

Obsessive Contradictions in "Pădurea spânzuraților"

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Abstract

In this article I intend to treat the problem of contradictions on which the main character from the novel *Pădurea spânzuraților*, Apostol Bologa, develops. I also took into consideration the trigger of all these antonymic attitudes, the light, treating the element both in terms of literary approach as well as in terms of representation of the limit situations. Apostol's convulsions, though innermost, have a high degree of universality, becoming the exponent of an entire generation. The central idea of this article aimed at highlighting this protagonist's struggle to regain balance, despite the mixture of heterogeneous elements between soul and thought. Bologa's consciousness enters a new process of defining, through which he regains the primordial primary balance, of the beginnings.

Keywords: contradiction, conflict, light, obsession, universality

1. Introduction

Pădurea spânzuraților is a complex novel whose subject is circumscribed to the modern issue of the inextricable inner conflict. Apostol Bologa isn't a character with a labile psychology, as Puiu Faranga is in the novel *Ciuleandra*. He is a sturdy character as if his roots are in the novel *Ion*. With a temper characterised by a powerful instinct and a special ability to adapt to the difficulties of life, he falls eventually defeated by personal dramatic problem, generated by a hostile historical context.

The criticism of those times were very favorable for *Pădurea spânzuraților*. In 1928, Eugen Lovinescu wrote: —"[...] *Pădurea spânzuraților* is the best Romanian psychological novel, in the sense of an evolutive study of a particular conscience case, – a methodical study powered by precise facts and incidents and pushed beyond the rational netting, deep inside the subconscious. At no time Bologa becomes a «nationalist» militant, he doesn't speak about «patriotism» or about the united Romania; his conscience case agonizes inside of a moral and human incompatibility [...] the mysticism of the hero can be as well discussed and, more than an effect of the war, it can be considered an influence of the Russian literature; anyway, the author knew how to give it profound roots in the hero's childhood and to move the entire problem of Bologa's conversion in the plan of some obscure and profound forces which work more powerful than the abstract concept of «country» or of «nationalism»." (Lovinescu, 1973: 264).

For G. Călinescu *Pădurea spânzuraților* is the —monography of an agonizing incertitude, and the main character illustrates —the psychology of the mediocre soul controlled by two different attitudes imposed from the outside. "Pădurea spânzuraților, a novel which could have been political and creative, remained an analysis novel. Bologa's language is of divine mysticism, with powerful Ibsenian sentences which give to his case an even more misty casuistic obscurity." (Călinescu, 1982: 733-734).

Tudor Vianu doesn't say anything new in relation to his predecessors when in 1942, in *Arta prozatorilor români*, he wrote: „Pădurea spânzuraților is entirely built on the schema of an obsession, directing the hero's destiny from the depths of the subconsciousness.” (Vianu, 1977: 315). Vianu supports his idea through the stylistic analysis of the text.

The other inter-war famous critics (Șerban Cioculescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Vladimir Streinu and others), each with his specific critical language and spirit, develop ideas already formulated and sometimes embroider on Rebreanu's confessions about his novel. This way a standard image of the novel and its protagonist is created, an image that will flow from time to time, from critic to criticism, with the necessary changes.

"Pădurea spânzuraților analyzes the doubtful drama of an individual to whom the objective determination, acting with a power usually attributed to fate, prove stronger, the inability drama to choose between contentious solutions; drama being a result from the stressed opposition between the human consciousness and the imperative of << duty >> which is out of the conscience and regards the duty from the point of view of the irrepressible impulses of the >> soul <<; "the tragedy of participating to a violent act, perceived as a foreigner for his own consciousness; (...) Rebreanu <<chooses >> (through soul's affinities) a broad theme and in the same time a clearly social and psychological one, collective and individual, finally a national theme." (Raicu, 1967: 118-119).

Bologa, the man of the antinomies between duty and nation, idealistic, concerned with philosophy, being incessantly in ideatic contradictions, loving and resenting at the same time, becomes the central core around which the narration oscillates. Enlisted by his own initiative, into the Austro-Hungarian army, being ambitious, Apostol becomes a man of 'duty'. In accordance with the education that he received at home and respectively with his moral structure, he believes with maximum conviction in work and in his military duty. From his point of view, desertion is a crime. This produces strength of Apostol to witness the execution of Svoboda.

2. The contradictory obsessions

The contradiction between the views upon moral issues is highlighted by Rebreanu through the discussion from the officers' mess hall will be the

trigger of Apostol's internal imbalance. Gradually, the uncomfortable feeling of restlessness will turn into an obsessive conflict between duty and the feeling of being guilty because he fights against the Romanians. All his precepts of a man, which until now seemed impossible to be affected, are now shaken from the roots.

