlying, invisible layer, upon which the actor's performance is fully built. This underlying layer consists of a set of factors related to different situations, as well as the artistic and technical knowledge that the actor relies on when interpreting their own score.

The **sub-score** contains countless small elements, most of which are hidden from view. These belong to the actor's inner self, arise from personal experience, and can be utilized in the moment of creation. The components are practically immeasurable. Nevertheless, the sub-score participates in the actor's preparation, containing elements that exist before they are expressed. It follows that the sub-score is fixed and established, but does not necessarily correspond to an equally fully developed external score.

I.9. The Character

The concept of the **character** is fundamental in the realm of theatre. Its definition is not straightforward, as attitudes toward it vary widely. Some intellectual currents maintain that the character and the author are one and the same, while others view the character as an entity independent of the author. This latter approach greatly facilitates objective analysis.

There are numerous definitions of the character. Miklós Bács suggests that, for analytical purposes, the concept can be divided into **dramatic character** and **stage character**. The dramatic character is the creation of the playwright, while the stage character is the invention of the actor. The outlining of the dramatic character is largely influenced by the reader's imagination. The stage character, by contrast, is a real, physical phenomenon brought into existence by the actor (Bács, 2007[1]: 45–46).

The dramatic character carries countless possibilities, which at the moment of reading are directed in a certain way and become defining. It is timeless, as it exists in the imagination of the current reader. The stage character, on the other hand, is distinctly present and actual due to its physical reality. The stage character is the interpretation of the dramatic character.

I.10. The Role of Music, Noise, and Silence in the Performance

Voice analysis has both an objective and a subjective branch. Relying on contemporary technical capabilities, objective voice analysis has become possible, which evaluates parameters measurable with instruments. This branch includes tonal variations, speech frequency, pitch, and volume. Elements most closely linked to the actor's individuality are voice intensity and timbre.

The subjective elements of voice analysis, precisely because of their subjective nature, are the hardest to identify and describe. Yet they are the most important for analyzing the actor's work and the overall direction of a performance.

Pauses can be highly expressive, as they always serve a dramaturgical purpose. Observing the rhythm of speech also reveals the rhythm of breathing. The placement of emphasis within sentences highlights their true meaning. Examining the voice can reveal how the actor transforms into a character.

In the case of music, only its function within the direction and the performance matters. Unlike speech, music does not represent the world.

Music can have many sources. With current technical possibilities, it can originate from any part of the space and completely fill the area available to it.

Music is a dual phenomenon in stage analysis. On one hand, its interpretation and notation are very difficult because it lacks spatial form. On the other hand, rhythm, as the fundamental element, often underpins the construction of space and time, as well as the other elements of the performance.

I.11. The Rhythm

In analysis, the unique rhythm of each system must be taken into account. The effects of speech are generally better understood through paired opposites: speech–silence; slowness–speed; lack of emphasis–emphasis; uniformity–highlighting; relaxation–tension. Breathing can be examined through the rhythm, length, and interconnection of breaths during speech, while the functions of pauses must also be considered.

Generally, when discussing rhythm, two concepts should be distinguished: rhythm itself and tempo. Unlike tempo, rhythm is not connected to changes in speed. It is related to emphasis. Rhythm refers to a duration whose elasticity is ensured by the director.

I.12. The Text

Since the emergence of *mise en scène* theatre, analysis must extend to the performance as a whole, because representation is not merely a byproduct of the text. It is essential to distinguish between the original, printed text and what is heard in performance.

There are significant differences between the read and the performed text. The read text takes shape only in the imagination and does not bring a human voice to life. The performed text, spoken by the actor, immediately generates visual, gestural, and prosodic signs. Here, the audience is given a fairly precise interpretation, which excludes other possibilities. At the same time, the audience may experience a variant they had not imagined while reading.

The performed text can be divided into two parts: one that is only heard, and one that is both heard and seen.

