

# Haşdeu, the Ironic Narrator. “Duduca Mamuca” - Space of Breaking Conventions

Vasilica Simionovici<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*The short story Duduca Mamuca, written by B. P. Haşdeu, stands out for its provocative and nonconformist character, both stylistically and ideologically. The text is notable for an unusual narrative freedom for Romanian literature from the mid-19th century, subverting the conventions of the era through a combination of humor, irony and parody. This freedom of construction is not arbitrary, but serves as an acid critique of emerging bourgeois values, class relations and social conveniences. Haşdeu deliberately loads the text with elements of theatricality, distorting reality to amplify the absurdity of situations and the superficiality of human relationships. The importance of the short story lies precisely in its ability to destabilize literary and moral boundaries, through an ambiguous but deeply ironic discourse, which reflects both the identity crisis of the characters and the confusion of an entire era in search of a balance between modernity and tradition. The present study proposes a critical reading of the text not only as social satire, but also as a lucid intervention on narrative mechanisms, revealing the modernity of Haşdeu's vision. In the absence of an explicit moral, Duduca Mamuca forces the reader to navigate through tensions of meaning and fractures of logic, making ambiguity an aesthetic strategy and a means of cultural contestation.*

**Keywords:** *narrative ambiguity; irony; social satire; symbolism; literary modernity.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Qualified substitute teacher, Secondary School No. 1, Dobârceni, Botoşani County. simionoviciv@yahoo.com

In the context of 19th-century Romanian literature, *Duduca Mamuca* by f stands out for its deeply hybrid character and for its aesthetic mobility that is difficult to fit into traditional patterns (Hașdeu, 1998). Written with provocative stylistic verve and sprinkled with rhetorical artifices of corrosive irony, the short story disrupts the clear lines of classical narrative and proposes a deliberately disjointed narrative construction. Hașdeu constructs not only a recognizable fictional universe, with grotesque figures and bourgeois settings, but also an ideological framework in which social conventions, educational values and moral codes are subject to a continuous process of deconstructing (Ilin, nd-a).

The characters do not act by virtue of a realistic motivation, but in the name of a satirical logic that aims at social types rather than psychological individualities. At the center of this universe is Mamuca – a hyperbolic and unstable figure, oscillating between carnality, seduction, infantilism and degenerate domestic authority. The short story, far from proposing a unitary narrative thread, offers a succession of fragmentary episodes in which the narrative irony, the sententious tone and the pastiche of literary conventions create a discontinuous and provocative reading (Ilin, nd-b). Beyond the burlesque details or the situational comedy, a subtle reflection on the degradation of social relations and the false appearances of urban life emerges.

Hașdeu's humor is not a simple narrative joke, but a vehicle for a subtle criticism, disguised as farce. Through his refined sarcasm and constant irony, Hașdeu questions power relations, gender constructs, social mythologies and the aesthetics of popular taste. Although apparently a simple story with a licentious substratum, *Duduca Mamuca* raises serious interpretative problems on a narrative, symbolic and ideological level, offering a caricatured image of a world in which morality is substituted by appearance, and cynicism becomes a form of social survival. This approach, radically different from that of the realistic or sentimental prose of the era, makes Hașdeu a modern author ahead of his time, capable of interrogating narrative conventions and ironizing his own creation. In this sense, *Duduca Mamuca* is not just a period short story, but an open text, in which meanings multiply as the reading deepens.

## The ambiguity of genre and narrative construction

### *The unstable framing of the text between fantasy novel and pamphlet*

*Duduca Mamuca* cannot be strictly classified in a literary genre without diminishing its formal complexity and aesthetic intention. The text deliberately refuses traditional classification and is situated at the intersection of several registers – short story, satire, moral fable and prose with fantastic accents. B. P. Haşdeu constructs a narrative that starts from a realistic framework, but constantly undermines it through irony, exaggeration and parodic interventions. Beyond the anecdotal appearance, the short story becomes a reflection on social and literary conventions, but also a subtle criticism of the hypocrisy of the era (Călinescu, 1982).

From the very beginning, the narrator's ambiguous relationship with Mamuca is marked by an oscillation between admiration and parody: “[...] *My Mamuca seemed to me to be very beautiful, unspeakably beautiful, unimaginably beautiful – incredibly beautiful!*” (Haşdeu, 1998). The deliberate exaggeration of the epithets and the emphatic register suggest a parody of romantic discourse. This textual strategy destabilizes the emotional register and creates an immediate ironic effect.

