

SINOPSIS

THE THEATRE'S LONG JOURNEY INTO SOCIETY



What's wrong with Romanian theatre today to look a harder job to do than it used to be before Ceaușescu's tombledown? Far from being a singular question, for a lot of people think this way. Amazingly, the clash with censorship and a certain insur-

gency, defining the theatre since always, have prompted greatly, chiefly during the inglorious twilight years of dictatorship, the competitive spirit of the men of theatre. In spite of all hardships - financial, production-related, political - the Romanian theatre had burst quite frequently out either in Bucharest or in provincial cities, big theatrical centres such as Craiova, Cluj, Timișoara, Piatra Neamț into fits of rebellion caused by a determination not to yield in and submit to oppression, which summed up into a spirit of resistance and lent the cultural dissidence its real worth. Theatre was an all-out state-financed form of showbiz (though for the last five or six years the funds were shrinking dramatically) and the house-cultural policy relationships were developing under the close control of an uglier and uglier censorship. Obviously, censorship played havoc in matters of politics primarily and in everything concerning the freedom of speech.

Abetments encouraging such relationships are to be found, under one form or another in any theatre functioning under a dictatorship, and East Europe offers a telling case for consideration. As for Romania, the cancerous growth of this accomplice-gearred system was a multi-pronged censorship, fuelling in its turn some of these abetments. Many Romanian men of theatre admit that the catastrophe would have been irremediable had Ceaușescu been a theatregoer. For it was only when Party and State activists, out of "revolutionary" vigilance, stupidity and incompetence, exposed the shows that did not suit the régime that the censorship's sentence could stifle implacably dozens of theatrical projects or maim shows already on stage to adjust them to the aesthetic principles promoted by the totalitarian régime. Even under those hard circumstances, the Romanian theatre managed to put on stage remarkable shows, splendid performances, for, as it happened in the East primarily, oppression was... an incentive. After December 1989, the Labyrinth was left without its Minotaur! Once the age of freedom was ushered in, it became obvious, quite soon, that the absence of a "target" - Ceaușescu's dictatorial régime - was causing inconveniences.

Birth is a hard physical process. For all suspicions that the new democratic society in Romania did not come forth in the regular way, but by some sort of caesarean surgery, the Romanian theatre was forcibly shaken by the impact. For several months, it seemed that last year nobody even remembered that the theatre even existed at all. The show was in the street. It was the time of Political Happening, of a street show that monopolized - justified or unjustified - all the creative energies of the arts, nay, of society as a whole. So it happens that now, the theatrical institutions are caught unawares in a deplorable situation by the current reorganization of

economic structures. The more than forty state-financed theatre houses, besides a few private troupes founded soon upon December 1989, are challenged now by a puzzle they have not been prepared to solve. Simple arithmetic tells us that due to the "liberalization" of prices - triggered by the break-neck speed switch to free-market economy promoted by the government, which is not a bad thing at all - the cost of modest theatrical productions amount each to a quarter million lei. The same reckoning shows that it is impossible for a repertory theatre to have five or six new plays on stage by season using the same artistic and technical personnel it had on staff before and after December 1989, if the state subvention does not go up to 70 or 80 per cent of the costs. As for tours to other cities, they are as good as daydreaming. From an economic and administrative vantage, the theatres are not yet psychologically prepared to accept hard facts: the solutions to their economic and artistic survival problems have to be provided by themselves. At this moment, the State cannot play "baby-sitting" any more.

It is not less true that the attitude of the State towards a major cultural phenomenon like Theatre-into-Society is not yet clearly outlined at the general cultural policy level. For a transition period, cultural officials felt the need to fill in the void with a Law of the Theatres and lay in this way the prerequisites for the reorganization of the theatrical establishments. As long as free-market economy is just budding, as long as law-makers do not focus yet on spurring the cultural act by supporting sponsors (with tax-exemptions on corresponding incomes), a law of the theatres is still justified maybe. In the same way in which UNITER (Union of Theatres in Romania) has just planned to smooth the path and stimulate theatrical performances by restoring the Romanian theatre's European relations, by protecting the rights of the Romanian men of theatre. Lack of strong trade unions in the theatrical community would stand for further explanation for the failure to be properly represented at State level.

