

SOCIOLOGY AND LITERATURE; A POSTMODERN ANALYSIS OF THE “RĂSCOALA” NOVEL

Ştefan UNGUREAN¹

Abstract: *The present study tries to sociologically explain the Romanian society from the beginning of the XXth century, starting from the reality of a “literary text” – Liviu Rebreanu’s novel, “Răscoala”. Moreover, the study is thought to be a demonstration of the way in which literature can serve not only the Illuminist ideal of soul creation, but also the understanding of the world.*

Key words: *terrorist-hostage relation, bestialisation, sovereignty, “disinhibitory” behaviors.*

1. Introduction

One can use sociology in many areas of literature, from the macro social to the interpersonal ones, from the political to the economical ones. The portfolio of social analysis contains the study of the social frames in which a literary production is written, distributed, read and evaluated, the study of the actors from the literary sphere, the centers of symbolic power, the social networks. Social analysis can take the literary text as a reference point for understanding the reality it reflects or anticipates, being interested not in the aesthetics of the text, but in the logics of the social actions of the characters, focusing on the way in which reality is produced inside the text.

2. Paradigm

The present paper analyzes Liviu Rebreanu’s novel “Răscoala” from Deleuze’s point of view – as an act of sodomy, taking an author from behind, giving him a child “*that would be his offspring, yet monstrous. It was really*

important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed.” [1]. The purpose of the present paper is to force Rebreanu to give us arguments for the modernization of the Romanian society from the beginning of the XXth century and we intend to “attack” the novel from different points of view, using multiple analysis.

3. First Analysis: the Economical Condition

The economy is overwhelmingly agrarian. The dominant social relation is the one between peasants and entrepreneurs, the latter being either old landowners, or contractors that live and activate in the urban environment. As the rate of the urban population not involved in agriculture is small, we can define the situation as “a path-dependency”, dependency on which an entire social

¹ Law and Sociology Faculty, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

scaffolding was built and it still functions. In such situations, any damage of the dependency system can easily block the entire society.

The economy functions by coupling capital and work. In the Romanian society at the beginning of the XXth century capital is exclusively an urban product, such as work is dominantly rural. In this context, from the first time and in the first pages of the book we can see that the author raises the question of "Union", seen from the eyes of a finance man from Bucharest as "the conquest of Transylvania". This is the sign that tells us that Rebreanu uses the analysis of the 1907 rebellion as a social radiography offered to the Transylvanians as a way of understanding this society and, by derivation, of the consequences of the act from December 1, 1918.

The agriculture was based on the arrangement between the entrepreneurs and the peasant, a mutual agreement. The system was built on a cycle: starvation – work – threat with starvation. Because the peasant was starving at the end of the winter, he had to accept all the conditions the entrepreneur had in the agreement, conditions that threatened the peasant with starvation the next winter but forced him to rapidly begin working the fields. To sum it up, work produced starvation. Agriculture and even society depended on this process of "bestialisation" of the peasant and on the constant threat to his being, the only concern being that the "beast" to become hostage, a "tamed beast", incapable of escaping the social park it was imposed to. History is written here differently: we can talk about the biology-social dyad meant not to get the men out from the "animal" condition, for him to overcome his nature condition, but to fix the nature condition into the social one using the economical-social-political mechanism.

As there were no non-agricultural alternatives, the peasant could not escape the "captive beast" condition nor could he protest. The way the machinery was built, it did not have emergency solutions; it did not have the elements that could make it capable of grasping the dysfunctions and produce changes. And because "the beast" has no soul, the machinery bases neither on the peasants' soul, nor on the agreement the soul would give inside domination, but on the control of his body. The dominator-dominated relation is one of submission, not of "obedience", as Rousseau stated, of volunteer agreement. This machinery functions as long as the power controls the peasant's body. If the peasant "recovers" his soul and wins the battle he fights with the entrepreneur over the control of his own body, then the entire economic mechanism catches the flu, and the entire "society" is in danger. In 1907, getting out of the "beast" state and the desire of the majority of the population for a human existence determined a disorder in the social life. It is hard to believe that the Transylvanian reader would not be shocked with this reality just ten years before the Union, he who was living in a different life equation.

This machinery is not perfect. It has two safety valves. The first one is the possibility of re-negotiating the frame-contract with the peasant on the "terrorist" position. It's the case of the emergencies in the field work when, due to weather, the entrepreneur is at the hand of the peasant. The solution for the peasant's blackmail is threatening with the import of workforce from Transylvania. As well as the idea of "occupation", this couldn't be pleasant for the Transylvanian reader. The second valve is stealing. If in the first case we talk about a public exposure of the positions and also a negotiation; in the second case, "the renegotiation" is outside the communication rules. Theft is, in fact, a

sort of communication in absence, sending messages with an anonymous transmitter, a unilateral communication. Blackmail and theft have in common the fact that peasants understand that their social relations are, in fact, social reports, and meaning decoupling and coupling between the same actors, based on the "force's" logic of the moment.