The obsessive states are presented at every step. "Stretching to sleep, Apostol feels "thousands of scraps of thoughts sparkling in the same second, clashing, mingling are chained. And among them, as a red bumblebee, buzzing here and there, louder and louder and always under new forms, the obsession that, in this night, everything must surely end (...)" (Rebreanu, 1964:152).

The obsession of desertion is actually the death obsession seen as the only way of saving the man that finds himself on the edge of an abyss, in obscure dialogue with his own being, a dialogue which in the end failed. When he approached the gallows pole, recalling the times when he was animated by an inflexible spirit of justice and looking around himself as if it is about someone else, Apostol seemed discharged of his own inner storm.

The fundamental theme of the novel, the death is literary valued by Liviu Rebreanu in its aspect of psychological phenomenon. In this novel of psychological analysis, the introspection goes through endless roads, like a labyrinth. This technique of creating a labyrinth inside the character's psyche generates in the reader's mind the impression of a genuine revelation inside the pages of the novel, an entire system of thoughts that is held by the human being. The lifelikeness of Apostol's feelings are not limited to a certain stage.

For Eugen Lovinescu, *Pădurea spânzuraților* is "the methodical study fed of precise facts and incidents and pushed beyond logic fabric in the depths of the unconsciousness. At no time does Apostol Bologa become a << nationalist >> militant [...]; in his conscience case he is struggling more in a moral and human incompatibility." (Lovinescu, 1975:241).

Nicolae Iorga, who generally proves to be hostile to Rebreanu's literature, this time has words of appreciation for his work: "Although made up of pieces, each of them being interesting, the tragedy of the Romanian soldier under foreign flag shakes." (Iorga apud Vianu, 1981:252). In his turn, Tudor Vianu points out that the book "is entirely built on a scheme of an obsession, guiding the destiny of the hero from the depths of the subconsciousness. In his view, the author turns into an analyst of the unconscious state, of the crowded thoughts, of the tyrannical obsessions". (Vianu, 1981:327).

Liviu Rebreanu doesn't synthesize in the novel his brother's death, but the drama of a whole generation affected by war, "In Apostol I wanted to synthesize the prototype of my own generation: Apostol Bologa's hesitations

are ours, all of us, as well as his anxieties" (Rebreanu, 2002:17). All the data you find in the novel are inspired from reality, but without imitating it, and their importance is manifested in terms of climate, rebuilding the years around World War. Beyond the truth, which is presented in the letters of Emil, Liviu's brother, with whom he held a correspondence, the writer discovers, thanks to his vocation of analyst, the states of subconsciousness, the premonition that his brother had in front of death, the depression which he was hiding.

Therefore, Liviu Rebreanu proves to be a genuine analyst of consciousness states, being able to discover behind his brother's feelings and emotions, hidden thoughts. At the same time, it is revealed the writer's power to relieve his own feelings, emotions, designing the novel's world in terms of a genuine creation of worlds and lives. Emil's destiny is the one which gave grievous aspect, the truthful atmosphere of the war and of the human feelings manifested during the World War.

3. The symbol of the reflector

The symbol of the reflector occupies a special place in the novel *Pădurea spânzuraților*. Destroying the enemy's reflector, whose light penetrated the tranquility and safety of the Austro-Hungarian diggings, represents a close-up of the front. In this novel, Liviu Rebreanu avoided to note the frustrating events or the scenes of war. The realistic scenes in which one may observe that the objectivity of novel's author, doesn't dominate the novel.

The spotlight, however, is the first image of the front with his division, with the tumult that reigns in the trenches and with the peace before the death. The destruction of the reflector is the first battle sequence. This is the only violent act that Bologna commits against an object, like his act confirms once again his refuse to kill people.

The destruction of the reflector, which penetrated the deepest corners of the hero's inner self, didn't take place without premeditation. Night after night, Bologna watched for the appearance of light and waited for a good moment to destroy it. Now we can find in the pages of the novel the analytical moments of tension. "Bologna didn't dare to look at his watch, being afraid not to balk his hope that the reflector's light will emergence. He was sure, however, that it was midnight. <<There's enough time >> he said in his mind with an increasing bitterness. Loneliness was suffocating him." (Rebreanu, 1964: 88). The moment when the reflector appeared is not a violent one, so to scare the hero, who in full charge of tension saw the spotlight as a divine light that brings the strange comfort of the light which he has already seen in the eyes of Svoboda.

Rebreanu seems to have revealed the entire mastery of his art. "For Bologna, the endearment of the trembling rays starts to be sweet as a kiss of a

loved virgin, threatening him, that he could no longer hear any thunder. Unconsciously, like a greedy child, he extended both hands towards the light, grumbling with a dry throat: -The light! ... the light! ... " (Rebreanu, 1964: 88).

