

ABSURD, FANTASTIC AND HUMOUR IN URMUZ'S *BIZARRE PAGES*

Abstract: The experimental prose written by Urmuz, the pseudonym of Dem. Demetrescu-Buzău (1883-1923), definitely represented a model for Romanian avant-garde movement, anticipating not only the Surrealists' iconoclastic fervour in blowing up all sorts of stereotypes, but also some of the main features of the so called "absurd" theater created by Eugène Ionesco. With the latter Urmuz has in common the propensity towards dissimulating – behind an elaborate network of absurd associations and fantastic scenarios – the tragic consciousness of humans' limited existence and of language's limited powers. In the present paper we set to reflect upon the affinities between humour and the fantastic in Urmuz's "Bizarre Pages", by analysing the particular modalities in which the writer succeeds in constructing (im)possible worlds, that entail various strategies of defamiliarization, including violations of current logic and of ontological expectations. After all, both, fantastic and humour, convey a similar sense of reality's instability, sharing the same critical attitude towards the so called "real", that they constantly try to reverse. A look at the literature written by Dem. Demetrescu-Buzău proves that the reverse side of the humorous mode and of the ironic enunciation is the anxiety provoked by the unbearable responsibility of living.

Key words: absurd; Urmuz; nonsense; defamiliarization; humour; fantastic

1. AN ECCENTRIC "PROPHET"

Urmuz was the pen name of Demetru Dem. Demetrescu-Buzău a Romanian inter-war writer who gradually turned into a myth or cult-hero of Romania's avantgarde movement. This happened not only because Urmuz's scattered work – consisting mainly of several absurdist short-prose pieces – announced the avantgarde's own experimental fervour, but also as a result of the fascination that his mysterious life has exerted on younger fellow writers and readers (his suicide in 1923, at the age of forty, has decisively influenced the consolidation of his myth among the avantgarde artists, inclined to regard him as a forerunner, *artist maudit* and victim of *bourgeois* prejudices and constraints).

Literary historians and critics generally agree that Urmuz's *Weird/ Bizarre Pages* opened a new trend in Romanian literature (and humour), but most of them tend to highlight exclusively the parodic qualities and the amusing effects of his writings. In reality, as I'll try to demonstrate in this paper, there is always a tragic counterpart of this humorous appearance, many of the shapeshifting creatures that populate these uncommon prose pages acting rather as means of exorcising their author's anxiety and abhorrence in front of the real world.

It is not a case that Urmuz's prose produced such a large corpus of diverging interpretations, given that in 1922, the year when *The Funnel and Stamate* was issued, accompanied as it were by a perplexing subtitle –"novel in four parts"– the Romanian literature was far from assimilating experimental-modernist formulas (only two years before, in 1920, Liviu Rebreanu had published *Ion*, an objective, realistic novel acclaimed by local literary critics as one of the first noteworthy accomplishments of its kind). On this background, we can easily imagine the effects that Urmuz's four-pages novel, displaying an extravagant, parodic subtitle provoked.

On the other hand, given that the writer's creative method has many in common with that of Surrealists and Dadaists (the technique of arbitrary associations, the displacement of social, mental and linguistic patterns and norms etc.), equally announcing the Theatre of the Absurd (with this latter Urmuz's prose shares the taste for nonsense and paralogic), it is not a surprise that few decades later the interest for his original experiments increased. Eugène Ionesco, one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Demetrescu-Buzău's work, considered him a sort of "clairvoyant" or "prophet", a visionary able to realize simultaneously a "radiography" and a foreboding regarding not only this part of Europe, but human civilisation as such: "Obviously, Urmuz is not the only one who anticipated this *fiasco*, but he is one of those poets that have foreseen it and, being a poet, he has foreseen it in a more visceral and, concomitantly, in a more cerebral manner; this is the main reason why his message is so straightforward and obsessive, veracious as a tantalizing and burlesque, nightmare."¹

Emerged after the experience of the first world war, on a background characterised above all by general inquietude, which had shattered any hopes or illusions, and with them the trust in the "real" world's rationality and stability, Urmuz's work communicates a message that – in spite of its burlesque weirdness – transcends its epoch, placing the category of the "human" in a new, intense, reviving and revealing light. From this perspective, it is not a case that the Romanian writer has been compared with Bruno Schulz, Kafka, Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz and Daniil Harms.