The narrative episode, apparently coherent, is often hijacked by comic, absurd or allegorical insertions, which disturb the internal logic of the action and give the text a structural freedom rarely found in 19th-century Romanian literature (Munteanu, 1989). Instead of a classical progression, Haşdeu opts for a fragmentary development, dominated by disparate episodes and ironic comments, and the unexpected ending, devoid of any explicit moral, accentuates this ambiguity, eliminating any certainty of meaning.

The author frequently introduces reflections on literature and society, in a deeply self-reflexive key. Thus, in the passage “*Romanticism and, mainly, that fraction of it, which is called realism, is the plague of our society*” (Haşdeu, 1998), Haşdeu directly attacks the dominant genres of the era. The continuation – “*It claims to be an echo of nature, forgetting that man is the microcosm of the macrocosm, as Spinoza says, and, consequently, nature is absurd*” (Haşdeu, 1998) – denounces not only the conventions, but also the claim to authenticity of this aesthetics. Thus, the short story becomes a self-reflexive text, criticizing its own cultural context.

The narrator himself is an unstable presence. He alternates between sarcasm, empathy, and moralizing observation, often contradicting himself throughout the text. For example, in the scene where he gives instructions for an "anonymous gift" addressed to Mamuca, he says: "*First you must make her an anonymous gift, leaving me to reveal in your ear, as if a secret, the name of the gallant admirer, adding from my side a long comment about your illustrious merits.*" (Haşdeu, 1998). This self-reflexive insertion is marked by a playful, theatrical tone, in which the author unmaskes and imitates the conventions of the sentimental genre, while parodying the narrative strategies of realism.

By intentionally combining several literary forms, Haşdeu anticipates modern directions in prose, in which the mixture of registers and tones becomes a means of reflection on writing itself (Pavel, 1985).

*Duduca Mamuca* is not a simple story, but a text about the limits of fiction, about the freedom to satirize the aesthetic and ideological conventions of the era. This conscious hybridization makes Haşdeu a precursor of literary modernity, an author who transforms irony into a critical tool (Manolescu, 2008).

If classical realism assumed a coherence of the narrative instance and a logical evolution of the characters, here we are dealing with a contradictory "voice", which exhibits its artifice and deliberately plays between genres. This technique undermines the conventions of realism and transforms reading into an exercise in critical interpretation (Ilin, nd-a).

*Duduca Mamuca* thus becomes an early example of a post-romantic text, in which fiction is no longer a simple vehicle for illustrating aesthetic or moral norms, but a form of interrogation and unmasking of ideologies hidden under the mask of convention (Manolescu, 2008). It is precisely this difficulty of framing that confirms its status as an open and problematic text, with remarkable critical potential (Ilin, nd-a).

### *Discontinuous narrative construction and multiple voices*

The narrative structure of the short story *Duduca Mamuca* is deliberately fragmentary, functioning as a succession of relatively autonomous episodes, united more by a satirical and reflexive intention than by a classical diegetic logic. The narrative coherently refuses the linear progression specific to traditional prose, opting for a discontinuous montage, in which dramatic sequences, the narrator's comments and convivial digressions alternate without a visible narrative hierarchy (Simion, 1981). This construction reflects the

author's intention to disrupt the conventions of the realist novel and to propose a literary form closer to the fictional essay or the stylized pamphlet.

An essential element in this discontinuity is the narrative instance, which manifests itself through an intentional instability, oscillating between irony, didactic commentary, pseudo-autobiographical confession and parodic intervention. For example, when the narrator states with absurd emphasis: "*I only forgot that Mamuca mea seemed to me very beautiful, unspeakably beautiful, unimaginably beautiful – incredibly beautiful!*", he not only overstates the affective to the point of ridicule, but also introduces an ironic distance from his own discourse. This comic hyperbolization is symptomatic of the tonal instability of the text, which oscillates between sentimental subjectivity and sarcasm (Haşdeu, 1998).

In addition to this unstable narrative instance, the polyphony is also fueled by frequent metatextual insertions, which interrupt the diegetic flow to introduce reflections or comments on narrative conventions and the world described. A revealing example is the line: "*The lady plays with too much fire.*", followed by the narrator's absurd justification: "*The artist should always be cold, cold as positive law, cold as the letter of the laws, cold as the pandects, cold as...*" (Haşdeu, 1998). Through this dissonance between evaluation and expectation, the narrator constructs a caricatured and self-reflexive vision of the act of storytelling and its characters.

This rhetoric of instability and fragmentation is amplified by the lack of a coherent narrative direction. Every time the narrative seems to advance towards a conclusion, a stylistic diversion intervenes – either through playful comments or absurd sequences. The narrator's voice is always suspect, transforming the reader into an active interpreter, confronted with intentional contradictions (Haşdeu, 1998). Thus, fragmentary construction is not a stylistic defect, but a strategy for problematizing the relationship between the narrator and the text.