I.13. Text and Performance

Generally speaking, the basic assumption is that the *mise en scène* derives directly from the text. The stage actualizes the elements contained in the text. This is called the text-centered view of directing. In this approach, for the performance to exist and be performable, it is tied to the text. There is another view, different from this, which is called the stage-centered view. Here, the text, music, set design, and acting develop autonomously and only intersect and merge at the end. In this case, the text no longer plays a central role; it is merely one element among many. It is also possible that the text is developed during the rehearsal process, or is only turned to at the end of rehearsals. In such cases, it makes no sense to compare the two. It may happen that the text serves as a so-called verbal decoration. In such instances, it cannot be read, as it consists of sounds, music, and noise that form no coherent meaning. The interpretation of the text's intrinsic value changes. It may happen that today something is readable that was once incomprehensible, or vice versa. Likewise, it is possible that something will only become interpretable in the future.

I.14. The Type of mise en scène

There are many types of theatrical directing. From a historical classification, they can be: naturalist, realist, symbolist, expressionist, epic, or theatricalized.

Autotextual mise en scène attempts to remain within the boundaries of the stage and, as much as possible, does not refer to the reality outside it.

Ideotextual mise en scène, on the contrary, directs attention to the social or psychological world in which it takes place and, for certain purposes, loses its texture and autonomy.

Intertextual mise en scène provides a transition between the first two.

According to Thies Lehmann, there is also metaphorical mise en scène, which functions as a metaphor for the dramatic text. Scenographic mise en scène treats the stage as an independent language. This is a mise en scène with absolute autonomy and its own stage language.

I.15. The Spectator

Someone who conducts a performance analysis is, in effect, in the position of the spectator. The spectator receives a whole, the performance itself.

The text that is spoken on stage counts as the interpreted text. The text becomes material through the actor's performance, clothed in voice and gesture.

The audience can display several modes of identification. In associative identification, the analyst accepts all points of view. Admirative identification involves the character being admired unconditionally. In sympathetic identification, the hero is still impressive, but now measurable by human standards. Cathartic identification evokes a violent emotion and leads to emotional purification. Finally, ironic identification actually signifies a critical distance, which is also well-known as the alienation effect. Critical distance is a very delicate factor, because some degree of identification must also be present.

II. HUMOR IN SILVIU PURCĂRETE'S PERFORMANCES

Humor is an everyday phenomenon that appears in all areas of life.

On one hand, humor signifies a creative situation; on the other hand, it conveys what is entertaining. It expresses the comic, the ridiculous, the mocking, and the witty.

Different humor styles are generally divided into four groups: aggressive, self-deprecating, relationship-building, and self-enhancing humor styles.

Humor can manifest in many forms on stage. Below is a brief overview of those identified in Silviu Purcărete's performances.

A clown's joke aims to provoke laughter or entertain the audience. The actor creates exaggerated, absurd, or funny situations, often at their own expense, and sometimes at the expense of others.

Burlesque derives from the Italian word *burla*—joke—which over time has referred to various types of performance. The humor of burlesque is essentially a modern version of the ancient *mimos* and the medieval farce, relying on distortions, impossible situations, and crude theatrical and linguistic devices. (Hont, 1969: 77–78)

A gag refers to a humorous visual or verbal idea, punchline, or joke. It involves an unexpected twist or absurd situation, usually not directly related to the play's plot. In another context, a gag can also mean a suddenly devised solution to overcome a challenge. (Szinonimak.hu, n.d.)

The primary purpose of mockery is to belittle, insult, or ridicule another person. Mocking provokes confusion, discomfort, or even anger in the other party. (Szinonimak.hu, n.d.)

On stage, the grotesque produces a humorous effect through the mixing of extremely contrasting elements and the power of the unusual. (Hont, 1969: 165)

In irony, the speaker says the opposite of what their true opinion is. Thus, irony is essentially a form of hidden, subtle, and witty mockery. (Juhász, 1989: 603)

A caricature presents the external features or character traits of a person or a group of people in a humorous way by means of deliberate exaggeration, overstatement, or distortion. (Hont, 1969: 220)

The central element of the comic is the sudden revelation of a latent contradiction. At the moment of its depiction, the story already belongs to the past, which makes critical reflection possible. The cruelly critical form of the comic is satire. (Hont, 1969: 236–237)

In this chapter, I analyze twenty performances in terms of identifiable humorous scenes. The analysis of each performance is divided into two parts.