Last but not least, we should not completely overlook – although it is not a cause-effect relationship – the particulars of a biography that is in itself "weird" or mysterious. It is enough to mention the "burden" of an adolescence dominated by the Father's authority, that had paralysing consequences on the son's actions, as some of the witnesses attest². More than one commentator have stressed that in the case of Urmuz, "the «lever» of biographical factors should not be underestimated"³ and many of them tried to identify a series of correspondences, at first sight unaccountable for, between the destiny of the writer and that – compensatory – of his work.

In any way, the weirdness of the biography stimulates the critical attempts of interpreting the Urmuzian work from a psychoanalytical perspective. Among these attempts, the analysis of Corin Braga who noticed that Urmuz's fictional world is constructed on the foundations of "a liminal anxiety"⁴, the act of writing revealing itself as a liberating act, "a sort of *anabasis* through which Urmuz breaks the vault of everyday inferno and escapes in an atmosphere finally breathable"⁵. According to Corin Braga, the crucial role with which Urmuz invests the act of writing may be regarded as a symptom of an "inner cleavage", since the artist's self – unable to get control over reality and to act within its frames – "relocates himself in a *mirror-consciousness*, an alternative and absurd world where he assumes [...] full powers and full responsibilities"⁶.

¹ Eugène Ionesco, *Présentation de Urmuz – Introduction in Urmuz's Work*, in *Stanford French Review*, vol.3, n°3 / 1979, p. 305.

² The writer's sister, Eliza V. Vorvoreanu, remembers that after having graduated high school, Urmuz would have liked to study music, but their father, who was a physician, decided to send him to study at Bucharest Medical School, so that the son perpetuate his career. This latter blindly obeys his father's will, but abhorring to witness dissection, abandons The Medical School. He keeps on playing piano and composing classical music. His father is not at all impressed: his son has to become a serious scholar. «Go to the Faculty of Law; there you will study rigorously... learning, scientific research are everything in a man's life». And thus Urmuz became, against his will, a poor apprentice-judge, although he was not the kind of person able to get along with «scribbling» on files, doing justice or – worse – with punishing other human beings." (Urmuz, 2013, p. 6).

³ Pavel Dan, 1975, p. 301.

⁴ Corin Braga, 2001, p. 76.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem.*, p.93.

2. STRATEGIES OF ESTRANGEMENT

Attentively examined, Urmuz's work reveals itself as a widen (im)possible world, in which we come across queer "characters"; shapeshifting, zoomorphic creatures such as Algazy and Grummer, Ismaïl and Turnavitu, Fuchs, The Funnel, Stamate, Cotadi, Emil Gayk. They inhabit these "weird" pages, generally acting as monstrous nightmarish hybrids, dissimulated behind burlesque appearances.

Whether fiction *per se* has been accused for its lack of support in the physical universe (especially as a consequence of the tradition inaugurated by Russell and his logical positivism), the fictional worlds being thus deprived of any cognitive value, then Urmuz's pages can be considered a sort of fiction in the second power, since they deliberately rely "on the pleasure of [...] abandonig any kind of control of the experience accessible to everyone"⁷. It might not be inaccurate to suspect that underneath their sealed universe lies a construct imagined precisely for testing not only the limits of literature, but also those which are believed to separate, by convention, the various ontological regimes. For the creatures that inhabit the "wonderland" of the *Weird Pages* – from Ismaïl, the freakish badger breeder, dressed in a gown made of quilted bedding, to Fuchs, so obsessed with artistic perfection that he "musicalises" even in reflexive gestures, for instance in the process of nutrition, closely related to that of sexuality and radically transfigured by the norm of pure beauty – all of them are, essentially, messengers of a hybrid and conflictual way of perceiving things. Such creatures illustrate, in a way, the opposite situation to that in the fairy tales where the speechless beings become intelligent through anthropomorphic substitution. From this perspective Sergiu Pavel Dan was right to speak of a "disintegration of the human by ineluctable anchoring in the level of understanding of a bestiary"⁸.