The guns continued to fire as Bologna ordered. Suddenly, the light faded, and Apostol is confident of having destroyed the reflector. But the joy that he wouldn't be forced to leave the Romanian front is replaced with a bitter taste of success, a success which will trigger a long process of self-analysis. The same inner process, that has invaded Bologna's consciousness when Svoboda was convicted, will be initiated.

4. The mirrors of Bologna's consciousness

Pădurea spânzuraților can be considered the novel of only one character: Apostol Bologna. The other characters of the novel take part in the events only in accordance with him. This is why I consider that Cervenco, Klapka and Gross are the mirrors of Bologna's consciousness and represent the contradictory nature of the main character. Those are the three parts of only one main, complex human type, Apostol Bologna. „From the extraordinary spiritual development of the main character comes an embedded force which the author, from a justified classical meticulousness, equally distributes it to all the characters implied in the action, but which, from an innovative instinct, is recovered through the main character. The more carefully we examine them as independent individuals, the most obvious faces of the monolith they become.” (Protopopescu, 1978: 86) The characters can be analysed either as freestanding ones or as — ”voces beyond the knowledge” (Popa, 2006).

If we search into Rebreanu's *Caiete de creație* we are going to discover that the concrete world of the novel develops the three main mirrors as follows: Gross is the cynical anarchist, Cervenco embodies the Christian kindness, the suffering and the inanimate mysticism, Varga seems to be the proud and loyal nationalist while Klapka is — the *poor man* controlled by time, coward when faced with the decision of choosing between life or death. Each one is built on only one moral and ideological coordinate. Those three characters are the symbols of Apostol's resignation from the human dignity, the mirrors in which it is reflected Apostol's deformed soul and consciousness.

The first one who comes into our sight and the only one with a biography is captain Klapka. He is described as a character which considers that life is full of compromises. He is the one who justifies his attitudes by fighting for his life and even if he promised to Apostol that he is going to defend him in front of the Martial Court, he will be the first one who will condemn him. Klapka justifies his behaviour in the name of life. Klapka is quite a complex and complicated character because he is quite impossible to

fill with meanings since he's empty from the humane point of view. *He is kind of Svoboda without courage and a Bologna has ultimately saved from the hanging.* (Crețu, 1982: 63) This character marks the reader's memory through his sincerity and confession. The connection between the two characters is built in mirror because Apostol and Klapka project one another. *Klapka considers Apostol – brother of suffering. At the same time he is, somewhat, the mentor, the guide* (Bot, 1985: 216-222). In the novel's scenery, Klapka exists only to underline Apostol through contrast.

The connection between Gross and Apostol is a complex one from the point of view of the real body as well as from the point of view of a voice beyond consciousness. First of all, one should remember that Gross was a trencher, a very important aspect offered by the author. Gross is the one who firmly says that the state is a huge institution while the war is an international hatred. Gross is the one who pushes to universal insurrection but he behaves as a loyal and brave soldier of the state. Even his speech about the saving of the human being is just a forced oratory. *I only execute the orders, said the pioneer always mocking. I accomplish or help the barbarity, but I do so full of sickness, buddy.* Even though he is the first who notices the change Apostol goes through, he still can't understand the causes and meanings of his fellow's troubles. Gross will be part of the Martial Court and will vote for Apostol's conviction.

Cervenco is rather the echo and the reference point for Apostol. At first sight, Cervenco is a picturesque figure; he goes to battle with a cane stick, singing religious songs, he speaks repeating the same words. The character is the image of a mystic man: *Country is death ...; "We need great, immense suffering... Only in suffering grows and generates the great love, the true and the victorious one ...* Cervenco is to the Apostol a ... John the Baptist. Bologna is fascinated by the look and flapping of the *guard* armed with a cane stick. Visiting him in the hospital - Apostol Bologna saw a *light in his eyes with flashes of suffering, exaltation and humility, as mysterious breaths of soul.* In Apostol's subconsciousness, Cervenco is the image of the gallows on whose rope he looks like a familiar face.

Apostol had known Varga since his studentship, when they met in the house of his uncle who was his philosophy teacher, and he said that Varga has a proud temperament and secretly diffuses spleen upon the others. In relation to his companion-in-arms, Varga shows superiority through his gestures, the way of speaking, and he would have the last word in a conversation. His entire behavior reveals his emptiness and the littleness of his soul. Cynicism is his mask. Varga is what Apostol no longer wants to be. By the time he catches Bologna trying to move to the enemy, Varga is acting in the name of encumbrance and he even thinks to admonish Apostol using the legitimate force and superiority of the winner.

Varga is a fair, exemplary and patriotic military in the sense of the patriotism promoted by the Hungarian army. " He does not understand that his homeland is not the Empire. Officer Varga is a Pharisee. Of course, the character is not created by a premeditated template, he is not deprived of a certain human complication.