First, I list the sources of humor identified in the original text and in the performance directed by Silviu Purcărete, as recognized in the scholarly literature. This part, for each performance, includes the subheadings: *The Context of the Performance*, *The Actor's Work*, and *Theatrical Visuals and Sound*.

The second part is titled *Highlights* and reflects my own work, in which I list the humorous scenes that I have identified in the performance.

The analyzed performances are:

Ubu Roy with scenes from Macbeth; The Decameron 645; Pilafs and the Scent of Donkey; Pantagruel's Sister-in-law; Twelfth Night, or What You Will; Waiting for Godot; Scapin the Trickster; Gianni Schicchi; The King is Dying; A Carnival Adventure; Italian Straw Hat; Victor, or Power to the Children; As You Like It; Moliendo Café; Julius Caesar; The Scarlet Princess; The Tragedy of Man; A Midsummer's Night Dream; Macbett; The Cenci Family

II.21. Primary Conclusions on the Humor Detectable in Silviu Purcărete's Performances

In my analyses, I understand humor as the presentation of a situation, expression, or idea in such a way that it generates amusement and provokes laughter.

Based on the list of performances mentioned so far, which includes both tragedies and comedies, it can be said that the use and presence of humor is generally characteristic of Silviu Purcărete's theater. Humor can be found even in his tragedies, which feature the largest number of victims, while in comedies, one or another more ruthless scene supports and amplifies the emerging humor.

From the analyzed performances, it can be concluded that the most common source of humor is the unexpected. Situational and character-based comedy occurs most frequently, but depending on the possibilities offered by the text, the director regularly makes use of linguistic humor as well.

Humor is primarily linked to the actor's work, but sometimes it results from special musical effects, unusual use of the set, or exaggerations in the costume. Humor often arises from the size, quantity, or manner of use of various objects and props.

Regarding the types of humor, variety is the dominant characteristic. The performances include wit and more restrained gags. Laughter often arises from the grotesque, ironic, or, at times, even satirical scenes.

Humor in the performances also frequently derives from quotations. The director occasionally refers to his own previous productions or to a well-known film.

In tragedies, humor primarily serves playfulness, softening the edge of cruelty and offering the audience a brief moment of relief.

III. PLAYFULNESS IN SILVIU PURCĂRETE'S PERFORMANCES

Numerous experiments and observations confirm that the more intelligent a species is, the more sophisticated its play, and the more likely playful behavior is to be present even in adult individuals. There is no consensus among behavioral researchers, however, on the actual role of play. Yet no one questions that human playfulness is closely connected to the degree of happiness.

As countless existing—and indeed functional—theories show, separating play from other activities, defining it precisely, and delineating its boundaries is a difficult task. There is no single, universally accepted definition. These differences stem from the varying theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, some common characteristics can be observed, such as:

Play exists for its own sake.

Ultimately, any activity can become play.

Play is voluntary and instinctive.

Play is unlimited in time and space.

It is an activity that brings joy.

Play is a source of joy when the player discovers various factors of happiness in it. Such factors include the exercise of function, effectiveness (“I do it myself”), rhythm, imitation, being someone else, random elements, adventure, transformation, illusion, and the pleasure of acquiring information. It also includes the joy of encountering humor or elements of diminution or exaggeration.

The nature of play can be described along certain lines, and analyzing these lines shows that the fundamental characteristics have generally held true for humans who play throughout history. However, as far as the 21st century is concerned, signs indicate that, as in many other areas, significant changes have taken place in play and playfulness.

Taking into account the words of Miklós Jakobovits, it is evident that traces of these changes can also be found in stage playfulness. Comparing the world before and after the turn of the millennium, he states that the play of our century is fundamentally different from that of the 20th century or even earlier centuries. The play of the period just behind us was characterized by immersion in mood, a certain lack of deliberation, a kind of magic in which one could feel the uplifting effect of catharsis.

From the perspective of the relationship between playfulness and the stage, it may be most useful to keep in mind that the aesthetic theories of play and playfulness consider the criteria for

play and for art to be the same—that is, both are activities for their own sake, in a sense, purposeless. Play is a free action, uninfluenced by any prior events, containing no necessity. It steps outside the framework of everyday life, becoming something different from ordinary experiences.