This construction method transforms *Duduca Mamuca* into a narrative space of experiment. Haşdeu constantly undermines any form of textual authority, and the resulting polyphony becomes an expression of an incoherent, unstable fictional world, but with a high critical potential. In this sense, the text approaches modern prose, anticipating deconstructed and self-reflexive narrative forms (Pavel, 1985). His interventions function as constant destabilizations of the reader's expectations and as ironies against the formal conventions of the era (Marino, 1987).

*The ending as a point of reversal and disarticulation of meaning*

The ending of the short story is notable for its intentional departure from traditional narrative expectations. If a conventional reading would anticipate a moralizing conclusion or a clear resolution of the conflict, the epilogue proposed by Haşdeu breaks this expectation, introducing Toderiță's death in an ambiguous, indirect register, through a meta-narrative procedure. The event is mentioned retrospectively, as information external to the plot, in an apparently anecdotal note, in which the author reveals the protagonist's suicide shortly after the marriage. This narrative solution, devoid of drama and cathartic effect, suspends any univocal conclusion and leaves the impression of a fictional world where logical coherence is replaced by the fragmentary and arbitrary. The refusal of a traditional ending can be interpreted as a deliberate gesture of challenging epic conventions, through which Haşdeu introduces an ironic, distant and self-reflexive tone into Romanian prose (Ilin, nd-a).

The way in which Toderiță's death is introduced amplifies the intention to undermine the narrative convention. Instead of a dramatic scene, a moral explanation or a coherent denouement, the reader discovers indirectly, through a mention inserted at the end of the text, that "in a paroxysm of misanthropy, he shot himself here in Iași a few weeks ago, the day after he married a duduca endowed with fifty thousand gold coins in the count" (Haşdeu, 1998). The information, delivered with an almost bureaucratic coldness, in a short sentence and devoid of emotional tension, produces an effect of rupture. The death is not depicted, but dryly stated, within a letter found posthumously, a fact that transforms the event into an artifice of distancing, not into a moment of narrative climax. Through this option, Haşdeu dissolves the idea of finality and diverts attention from the action to the narrative mechanism itself, emphasizing the parodic and self-reflexive character of the text.

The letter-testament left by Toderiță is itself a gesture marked by irony and theatricality: "You are my compatriot and comrade; you are somewhat literate; you will be a misanthrope like me, I foresee it from now on; but, no one is more capable of understanding me and completing the beginning of these memoirs..." (Haşdeu, 1998). Toderiță addresses herself directly to a fictional narrator, assuming a bitter and cynically distant voice, in a self-reflexive game in which the boundaries between author, narrator and character blur. The prophetic tone, with caricature accents, transforms suicide into a textual and self-

parodic act, and death into a narrative device meant to suspend meaning, not to close it.

This closing strategy betrays a profoundly modern vision, by refusing any traditional resolution. Hașdeu abandons the role of the moralizing narrator, specific to 19th-century literature, in favor of a fragmentary fictional construction, lacking clear causality, in which the logic of the absurd prevails over the epic order (Manolescu, 2008). In this register, Toderiță's death does not have a punitive or cathartic function, but is equivalent to the deliberate collapse of meaning.

This lack of finality is, in fact, a deliberate act of defiance of the reader. Hașdeu refuses to offer a conclusion in the traditional sense, placing himself outside any narrative convention of his era. The text does not end, but breaks. Without an epilogue, without a moral, without a clear conclusion, the short story stops abruptly, leaving the reader in a void of meaning. It is a strategy of destabilization, which transforms the act of reading into an exercise of interrogation, not of consumption (Marino, 1987).

This form of "anti-ending" transforms *Duduca Mamuca* into a text in which the disarticulation of meaning becomes a structural mechanism. Hașdeu parodies not only romantic or realistic styles, but the very idea of fiction with a clear finality. The ending functions as a space of nonsense, of the deliberate suspension of meaning, in which fiction dissolves itself. This is perhaps the most radical aesthetic gesture of the short story, one that confirms its status as an open, modern, uncomfortable text (Călinescu, 1982; Zub, 2004).