In addition, given that from the very beginning the description is sensed as parodic, the reader can discern a radical shift of the traditional view on the literary character (and, by ricochet, on the human individual as such), a shift disclosing the parodist's endeavour of dislocating conceptual and ontological boundaries. We are gradually seduced by the mirage of these (im)possible worlds, built and demolished simultaneously, in total indifference regarding the real objects and the norms of the current logic. Such an exercise reveals, among other things, the unpredictable imaginative resources of the "inconceivable", allowing the reader to test the limits of his own perceptual and interpretive grids. Lisa Zunshine's assumption, according to which "violations of ontological expectations seem to be ripe with narrative possibilities"⁹ is thus verified.

Moreover, in this particular case humour and parody are supported by the flawless form of the writings, a result of what critics generally called "a mystic of technical precision"¹⁰, virtue owing to which the author of the *Bizarre Pages* was compared to Flaubert¹¹. Doubled as it is by the parodic manipulation of all sorts of *clichés* and common places, this precision can mislead the innocent reader, making him believe the author speaks about serious matters. On the other hand, the endeavour to

⁷ Pavel Dan, 1975, p. 303.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Lisa Zunshine, 2008, p. 69.

¹⁰ Adrian Lăcătuș, 2002, p.8.

¹¹ "Urmuz is an artisan, a miniaturist who chases his pieces with a obstinacy that is actually the reflex of a classical understanding of creation under the imperative of an ethical command: «Faire du bon travail!»" (Lăcătuș 2002, 8).

recondition the worn out *clichés* “in order to make them produce new expressive effects”¹² is only the top of the iceberg. On a detailed exploration, we’ll realize that these miniatures comprise in fact veritable “parodic conglomerates”¹³ where deep, fragmentary, hidden and subtle correspondences play a crucial role (a role at least as important as that of the linguistic prestidigitation exercises).

From the very beginning *Ismail and Turnavitu* strucks us by the solemnity of its (pseudo)scientific style; the impeccably polished phrases seem to be quoted from a botanical encyclopedia or from a scholarly treatise of natural sciences; later on the “dissertation” gradually turns – with Turnavitu’s presentation – into a sort of realistic novel, ending, like in postmodern cartoons, with a sort of joyful apocalypse.

By assuming an utter heterogeneity and allowing repeated logical-semantic transgressions, the (im)possible worlds of the *Weird Pages* postulate, in effect, a *possible-in-every-moment*, while the individuals who inhabit them – given their ambiguous status of composite entities – are akin to Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* or Italo Calvino’s *Non-Existent Knight*¹⁴, displaying at the same time a “family resemblance” with such beings as Max Ernst’s *Ubu Emperor* or *Euclid*, both well-known accomplishments of Surrealistic painting.

3. THE GALLERY OF PORTRAITS

The utter novelty and the humourous characters in Urmuz’s prose can be seized especially when we analyse his weird gallery of portraits. Most of them are constructed using the so-called portrait-biography technique: a mechanomorphic or zoomorphic human being is described in a total indifference to the generally accepted logical norms and to the common anthropomorphic or biological requirements. The description leaves the impression that it complies exclusively with syntactic rules. From this perspective most of the portraits of the heroes that populate these short stories are memorable. Besides the reversal of the traditional perspective that I mentioned above, we can perceive here a surprising formal continuity with the classical tradition of La Bruyère’s characters¹⁵ and, at the same time with the 19th century tradition of the literary physiology¹⁶. That’s why some literary historians suggested that a title equally suited to these strange compositions could have been *Bizarre Characters*, given the fact they disclose the preoccupations of a slightly misanthropic moralist, able to extract from his detailed observations a bitter-humorous delight¹⁷.

Indeed, one of the greatest surprises that these texts offer to the reader (whose expectations are sistematically disproved), has to do with the parodic recycling of a quite rigorous genre. All Urmuzian works start with such portraits, drawn with pretended seriousness which casts a sort of chimerical light

¹² N. Manolescu, 2001, p. 521.

¹³ Adrian Lăcătuș, 2002, p. 17

¹⁴ Regarding Calvino’s *Non-Existent Knight*, Giovanni Bottiroli (Bottiroli 1997: 202) notes that the protagonist, sir Agilulf, does not embody only a paradox, that of “the existence of a non-existent person”, but he is also the messenger of a way perception and understanding of things in itself hybrid and conflictual: “No, he could not be broken into pieces, he could not be cut: he was once and for all Agilulf Emo Bertrandino from the Guildiverns and Others from Corbentraz and Sura, invested knight of Selimpia Citerior and Fez in a certain day [...]. And possessor of the most beautiful and immaculate armor in the whole camp, for ever inseparable of him.”