In this chapter, I analyze eighteen performances from the perspective of scenes identified as playful. The analysis of each performance is structured in two parts.

The first part presents the playful aspects identified in the original text and in the performance directed by Silviu Purcărete, based on the specialized literature. This section includes the subchapters: *The Context of the Performance*, *The Actor's Work*, and *Scenic Image and Sound*.

The second part, titled *Highlights*, reflects my own analytical work, listing the playful scenes that I have identified within the performances.

The analyzed performances are: *Ubu Rex* with Scenes from *Macbeth*; *Titus Andronicus*; *The Decameron* 645; *Pantagruel's Syster-in-law*; *The Twelfth Night, or Wath You Will*; *Waiting for Godot*; *Scapin the Trickster*; *Gianni Schicchi*; *The King is Dying*; *Victor, or Power to the Children, As You Like It*, *Moliendo Café*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Scarlet Princess*, *Tragedy of Man*, *The Peasant and Death*, *Macbett*, *The Cenci Family*.

III.20. Primary Conclusions on the Playfulness Observable in Silviu Purcărete's Performances

When I discuss playfulness from the perspective raised in this dissertation—that is, as a means of counterbalancing any form of cruelty—it must be emphasized in connection with Silviu Purcărete's performances that the director does not shy away from violent scenes. These range from the enactment of simple bodily harm, which can be seen in numerous performances, to the practical realization of Artaud's theater of cruelty. A notable example is the 2022 performance of *The Cenci Family*, but the theater of cruelty also appears in much earlier productions, such as the 1992 *Titus Andronicus*.

In these performances, acts of cruelty arise from the narratives used and are organically integrated into the sequence of events, and therefore are never gratuitous. Through the use of playfulness as a means of discharging the negative charge, the violent scenes within the plot gain meaning, and their unmanageability simultaneously dissolves. In this way, catharsis is often achieved.

Regarding direct acts of cruelty, gradations can be observed. Their playful treatment sometimes even borders on humor. In performances depicting the horrors of war or the tragedy of revenge, irreversible death naturally appears.

It is important to emphasize that when cruelty is presented not in a stylized form, but in its natural, so-called unmediated state, moderation and a certain restraint in stage imagery are characteristic.

The playful solutions employed by the director mostly function as warnings, indicating that constructive human values and the genius of destruction coexist.

IV. ELEMENTS THAT ENHANCE AND CONNECT HUMOR AND PLAYFULNESS

IV.1. Some General Characteristics of Silviu Purcărete's Theater from Which Humor and Playful Solutions Emerge, and That Connect Them

In the director's performances, detaching the text from its primary source leads to free associations and chains of thought.

From the perspective of the text, there are performances in which the work mentioned in the title or referred to elsewhere exists only as a pretext. Such cases provide a good reason for the director to stage one of his favorite theatrical solutions: the ritual. Examples include the ritual of eating, the question of the ritual of death, and the ritual of cruelty.

Visuality plays a major role in the director's performances. The key is abstraction from reality. Dreamlike elements give the director the opportunity to playfully present inevitable events with tragic outcomes. Humor mostly arises from exaggerated images.

It is important to mention the influence of postdramatic theater and commedia dell'arte, both of which leave a strong imprint on Silviu Purcărete's theater and often contribute to humorous and playful solutions.

The director frequently makes use of technical possibilities in his performances.

Animals often appear on Purcărete's stage, sometimes fulfilling humorous roles, other times playful ones.

Finally, it is worth mentioning a phenomenon that the director frequently employs in his productions: symmetry.

IV.2. A directorial solution based on the 'theatre within the theatre' concept

The theater-within-the-theater, also known as metatheater, is a directorial device in which a theatrical performance or play appears within another stage performance.

In the body of work by Silviu Purcărete that I have studied, several Shakespeare productions can be found, and in each of them the theater-within-the-theater device is present. Generally

speaking, when the director resorts to this device, it sometimes manifests as humor and sometimes reinforces playfulness.