### **Affective ambivalence and contradictory idealization of the figure of Mamuca**

#### *The female figure between seduction, irony and social convention*

The figure of Mamuca is constructed in an ambiguous register, which undermines the traditional patterns of femininity in 19th-century literature. She simultaneously embodies naivety and sensuality, docility and concealed strength, becoming an unstable presence, always oscillating between innocence and seduction (Hașdeu, 1998). The narrator recalls with affected nostalgia: "*What the hell, she was beautiful! She was beautiful like a Romanian! She had eyes... I don't remember the color and size very well! She had hair... the size of her eyes. She had a little mouth...*" – but this evocation is quickly blurred into an ironic register: "*But nine years have passed since then, and in nine years I have forgotten several kinds of little mouths!*" (Hașdeu, 1998). This oscillation between idealization and depreciation reveals a

rhetorical pattern meant to destabilize the reader: Mamuca is desired, but also ironized, admired, but also treated as an object of sentimental transaction.

Haşdeu does not aim to outline a realistic psychology, but creates a mask-character, an artificial and ironic feminine type, meant to reflect the moral degradation of the bourgeois environment and the fragility of the social conventions that support it (Călinescu, 1982). In this sense, Mamuca becomes a critical instrument through which the author denounces the hypocrisy of a world that transforms femininity into appearance, and affectivity – into a mechanism of negotiation and social status. Thus, the character's relationship with the narrator is not built on a coherent emotional path, but on allusions, fragments of emotion, contradictory inflections: "on the one hand, as a human being, I loved her; that is to say, I loved her on the one hand; on the other hand, as a Romanian, I did not like things and even Russian girls, and, by calling my beautiful Mamuca, by this very fact I Romanianized her and somehow loved her on the other hand as well." (Haşdeu, 1998).

This identity tension is not accidental: Mamuca, although Russian, is invested with idealized "Romanian" features, in a gesture that denotes both the internalization of gender stereotypes and an identity problem specific to the post-unionist era. But this "Romanianizing" of Mamuca is nothing more than a strategy of affective diversion: it is not authentic love that motivates her, but the narrator's need to integrate her into a narrative convenient to him. Moreover, Mamuca does not have a voice of her own. Her lines are rare, and her presence on stage is constantly mediated by the narrator's speech. This active absence reinforces the idea of a mask-character: a female figure constructed to reflect the conventions of the era and ridicule them. In a world where gender roles are pre-established and female behaviors must correspond to a certain social coding, Mamuca appears as a symptom of the falsification of affectivity, not as an exponent of an autonomous femininity.

In this setting, Mamuca becomes simultaneously the object of seduction and satire, an ambivalent figure through which Haşdeu ironically denounces the superficiality of social relations, but also traditional narrative conventions. It is not love, but the spectacle of love that is analyzed – a spectacle in which Mamuca plays a predetermined role, and the reader is invited to discover her fragility behind the mask.

### *Satire of family and salon education*

Haşdeu subtly but consistently attacks the petty-bourgeois family and the "salon" type of education, illustrating them as

mechanisms of imposture and social mimicry. Mrs. Ana P., Mamuca's mother, is the embodiment of an "*old actress in resignation*", who tries to maintain a young and cultured image, despite her age and the degraded context in which she lives: "*however, as a young actress, she considered herself capable of playing a young role at any time*" (Haşdeu, 1998). This self-delusion becomes ridiculous, offering a first note of satire on the gender roles perpetuated by the theatrical and superficial education offered in the family.

On the other hand, Miss Maria (Mamuca) is presented as a young woman raised for appearance rather than authenticity. Her precocious artistic career is not the result of talent, but of a system of social promotion in which applause does not reflect value, but the preferences of the "*audience loving... young ladies*" (Haşdeu, 1998). The education provided by her mother is in fact an instruction in the art of simulation, in which the "roles" learned on stage are confused with those played in everyday life. Maria is taught to seduce through presence and mimicry, not through intellectual or moral depth.

The family meal scene is revealing for the social mechanism described by Haşdeu. When the narrator expresses his desire to have dinner with the host's family, the exchange of lines takes on comical and even absurd accents. He declares: "*I am not used to eating alone; in society the food seems tastier, the taste seems to be more appetizing*" (Haşdeu, 1998). This remark introduces a subtle criticism of salon conventions, in which even everyday gestures, such as the meal, are subject to codes of appearance and social spectacle.

The criticism of salon education is completed by the portrait of Mrs. P., who demands appreciation for her daughter's performance in the role of Gertrude. The narrator's reaction – "*I didn't like it*" – is blunt and lacking the expected politeness. When asked to justify his opinion, he adds: "*The young lady plays with too much fire*", arguing that the artist should be "*cold as positive law, cold as the letter of the laws, cold as the pandectes*" (Haşdeu, 1998). This ironic hyperbole highlights the superficiality of the mimetic art promoted in the family and cultural environment described.