¹⁵ Nicolae Balotă, 1970, p.28.

¹⁶ Corin Braga, 2001, p. 81.

¹⁷ Eliza V. Vorvoreanu remembers her brother’s devastating sense of fun made not only for his own happiness but also for that of the entire family. Unlike most literary critics who insist on the author’s morbid disposition, she believes that not one of his grotesque characters ever haunted him. Urmuz, she says, was always struck by the sound value of certain words and by the unpredictability of most human actions.

on the manner in which the characters behave or dress. Thus, the first sentence of *Ismail and Turnavitu* informs us that “Ismail is made up of eyes, sideburns and a dress”¹⁸, but immediately we find out that the protagonist “spends his time preserved in a jar” (the referent is here of vegetable nature), in the attic of “his dear father’s house”, that is inside the domestic “realm”, harmless in appearance, but oppressive in substance. Apparently such arbitrary associations make laugh:

For the greatest part of every year no one knows where Ismail lives. It is believed that he spends his time preserved inside a jar in the attic of his dear father’s house, his father being a nice old man, his nose pulled through a press and surrounded by a fence made of twigs. He keeps Ismail thus sequestered, it is said, so he will not be stung by bees or be reached by the corruption of our electoral mores¹⁹.

Ismail’s old father, with his nose pulled through a press and Algazy, the hero of another Urmuzian miniature, have a family air that could hardly be overlooked. Both belong to the unusual category of the composite entities, bodies on which are grafted or screwed objects, debris, recycled products, ready-made equipments etc. Critics have rightly linked these hybrids, no matter if zoomorphic or mechanicist, to similar representations in the Surrealists’ and Dadaists’ paintings. It is not difficult to observe that Algazy, Gayk, Ismail and others closely resemble their “brothers” that pervaded the canvases of Picabia, Duchamp, Max Ernst, Brauner, Miró, Dali, Picasso and others. Moreover, the presence of all sorts of artificial installations alludes to the process of becoming-machine and has to do – as Ion Pop states – with “an entire pre-surrealistic orientation from the second decade of the XXth century, that of the «automaton myth»”²⁰:

Algazy is a nice old man with a toothless smile, his beard shaven and silky, neatly laid out on a grill that is screwed under his chin and surrounded by barbed wire... Algazy does not speak any European languages...But if you wait for him first thing in the morning and you say to him: “Good morning, Algazy!” and you stress the sound z, Algazy smiles and, to show his gratitude, sticks his hand in his pocket and pulls the end of a string that makes his beard shake joyously for fifteen minutes...²¹

What we are witnessing here is not so much the human’s dismemberment, but rather its dislocation and discarding, as in the sequence in which Grummer, the bird-man, is introduced. With his aromatic wood beak, Grummer reminds us of Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky, both being genuinely designed according to a technique to be found also in certain contemporary cartoons :

Grummer lies in ambush... casting sidelong, cunning glances; he first sticks out his beak which he sharpens ostentatiously on a gutter especially mounted on the counter edge and it is only then that he reveals himself full length...He performs all kinds of manual operations on Algazy to get him leave the store, then by hints and insinuations he draws you, without your becoming aware of it, into all sorts of discussions – particularly on sports and literature – until he gets you in the right position to strike your belly twice with his beak and to send you screaming with pain into the street.²²

¹⁸ Urmuz, *Pagini bizare/ Weird Pages...* p. 23

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*, p.25.

²⁰ Ion Pop, 1990, p.57.

²¹ Urmuz, 1985, pp. 55-57.

²² *Ibidem.*, p. 61

It might seem surprising that, for the most part, the interwar Romanian critique has detected here only the inclination for farces and eccentricities of an amusing writer, nothing more than a skilful author of punnings and absurd parodies. Among the few who have perceived, at least in part, the extent of the consequences of the Urmuzian experiment, was Perpessicius, the one who saw, behind such puppets as Grummer, Algazy, Gayk, Ismaïl, Turnavitu or Cotadi, all bent under the weight of their queer destinies, the symptoms of an existence related to human condition as such..