But the best illustrative phenomenon for this interval is the holdback in approaching the real problems challenging the theatre. Changes occurred in Romania last year affected both the stamina and projects of theatrical establishments. There are provincial troupes unable to justify their existence due to lack of performances. There are theatres unable to employ stage-directors. There are stage-directors crossing a period of crisis in their career. None the less, there are theatres that have found a way out of the deadlock. A laboured deed demanding huge efforts! The National Theatre (Bucharest) may be an example thereof, after Andrei Șerban came to its steer.

The Romanian theatre is now the stage of an open clash between economic laws and the laws governing art. A clash toughened too by the State's outspoken plans in matters concerning the cultural authorities - theatre relations. And, a clearcut attitude of the State vs. the Theatre is quite necessary, isn't it?

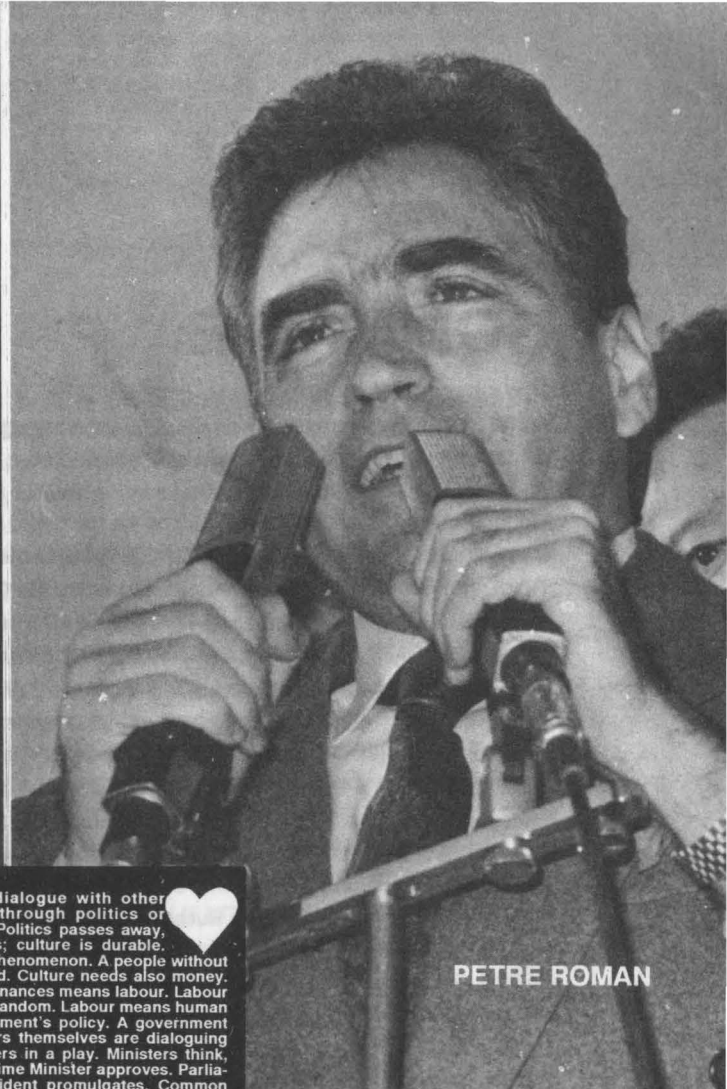
■ MARIAN POPESCU

■ (english by DELIA RĂZDOLESCU)

Rubrica SINOPSIS oferă și cititorilor săi din străinătate - posibilitatea de a lua cunoștință de problemele generale ale teatrului românesc contemporan.