Overall, *Duduca Mamuca* proposes a satire of conventional education and mimetic family ideals, emptied of authenticity. Haşdeu ironically deconstructs the models of female education promoted in the era, highlighting the lack of substance of an education that mimics culture but fails to form characters. Instead of a protective family or an authentic formative space, the reader discovers a scene in which values are theatricalized, and human relationships – negotiated according to appearance and interest.

*The symbolic function of Mamuca: between myth and pamphlet*

The character Mamuca does not function in the economy of the short story only as an object of a youthful love, but as an ironic projection of the contradictions of a late romantic spirit, caught between the fascination of the feminine myth and the pamphleteering sarcasm of modernity. Her figure brings together in the same fragile body of an actress a symbolic double: the image of the naive ideal "*beautiful as a Romanian woman*" (Haşdeu, 1998), and, simultaneously, the parodic reflex of a stage femininity, constructed, artificial, meant to be "*play and illusion*".

Mamuca becomes, through this ambivalence, a projection space for the narrator's own identity dilemmas, the young Romanian student lost "*at some Russian University*" (Haşdeu, 1998). The fact that he "Romanianizes" her through the affective appellation ("*I called her 'Mamuca', even though she was Russian - or maybe even because she was Russian*") reveals the need for a cultural re-signification: the woman becomes the pretext through which the male subject negotiates his otherness and belonging. Love is thus converted into an act of identity conversion, and the linguistic gesture ("*through this very thing we Romanianize her*") transforms the erotic relationship into a commentary on identity and mimicry.

But Haşdeu ironizes this romantic mechanism, dismantling it from within. Instead of a stable feminine ideal, Mamuca appears refractory, unfixable. In the dinner scene, she is sometimes the ironic "duduca" who charges him for pedantry ("*It is known that you have not studied philosophy*"), sometimes a simple pretext for his sophisticated demonstrations about "subjective taste" (Haşdeu, 1998). The woman, therefore, is absorbed by the masculine discourse and emptied of consistency; she becomes, as the narrator himself would say, "*matter of feeling*", not its subject.

The feminine myth, as reconstructed by the narrative voice, is simultaneously adored and ridiculed. Mamuca's beauty is affirmed through hyperbole ("*unspeakably beautiful, unimaginably beautiful - incredibly beautiful!*"), but this intensity is already contaminated by the absurdity of lexical excess. Instead of sincere veneration, we have a caricature of amorous language, an exercise in rhetoric in which emotion is devoured by style. Haşdeu thus transforms the myth of eros into a subtle pamphlet against romantic idealism, deconstructing the gesture of adoration through its overexposure.

Further on, in the masked ball scene, Mamuca becomes the symbol of instability and the illusions of urban modernity. The narrator

projects onto her an entire strategy of seduction – intellectualized, theatrical, playful – in which love is confused with manipulation and spectacle. The episode in which he kisses her hand “with a swift movement, whose swiftness can only be joined by the blow of an Italian dagger” (Hașdeu, 1998) marks the peak of this theatricality: the passionate gesture is simultaneously artificial and calculated, reminiscent of an operetta scene. Eros becomes parody, and sincerity is dissolved in theatricality.

For this reason, Mamuca is no longer just a woman, but a double figure, a fictional construct that reflects both the lost ideal of romantic femininity and the author’s intellectual irony. In the eyes of the narrator, she is “puică”, “duducă”, “matter of feeling”; for the reader, she becomes an image of otherness – that other that cannot be known, only manipulated and interpreted. Hașdeu builds around her a fluid symbolism, oscillating between the sacralized myth of love and the ironic dissolution of any ideal.

Through Mamuca, Hașdeu exposes the moral and aesthetic hybrid of his generation: a culturally uprooted young man who wants to love “Romanian” in a Russian context, but lives his feelings according to the bookish pattern of a borrowed civilization. That is why Mamuca is not a “heroine”, but a symptom. She embodies what the author calls, in another context, the “mystification” of modern love – a network of masks, roles and pretexts.

Ultimately, Mamuca’s symbolic function is to expose the ridiculousness of a world that confuses love with spectacle, sincerity with rhetoric, and femininity with a form of cultural mimicry. Between myth and pamphlet, between idealization and satire, Mamuca remains the mirror in which is reflected, distorted, not the face of the woman, but that of the man who narrates her story.