In any case, the confusion of registers and (reality) levels remains one of the crucial aspects for understanding Urmuz's work. The result is a paradoxal universe which astonishes us by its heterogeneity and its coherence (attributes rarely encountered together), functioning as a harmonious, musical whole, structured by the recurrence of certain obsessive topics (e.g. the erotic theme, that of the evasion or the obsession of a discretionary authority). We can easily recognize here a musical principle – theme with variations, which certainly has played an essential part in what a contemporary critic has called “affirming a unique and irreducible vision, beyond (and through) the negativity of the parody”²³.

4. THE SEMANTICS OF IMPOSSIBLE WORLDS AND THE PARADOXES OF INTERTEXTUALITY

In his essay on fictional worlds, Lubomir Doležel (1998) remarked that when the reader explores impossible universes, he has to adapt his cognitive systems and frameworks, thus enabling himself to reconstruct inconceivable scenarios or events. In Doležel's words, “readers have to be ready to modify, supplement, or even discard the actual world encyclopedia”²⁴. Undoubtedly, who opens the “four-part novel” entitled *The Funnel and Stamate* published by Urmuz in 1922 should adopt a similar attitude:

A well-ventilated apartment, consisting of three rooms, glass-enclosed terrace and a door-bell. Out front, a sumptuous living-room, its back wall taken up by a solid oak book-case perennially wrapped in soaking bed-sheets...A legless table right in the middle, based on probability calculus and supporting a vase containing eternal concentrate of the “thing in itself”, a clove of garlic, the statuette of a priest (from Ardeal) holding a book of syntax and20 cents for tips.²⁵

The most striking aspect in the case of this novelistic *incipit* – as everywhere along the *Weird Pages* – seems to be the “comedy of words”. Crohmălniceanu was right to remark that the famous bergsonian definition of the comic – “du mécanique plaqué sur le vivant” – finds, with Urmuz, a perfect illustration (especially as far as the field of language is concerned)²⁶. As if terrorized by the idea that he could slip in predictability, the writer does not lose any opportunity to dismantle stereotypes, linguistic *clichés* or literary conventions. The most significant aspect when it comes to the novelty of the Urmuzian formula seems to me the latter. Noticed first by Matei Călinescu, discussed lately with more and more elaborated arguments, this method discloses, in effect, an exacerbated

²³ Adrian Lăcătuș, 2002, p.15.

²⁴ Lubomir Doležel, 1998, p. 181

²⁵ Urmuz, 1985, p.7.

²⁶ Ov. S.Crohmălniceanu, 1974, p.614; Crohmălniceanu is not the first to make such an observation; even in the interwar period, in an article by Lucian Boz (“Urmuz: the Mind's Game with Death”, published in *Excelsior*, I, 18, Aprilie 4/ 1931), reference was made to that famous Bergsonian formula which the Urmuzian imaginary tends to illustrate literally.

aesthetic consciousness, ultimately responsible of what Harold Bloom once called “the anxiety of the influence”, and consequently responsible also of the creator’s painful inner cleavage.

Like Paul Valéry, who was disgusted and seduced at the same time by the predictability of the realistic novel, Urmuz, seems, in his turn, simultaneously attracted and disappointed by its stereotyped and conventional enunciations. “The marchioness went out at five o’clock ” or “Happiness is always short lived” are statements that disclose, owing to their arbitrary character, the very automatizing disorder of depersonalization (which is also an important source of humour).

Yet, what seems to me of crucial importance – also because may help at a certain extent in elucidating some of the writer’s enigmas – is his ambiguous attitude, mixture of anxiety and nostalgia towards the literary predecessors. Urmuz’s hypertrophic aesthetic consciousness, his skepticism doubled as it is by the longing for classical perfection, urge him not only to systematically discredit all sorts of *idées reçues*, but enable him, at the same time, to anticipate the danger of what could be called the conformism of non-conformism. In other words, the risk of wearing out and exhaustion in which any language, no matter how innovative or incongruous, inevitably falls. From this point of view, a contemporary critic has rightly observed that the *anti-bourgeois* (no matter whether romantic, mystic, avant-garde, revolutionary etc.), seems to Urmuz “as ridiculous as the *bourgeois*, while his language is equally bantered”²⁷.