Gross, Varga, and Klapka represent a path that Apostol refuses to follow. Faithful to the truth and following the law of the aesthetic, Rebreanu did not fall into the trap of politics by writing a patriotic-nationalist novel. Instead, he created a true novel of obsessive contradictions following different opposite attitudes of Apostol.

Apostol's love for Ilona and her love for the Apostol is the earthly form of universal love, of the divine love. Ilona is the opposite model of Apostol's mother. She is a totally natural being. Ilona is a woman who asks to be dominated by a man, even a model. Here, on earth, between the heart and the brain, we can observe the split, the androgyn, the primordial unity, which was cut in two halves. They are pushed towards one another by mysterious forces, beyond man's nature.

The only character who truly understands Apostol's drama is Ilona. Her love, especially when she gives herself at the return from church, as a sign of her fusion, until her dissolution of his earthly person in the drama of Apostol Bologna. Through her love, Apostol, at the end of the dramatically existential journey, enters the divine, universal love. So the words of the girl addressed to Apostol should not be overlooked when he left: *I know the mountains better," Ilona suddenly whispered, guessing his thoughts. I know all the storms, all the paths, all the streams. I will be your guide.*

Cervenco, one of the three characters that becomes the mirror of Apostol's conscience, permanently triggers the symbolic orientation of the destruction of the reflector. "I could not close my eyes all night, captain muttered aside. I'm sorry that you destroyed the spotlight, I don't know why ... You killed the light, Bologna" (Rebreanu, 1964: 91). The consequences of this chapter are now accompanying the hero throughout his inner evolution. The symbol which completes this chapter is closely linked to hero's inner springs of humanity, causing the amplification of the conflicting human being. The light becomes Apostol Bologna's the new victim. His conflicting structure will bear the strange incompatibility between work and desire, between the state and the love for nation, between life (represented by his love for Ilona) and death.

The divergence of the three sides of Apostol's destiny comes from the inability dissolution of these elements. It results a character which is everywhere followed by convulsive disaggregating state. Apostol is not what could be defined as a character with multiple faces incumbent or successively established. He is what Edward Morgan Forster would call "a round character",

a character who, by his existence, will only return to his roots, to his childhood, that he firmly kept in memory.

Forster classifies the characters into two major types: round characters and flat characters. The flat ones have one dominant feature and the round are very complex characters that develop in the inner plane, throughout the novel. Apostol has an inner development and returns in time to rediscover the divine light from Svoboda's hanging as well as the light discovered in his childhood when he discovered God. His whole life has been an inner development and not an involution, as one may think, taking into consideration the external events, because for him, as is the case of Toma Novac, the main character of the novel *Adam și Eva*, death is not a form of defeat, but it is a form of discovering the supreme happiness beyond the life's challenges.

According to Forster, a great novel manages both types of characters, flat as well as round. If Apostol Bologna represents the round character, the only one which can lend a tragic role, the other characters, which are flat, hold a single dominant feature as it is the case of the three officers: Cervenco, Klapka and Gross, who are created according with the reality of war. They determine Apostol to remain anchored in the reality. At the same time, they are the exponents of Bologna's uncertainties. They have a single dominant feature, which is to remain rational. Cervenco seems to be a much more complex character, achieved thanks to its moral sense, far from it being the thought of violence on the front or changing attitudes throughout the novel.

Bologna's confession is interesting even before the denouement, as if it comes to assert the thesis of the Romanian analytical novel whose horizons are opened by Rebreanu. "Human life is not outside, but inside, in the soul ... What's out is incurious ... It doesn't exist, the only one which matters is the soul ... When my soul will not exist anymore, everything will stop ... " (Rebreanu, 1964: 334). Then there comes the interdependence of his human being, which has shaken his entire experience which was in permanent contradiction: "And yet the rest decides for the fate of my soul ... And the rest depends on another rest ... Everywhere bondage ... A circle of addictions in which each link boasts the most perfect interdependence" (op.cit. 1964: 337). Apostol Bologna's avoidances are explained by Rebreanu himself in his "Caiete de creație": "When he hesitates, he remembers that he had read somewhere that form the embryonic shape the heart stands next to the brain. How fortunate to keep this embryonic shape throughout life." (Rebreanu, 1972 :353)

Liviu Rebreanu is a great analyst through his ability to precisely recreate the shape and the motion of the soul, but also of human thought, communicating at the same time, not only the mystical life and the variable nature but also the human soul's vibrations. The final part is the most

striking part because it is an extensive investigation that reaches up to the reactionary impulses of a condemned to death. The end of the novel is totally plunged into nothingness, but this does not diminish the presence of the hero. On the contrary, its obsessions become more pronounced. The tragic death and the gallows will put an end to these endless obsessions.

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