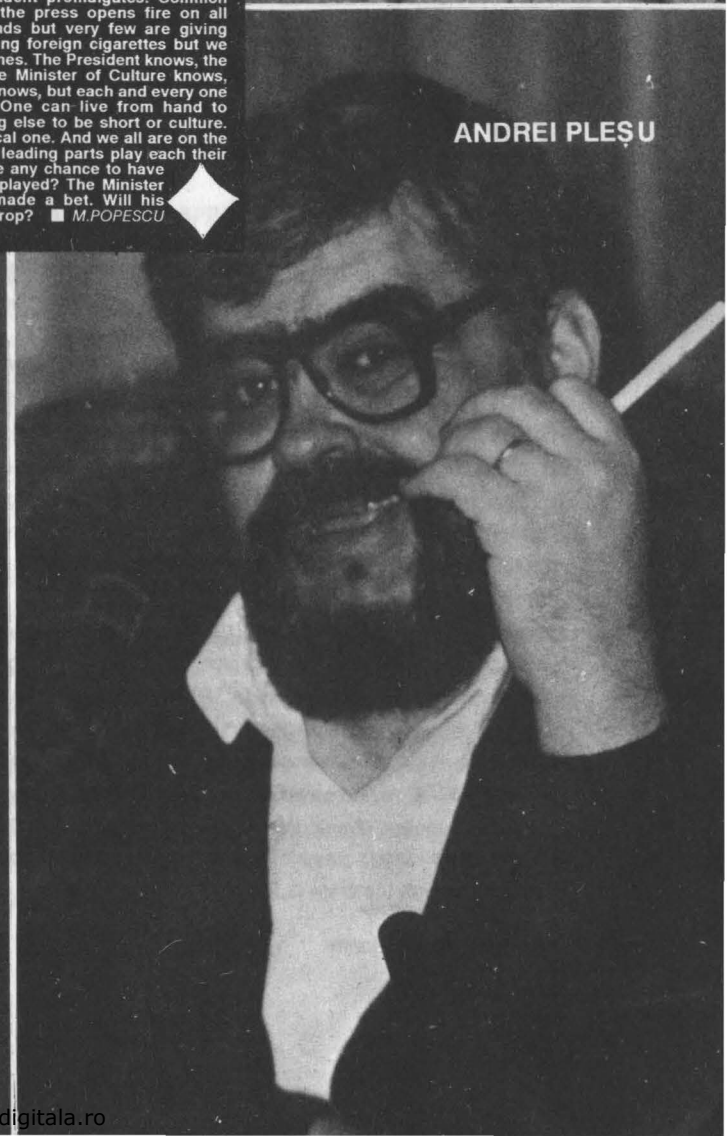
ION ILIESCU



PETRE ROMAN



THEODOR STOLOJAN



ANDREI PLEȘU

♠ A people may dialogue with other peoples either through politics or through culture. Politics passes away, but leaves marks; culture is durable. ♥
The theatre is a cultural phenomenon. A people without culture is historically dead. Culture needs also money. Money means finances. Finances means labour. Labour is not something done at random. Labour means human people but also a government's policy. A government means ministers. Ministers themselves are dialoguing but they are not characters in a play. Ministers think, ministers propose. The Prime Minister approves. Parliament disposes, the President promulgates. Common people have shortages, the press opens fire on all fronts, everybody demands but very few are giving something. We are smoking foreign cigarettes but we die for shortage of medicines. The President knows, the Prime Minister knows, the Minister of Culture knows, the Minister of Finances knows, but each and every one knows something else. One can live from hand to mouth, but it is something else to be short or culture. This is a drama. A historical one. And we all are on the cast. Those who play the leading parts play each their own card. Is there any chance to have the cultural card played? The Minister of Culture has made a bet. Will his partners stay or drop? ■ M. POPESCU ♦