Another important milestone in the application of the theater-within-the-theater method is the works of Molière.

Moving forward in time, *The Tragedy of Man* serves as an example of theater-within-the-theater.

After a period of relative neglect, the method is once again frequently employed in contemporary theater. Metatheater is not merely a simple dramaturgical trick, but a complex artistic tool that carries multilayered meaning and can serve various purposes.

IV.3. Repetitive Motifs in Silviu Purcărete's Performances

Many elements are repeated in Silviu Purcărete's performances. These can be broken down to the level of props, or they can be linked to the actor's work or the stage presence of various living beings. Self-quotation means that stage scenes, situations, formations, or props from one performance are transferred to another.

Regarding space, it should be noted at the outset that in Purcărete's productions, it is by no means limited to the stage. Very often, it includes the auditorium to varying degrees, and sometimes even the theater lobby or mezzanine.

Breaking down the issue of set design into smaller parts, several elements reappear in multiple performances. The makeup table is a basic element of the theater-within-the-theater device.

A frequently recurring set element is the use of the prompt corner or the space beneath the stage to indicate hell.

A somewhat special, yet fairly common prop in his productions is rain. Sometimes it cleanses, other times it worsens an already unfavorable situation.

Regarding the set, it is important to note that in Purcărete's performances, the set not only changes but its dismantling or collapse is often part of the performance.

In several productions, the action begins only after lengthy preparation.

A frequently recurring phenomenon is that characters interact with the audience.

In the actor's work, elements from commedia dell'arte, such as lazzi, appear repeatedly. Many performances provide examples of jokes, gags, and choreographed fights.

Humor related to the actor's work occurs when a character is present on stage who is not part of the current scene.

Special humor arises when the director references pop culture.

Beyond actors, the director often brings other living beings onto the stage. Animals appear in many of his performances.

In line with the rich musical world characteristic of Silviu Purcărete's methods, instruments are visible or audible in many productions.

Many performances feature utensils, umbrellas, suitcases, bags, radios, and tin gasoline cans.

Objects considered dangerous due to their function also appear on stage in Purcărete's performances. Examples include chainsaws.

IV.4. The Collective Character in Silviu Purcărete's Performances

Since Silviu Purcărete's numerous productions often feature groups functioning as a unit—either in the form of a classical chorus or as a crowd shaping or commenting on events—it is essential to mention the phenomenon of the ensemble cast.

It can be observed that in such productions, the crowd wears identical, nondescript, and uniform costumes. At the same time, the movement of the crowd is generally coordinated to music, or, in the absence of music, to a rhythm determined by the spoken words.

The chorus or ensemble of extras forms a colorful unit while also projecting strength.

The key to the success of mass scenes lies in the precise coordination of the performing ensemble. Meticulous attention to detail is extremely important, so that every participant focuses on their role as if they were playing the lead.

IV.5. Gender swapping on stage

Cross-dressing and androgyny are very old phenomena, present in everyday life, rituals, and even in theater.

It is generally an interesting observation that when men play women, it is usually imbued with humor. The reverse is not necessarily true: when women play men, it does not automatically generate humor, and the essence of the character can be conveyed effectively without exaggeration.

Portraying the opposite sex questions norms that are often assumed to be fixed. Humor, or sometimes playfulness, also manifests in this artistic approach.

Alongside long-standing traditions, in some cases the non-swapping of roles is considered a modern theatrical device. In contemporary theater, this practice usually focuses on one or two key roles, based on a carefully developed principle. However, it is also not uncommon for a director to choose a man to play a female role, or a woman to play a male role, simply because the actor is deemed most suitable for that specific character.

IV.6. On Stage Eating

Eating on stage, and sometimes even cooking, is very common in Silviu Purcărete's productions.

The question arises as to what the actors actually consume on stage. In the case of alcoholic beverages, it is always tea, fruit syrup water, or non-alcoholic beer. Coffee is now usually real coffee. These practices, independent of the director, are generally characteristic of any performance in which a drink must be consumed.

However, when it comes specifically to eating, there are significant differences. In Purcărete's productions, eating is never a mere formality, in the sense of being "acted out." Real food is consumed genuinely. Eating is a very important component of his performances, and the director does not attempt to avoid the naturalistic effects that come with it—such as smells and aromas.