### **Toderiță or the crisis of romantic masculinity**

#### ***Intellectualized masculinity: reason as a mask of emotional impotence***

The figure of Toderiță illustrates one of the most ironic hypostases of the male hero in late pașoptist literature: the man who thinks about love instead of living it. Under the appearance of a methodical lucidity, the narrator hides an emotional fragility that is betrayed precisely by the excess of rationalization. In a world where romantic discourse is already beginning to be viewed with distrust, Toderiță compensates for the lack of passion through a kind of juridical-

philosophical rhetoric, raising in theory what he cannot experience in fact (Hașdeu, 1998).

From the very first pages, Hașdeu builds a character dominated by the logic of demonstration and the phobia of emotion. His remark about the actor's art – which "should always be cold, cold as positive law, cold as the letter of the laws" – expresses not only an aesthetic taste, but also a conception of life: sensitivity is suspect, passion is a sign of weakness, and love becomes an object of analysis, not of experience. G. Călinescu rightly observed that Hașdeu's prose "treats romanticism as a disease of excess" (Călinescu, 1982), and Toderiță is the symptom of this disease in its ironic version: a romantic who has cured his own emotion through pedantry.

In his relationship with Mamuca, reason becomes a rhetorical screen meant to disguise emotional impotence. The dialogue about "subjective taste" and the substitution of rabbit for turkey, apparently a philosophical demonstration, is in fact a comic avoidance of emotional contact. In a society dominated by conventions, Toderiță takes refuge in reasoning and analogies, unable to assume a language of intimacy. In Adrian Marino's terms (1987), he belongs to the "intellectualized human", that is, the type who lives through concepts, not through emotions. This hypertrophy of the intellect, disguised as an ironic spirit, hides a deep anxiety: the fear of the ridicule of passion.

Moreover, Hașdeu constantly places the narrator in a position of self-observer, an "actor who watches himself play" (Pavel, 1985). In the dinner scene, Toderiță contemplates himself in action, analyzing his lines as if they were legal instruments, and this double consciousness – of subject and observer – marks the rupture between experience and living. Intellectual narcissism becomes a form of affective sterility. N. Manolescu (2008) notes that in Hașdeu's prose "intelligence becomes an instrument of one's own self-irony", and this mechanism is visible in Toderiță, where lucidity is no longer a critical force, but a symptom of alienation.

Toderiță's masculinity is no longer defined by action, but by discourse. Instead of heroic gestures, he produces learned statements; instead of passion, formulas. This inversion of the relationship between reason and affect betrays, in fact, an identity crisis – a moment in which the romantic masculine ideal collapses under the weight of its own rhetoric. M. Munteanu (1989) interprets this tendency as an "ironic demythologizing of idealizing eros", in which love becomes the terrain of a cultural satire, and the man – a figure of inadequacy.

Thus, Toderiță's rationalism is not a sign of superiority, but of defensiveness. Under the guise of logical argument, he hides the fear

of exposure, failure and emotion. Hașdeu parodies, in essence, the type of romantic intellectual who, unable to reach the ideal, dissolves it in reasoning. In this way, *Duduca Mamuca* becomes not only a sentimental satire, but also a subtle analysis of modern masculinity – that masculinity that defends itself from love through lucidity and from living through irony (Ursu, 1972; Zub, 2004).

*Love as a spectacle: the heroism of seduction and the aesthetics of imposture*

Toderiță does not love, but plays love. For him, approaching Mamuca is not a sincere impulse, but a performance, a role in which he must confirm his intelligence, charm and superiority as a “*cold man per excellence*”. Seduction becomes an exercise in style, and the gestures – from ceremonial bows to exaggerated declarations – bear the mark of a director concerned with the final effect, not with the authenticity of emotion. Instead of passion, he offers a choreography of calculated gestures, a parody of romantic heroism.

The masked ball, the central scene of the novella, concentrates this aesthetic of imposture. There, Toderiță transforms her life into a meticulously staged sentimental farce: she sends fake notes, manipulates characters, provokes imaginary duels and orchestrates an entire mystification just to confirm her power to control the stories of others (Hașdeu, 1998). Everything unfolds under the sign of simulacrum, in a universe in which affective truth has been replaced by the spectacle of emotion. In Hașdeu's logic, the modern seducer is an actor who has lost his awareness of the role, unable to distinguish between fiction and experience (Pavel, 1985).

The erotic farce, however, has a tragicomic nuance. Beneath the refinement of the lines and plots lies a deep insecurity: the need to be seen, to be admired, even at the cost of ridicule. Toderiță contemplates himself as a character in a morality play, a hero who sacrifices himself on the altar of his own vanity. When he defends Mamuca from Baron von R., he does not act out of love, but out of the desire to prove his “heroism” in a world where heroism has become an artifice of image. As Nicolae Manolescu (2008) shows, Hașdeu deconstructs the romantic masculine model, substituting sentimental exaltation with theatrical gesture, and authentic suffering with rhetoric.