The best example in this sense is the heroic encounter at the end of *Algazy & Grummer*: “Next day, Grummer [...] plucked the old man with his beak and furiously carried him after sunset, to the peak of a tall mountain [...] A gigantic battle was joined there between them which lasted all night”²⁸. After this scene, follows a transparent parodical allusion to the avant-garde rhetoric: “But the old man, in whose insides the fumes of the fermenting bladder began to stir up the coming thrills of the literature of the future, decided that what he was offered was stale and scanty”²⁹. Unlike most of the critics who analysed Urmuz’s work, Adrian Lăcătuș remarks here more than a literal representation of the category of “consumer literature”, noticing that the same kind of parody applies to the “revolutionary” language, which is typical for the avant-garde. Consequently, we can presume that “an ironic conservatism”³⁰ defines our writer’s attitude, representing the starting point – often unnoticed – of the Urmuzian joyful “delirium”. It would not be unreasonable, therefore, to see Urmuz more than a fanatic and radical promoter of the new. We might consider him rather an anti-modern, in the sense in which Compagnon uses this concept, a modern writer *malgré soi*, that is a sort of “split” modern, torn between several tendencies, like Baudelaire, Breton, Bataille or Blanchot.³¹

The indecision, the ambiguity, the ironic conservatism and skepticism are all traits which can always serve as arguments in support of such a hypothesis; ultimately, even his biography encourages readers to see in Urmuz a typical case of inner cleavage in which forces of opposing signs are exercised with equal intensity.

Moreover, the manner in which the author manipulates the intertextual allusions (especially those to classical mythology), shows this kind of dual attitude, ambiguous and confusing; finally he finds a way of establishing a connection between apparently diverging fictional worlds, making them

²⁷ Adrian Lăcătuș, 2002, p. 18.

²⁸ Urmuz, 1985, p.63.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Adrian Lăcătuș, 2002, p. 18

³¹ A.Compagnon, *Antimodernii*, p.11

communicate also extensively (by means of resuming characters or situations of canonical writings, as Homer's *Odyssey*, for instance). On the other hand, as far as the relationship with the Romanian predecessors is concerned, we notice that the Urmuzian duos have many in common with I.L.Caragiale's delicious-absurd couples (such as Lache and Mache, Smotocea and Cotocea, Ghiță Nițescu and Niță Ghițescu).

5.CONCLUSION

Urmuz is the exponent of a different kind of modernity, contrasting that of the Romanian supporters' of synchronism and even that of the avant-garde artists. Always playing his card/ ace on the limit, between refusal and acceptance, on that thin boundary which separates revolt and nostalgia, farce and tragedy, possible and impossible, every line he has written discloses his longing for a primordial, unalterable language, in agreement with his utopian ideal of aesthetic perfection. This is one of the reasons why his works – impeccably constructed – leave the impression they defy the laws of current logic, continuously oscillating between stylistic registers and ontological levels, and showing an equal mistrust in the centripetal forces, of stability and balance, as well as in centrifugal ones, subversive with respect to the pre-established, canonical order. The humour of Urmuz, therefore, should be understood as an instrument for galvanizing the elements of a dynamic imaginary, always changing and recreating itself. We must not forget that, after all, the writer belongs to the same family of East-Central European writers as Kafka³², Mrozek, Ionesco, Gombrowiz or Daniil Harms.

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³² The critic Ion Biberi, in his *Études sur la littérature roumaine contemporaine* (1937) underlined the similarities of theme and structure between Kafka and Urmuz. Here it is an illustrative passage from Kafka's *Die Sorge des Hausvaters*: “At first glance Obradek appears like a flat bobbin in the shape of a star and seems indeed wound about with thread, but it turns out to be nothing but bits of broken cotton tangled and twisted, of all kinds and colors. Of course, it is not just a simple bobbin since from the center of the star there rises a transversal tipcat to which another one is joined at right angles. With the help of this on one side and of the rays of the star on the other the whole is able to stand up as if on two feet.” Perfectly reminiscent of Urmuz's “maypole in the middle to which the whole Stamate family is tied...” Unknown to each other, although they were writing at exactly the same time, Kafka and Urmuz expressed with an identical precision in despair what Jacques Vache once called “a theatrical of universally joyless inutility”.

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