IV.7. Oversized Objects

Silviu Purcărete's productions are characterized not only by numerous crowd scenes but also by the presence of a large number of undersized or oversized objects. Oversized objects are one of the director's defining stylistic features. They have a strong attention-grabbing effect,

as they emphasize and highlight. They are the main means of staging the contrast between grandeur and insignificance. Through this contrast, he successfully expresses irony and the difference between appearance and reality. Similarly, undersized objects also have a strong attention-grabbing effect.

IV.8. Humor and Playfulness Related to Music

For music to be humorous, it must be somehow surprising in nature, and the element of the unexpected must be present. Many forms of humor—such as clowning, parody, wit, satire, burlesque, and caricature—can also be found in music. What sets musical humor apart, however, is its unique feature: its exclusive source can be music itself.

Musical humor can manifest in many ways. One of the simplest is imitation of sounds from nature or other familiar sources.

Another fundamental element of musical humor is tempo.

Satire represents a very distinctive segment of musical humor. It can itself be divided into subcategories, such as caricature, parody, and burlesque. Whatever the type, its basic elements are exaggeration and ridicule.

Parody is also part of musical humor, usually involving the mockery of a serious genre.

In musical burlesque, the joke comes at the expense of something or someone.

A common device in burlesque is the use of inappropriate rhythm choices.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the aims was to trace the origins of humor. Secondly, I hypothesized the existence of a directorial method that the director employs to counterbalance the violence inherent in the script or story, which I have termed playfulness. Thirdly, I sought to determine whether a connection exists between humor and playfulness in the performances.

During the analyses, directorial tools gradually emerged that could be grouped according to shared characteristics. By the conclusion of the analyses, it was possible to classify these tools into certain categories, and the resulting framework revealed how humor arises, confirmed the existence of the hypothesized playfulness and its nature, and clearly illustrated the relationship between humor and playfulness.

First, some more general characteristics of Silviu Purcărete's theater emerged, from which humor, playful solutions, and the connection between them arise.

The first of these is visibility. One of the defining elements of the director's productions is the visual aspect, which itself consists of multiple components.

There are numerous props, which almost by themselves fill the stage. Not in the sense of clutter, but they are arranged in the playing space so that they are almost always within arm's reach.

The use of technical equipment can become a source of humor or playfulness because these are not merely tools—they are an organic part of the stage action.

Humor related to the set most often arises from its collapse.

Silviu Purcărete frequently employs the device of ritual. In the director's productions, the question of ritual is not limited to eating; the ritual of death often appears.

The ritual of cruelty is also common, which becomes playful precisely through its depiction. In other words, the director does not sanitize cruelty, but places it in context, thereby softening its edge.

Many productions incorporate elements associated with the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*. Characters reflect recognizable types from this genre, and the scenes feature jokes reminiscent of the *zanni*.

The director returns with considerable regularity to the theater-within-the-theater device in his productions.

Many elements are repeated across Purcărete's works.

Crowd scenes are very common, sometimes humorous, sometimes playful. It is at this level that the encounter between humor and playfulness is most perceptible.

Collective characters appear with notable frequency. In several productions, the so-called protagonist–crowd axis is observable. Due to the dynamic nature of this relationship, it brings humor, playfulness, and the blending of the two onto the stage.

Cross-dressing and role-swapping are mostly presented in a humorous manner, sometimes neutral, and occasionally with a playful effect.

Another conclusion concerns the presence of ritual, perhaps more frequent than any other element.

Given the director's particular relationship with music, it is also necessary to discuss the humor and playfulness associated with the music heard in his productions.

Musical humor can manifest in many ways.

There are numerous examples of playful solutions in Silviu Purcărete's performances. In all cases, the essence lies in counterbalancing an often violent scene with music of a calm mood.

In conclusion, it can be said that the origin of humor in the Purcărete productions I studied has been clarified. At the same time, the existence of the hypothesized playfulness in the

director's works has been confirmed. Finally, it has also been demonstrated that a close connection between humor and playfulness is very common.

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