Aesthetically, this theatricality of love reflects a broader phenomenon: the transition from romantic experience to the modern consciousness of spectacle. Love becomes a social scene, where each line is a form of self-presentation, not a sincere discharge of affect. Toderiță is a director of his own image – an “actor of intelligence”

who seduces through scenarios and metaphors, not through real gestures. In Adrian Marino's (1987) terms, this attitude marks the "crisis between expression and experience" "a rupture through which Romanian literature discovers its own modern ironic spirit.

Hașdeu, with the finesse of a moralist and the sarcasm of a proto-psychologist, does not condemn just one character, but the entire mentality of the era. The heroism of seduction collapses into imposture because the cultivated man of the 19th century experiences his emotions through the intermediary of language. Călinescu (1982) had observed this comic degradation of the ideal: "*the late romantic experiences the feelings of others, telling them*". Toderiță is precisely this "*storyteller of emotions*", a man who mimics love in order to prove his lucidity.

In the end, the spectacle of seduction falls apart. The acts, although elaborate, do not produce love, but farce; the promised heroism turns out to be a simple imitation of chivalry. Behind the strategic intelligence, a moral and affective void remains – the image of a man who, fearing the ridicule of passion, ends up experiencing the ridicule of its absence. Here the circle of Hașdeu's irony closes: love as a spectacle is no longer the triumph of the spirit over instinct, but proof of the sterility of a masculinity that has forgotten to feel (Munteanu, 1989).

### *From ideal to imposture: the parody of eros and the demystification of the romantic hero*

Toderiță experiences a symbolic fall: from the chivalrous ideal of love to the self-sufficient grotesque of imposture. What begins under the sign of a noble aspiration – the desire to experience a "great" love, worthy of romantic heroes – ends in farce and self-caricature. Hașdeu follows with sharp lucidity how the romantic ideal, once detached from authenticity, becomes decoration and convention. The moment Toderiță proclaims his intention to conquer Mamuca "*according to Bentham's utilitarian legal principles*", the irony becomes total: love is reduced to a calculation of probabilities, and passions are transformed into moral equations (Hașdeu, 1998).

Far from being a seducer, the narrator becomes a sentimental strategist. Instead of spontaneity, he brings planning; instead of impulsive gestures, simulation. His entire amorous conduct is a mixture of theatricality and self-parody. Even the duel with Baron von R., the moment when the classic heroism of a man in love should have been manifested, is a farce staged to provoke the admiration of the woman. Toderiță sets himself up as a hero only to play the role in front of his

own imagination – an artificial image of courage, emptied of any authenticity (Călinescu, 1982).

This imposture is not an individual accident, but the sign of a cultural transformation. Hașdeu captures the decline of the romantic male type, who, losing contact with inner experience, takes refuge in rhetoric. The romantic hero becomes his ironic double: a man who speaks of ideals, but can no longer embody them. In this sense, *Duduca Mamuca* is more than a sentimental satire – it is a dismantling of the heroic myth, an X-ray of the masculine crisis in an era of accelerated modernization. Mihai Munteanu sees in this trend a “*demythologizing of the romantic subject, passed through the filter of comic lucidity*” (Munteanu, 1989).

Symbolically, Toderiță's fall also marks the death of an aesthetic illusion. Eros is no longer the expression of the transcendent, but a social game, regulated by appearances. Hașdeu suggests that, in a world dominated by conventions and parody, the ideal does not disappear, but is deformed: it becomes a form without content, a gesture without faith. The narrator behaves like a bookish Don Juan, an imitator who learns his lines from the Romantic textbook, but no longer understands their meaning. Behind the irony, the author lets us glimpse the melancholy of an era that can no longer believe in innocence or the absolute (Manolescu, 2008).

Hence the moral ambiguity of the text: Toderiță is not only a prankster, but also a product of a world that has replaced ideals with forms of sentimental entertainment. The gesture of provoking a duel, of posing as a knight, of directing coincidences – all are forms of a comedy of virility. What was once heroism becomes spectacle. In this parody, Hașdeu exposes not only the weakness of a character, but also the emptiness of meaning of the entire romantic imaginary, caught between exaltation and ridicule.

Toderiță's fall, therefore, is not a simple moral, but a cultural diagnosis. The author shows how, behind an apparent playful irony, a silent tragedy hides: the death of the ideal. Beyond the narrator's sarcastic smile, one feels the exhaustion of a type of humanity that can no longer experience love except as an act of imitation. Through this lucid and bitter perspective, Hașdeu opens a line of modern reflection on masculinity: between aspiration and imposture, between play and absence, between ideal and nothing.

## Conclusions

The reading of the short story *Duduca Mamuca* highlights the aesthetic and critical complexity of Hașdeu's approach, which goes far

beyond the limits of a period satire. Under the playful appearance of a frivolous narrative, there is a carefully directed intellectual construction hidden, in which irony becomes a method of social analysis, and parody – a form of moral lucidity. Hașdeu is not content to describe the bourgeois world, but exposes it as a stage of conventions and self-deception, transforming prose into a laboratory of ideas about identity, morality and the mechanisms of narrative discourse.

The figure of Mamuca, far from being a simple erotic pretext, acquires a symbolic function in which two registers intersect: myth and pamphlet. She simultaneously represents the ideal and the caricature of the ideal, idolized beauty and conventional artificiality. Around her, not only the fragility of romantic femininity is revealed, but also the male inability to perceive it outside of clichés. The relationship with Toderiță, dominated by games of seduction, parody and irony, illustrates the degradation of eros into a spectacle of forms without substance – a theme that Hașdeu elevates to the rank of moral and cultural reflection.

Toderiță, in turn, becomes the symbol of an identity crisis and of a masculinity intellectualized to the point of sterility. Instead of passion, he offers discourse; instead of experience, analysis; instead of courage, irony. The romantic hero dissolves himself in a series of rhetorical gestures, losing contact with affective reality. In this perspective, Duduca Mamuca functions as a lucid critique of late romanticism, which transformed love into a cultural, not existential, act.

Beyond the thematic dimension, the modern strength of the short story lies in its narrative construction. Hașdeu deliberately breaks with classical linearity, introduces self-reflexive digressions, and alternates the tone between satire, confession, and moral commentary. This fragmentation is not a structural weakness, but a form of modernity. Through it, the author undermines the authority of the narrator and transforms the reader into an active interpreter, confronted with an unstable and provocative text.

The abrupt ending, devoid of explicit morality, confirms the author's intention to destroy the illusion of coherence and to replace meaning with reflection. Toderiță's death is not a punishment, but a textual gesture – a form of exit from fiction. Through this "anti-ending", Hașdeu demonstrates that literature can be a critical instrument, not a faithful mirror of the world. Irony, sarcasm and self-reflexivity become not only aesthetic strategies, but also forms of knowledge, expressions of a lucidity that announces Romanian literary modernity.

Overall, Duduca Mamuca is not a simple satire of morals or a sentimental farce, but a borderline text between romanticism and modernism, between convention and demythologizing. Through his

ironic narrator, through the theatricalization of human relationships and through the parody of moral codes, Hașdeu offers a disturbing image of a world in which sensitivity has been replaced by appearance, and the ideal – by imitation. In this tension between seriousness and farce, between illusion and lucidity, lies the true strength of the short story: that of exposing the fragility of the human spirit, caught between the desire to believe and the need to laugh at one's own faith.

## References

- Călinescu, G. (1982). *History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present* (2nd ed.). Minerva.  
<https://archive.org/details/calinescu-g.-istoria-literaturii-romane-de-la-origini-pina-in-prezent-minerva-1982>
- Hașdeu, B.P. (1998). *Poetry, prose, dramaturgy*. Literature.
- Ilin, S. (nd-a). The artistic prose of BP Hașdeu. *Cultura*, (455).  
<https://revistacultura.ro/nou/proza-artistica-a-lui-bp-hasdeu/>
- Ilin, S. (nd-b). The artistic prose of BP Hașdeu (II). *Cultura*, (456).  
<https://revistacultura.ro/nou/proza-artistica-a-lui-bp-hasdeu-ii/>
- Manolescu, N. (2008). *Critical History of Romanian Literature*. Parallel 45. <https://archive.org/details/nicolae-manolescu-istoria-critica-a-literaturii-romane.-5-secole-de-literatura-paralela-45-2008>
- Marino, A. (1987). *Hermeneutics of the idea of literature*. Dacia.
- Munteanu, M. (1989). *The Romanian Fantastic. Poetry and Prose of the 19th Century*. Minerva.
- Pavel, T. (1985). *Fictional worlds*. Harvard University Press.  
<https://archive.org/details/fictionalworlds0000pave/>
- Simion, E. (1981). *Romanian Writers of Today* (Vol. 1). Romanian Book.
- Ursu, NA (1972). *Hasdeu and Romanian Philology*. Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania.
- Zub, A. (2004). *Horizon and Style: Romanian Literary History and Theory*. Junimea.