This characteristic of the economic phenomenon has a double moral meaning. The first one expresses the clear break between the economic and ethic axes. Economy functioned only if the peasants' life was permanently under threat. Theft meant partial salvation, thus deviant acts were emptied of their immoral content and could not be sanctioned. When people are forced to do actions with no moral content we find ourselves in a situation of anomy. If an onerous contract, imposed by making the other incapable to negotiate, is answered with theft, how immoral is this behavior? Trifon Guju: "*is still our work!*" In other words, one can find truth in work, not in law. Theft is historically justified: "*as if one has not been stealing since the beginning of the world*", is a tradition legitimated habitus, a sign of unquestionable validity. An immoral contractor, a peasant brought to incapacity to be a moral subject, and a historically anomic society, these are the characteristics of the beginning of the last century.

Which is the answer to theft? In the absence of a moral code, the answer cannot be but institutional. The investigation is carried out by a gendarme that uses in his action the local administration apparatus - the mayor, which has to go and see how much was stolen "*but don't take it so easy, uncle Ionuț! said the sergeant! 'Cause then you'll be in trouble, I tell you*" [2]. Therefore, the costs for social control in the private sphere are paid by the state; as such, the contractor cannot see them in his

balance sheet. The 1907 Rebellion is strongly connected to a management error, giving the politicization of bookkeeping. Why is this important? Both the slave system and the feudal one were based on the labor force monopoly, on threat; both of them collapsed because of the surveillance costs. The Romanian society had, in 1907, all the characteristics of a feudal society, the only difference being that the state was surveying work which led to minimizing the peasants' problem. The political aspect is seen as a sequel of the war with more or less pacifist means. Obviously, such a state is a weak and endangered one, giving the fact that it devours its resources on internal control.

Besides, the gendarme's future, his professional and, implicitly, his human condition depend on the way the landowner Iuga sees the situation, given the direct relation the two of them have with the ministry of interior. The government is not equidistant in its relation with the political subjects; it represents an enterprise owned by the political subject capable of imposing the economic contract, as it results from the way in which the ministry official reacts to the peasants' complains: "*be calm, people, listen to the landowners and work! Work hard and don't listen to bad advice! You are the foundation of our country...*" and then, he responds: "*hold your tongue, or else I'll send you to the police where they'll beat you, you miserable!*". The social conflict between the peasants and the contractors becomes a conflict between the former and the government; hence, the problem of "sovereignty" is raised; so the legitimacy of sending to death the one that infringes upon sovereignty is just one step away. As peasants cannot be charged with treason, they are considered "only" "state enemies"[3], enemies seen not as people, but as "beasts" without control. As "enemies", they can be killed, as "beasts"

they do not have the right to a proper funeral. We presume that for Rebreanu the resemblance with the way that the 1784 Transylvanian rebellion was suppressed was more than obvious.

What would have been the solution to the agrarian problem? For a better understanding of this problem, we will use the factors of production concept and will project a ox-oy system, where Ox is the variable capital (manual labor) and Oy, the constant capital (equipment), and a profit curve. When the point shifts on the curve on the Ox, this means that the profit is based on the intense use of the human resources, and when it shifts on the Oy, this means that the profit is based on intense use of the constant capital. The present situation indicates the place of the profit point very close to the Ox ax, meaning that profit comes from intense use of human resource. As Marx theory states, a high profit rate is obtained when surplus value is high and when the constant capital value is low. Why is this happening? The high cereal export demand, the low costs of manual labor due to the monopoly obtained from the agreement system, the blocking of cereal imports and, moreover, the elusion of workforce surveillance and control costs are just a few of the factors that can explain this situation. Because the contractors did not invest in industry, this didn't develop, so it didn't demand rural workforce, which determined the monopoly on human resources but also a low demand of agricultural products on the internal market; so, the export dependency induced a permanent "threat". Hence, the association between an internal threat and an external one was one step away.

The status-quo was maintained also because of psychological reasons. The traditional landowner, Miron Iuga in the novel, belonged to a world that confounded land with identity and that considered that identity meant avoiding

technology. Identity meant also working the field with the peasants and assuming responsibility for peasants by "spending" in this case, schooling costs. The landowner wants to represent a sort of pastoral power[4]; he wants to care for each and every "sheep"; this is one of the symbolic sources of the peasant's "bestialisation" mechanism. This is how the dominant relationships interweave with the communitarian and solidarity ones. Not fortuitously the death of Miron Iuga, the landowner, is described as an accident, a moment of great emotional confusion.

Each and every gain a landowner or a leaseholder had was a result of peasants' loss, and any idea of peasants' life improvement was seen as a threat to the landowners and leaseholders' welfare. The structure of relationships generates the perception of the actors and vice versa, and they are in conflict in both cases. At the level of representation, we see a malthusian vision: "*people multiply, but lend does not stretch like jelly*" and another one, about the deadlock in solving the problem: "*if people had their own piece of land, who would work the landowners' one!*". In conclusion, we will say that, independent of the proportions of the wealth, the dominant relation – "terrorist-hostage" – is a zero sum game, both at the level of mechanism and representation; this can explain the perception of the inevitable, a social conflict with a "win/lose" solution. It is obvious that, on this ground, the social order is precarious.

Wealth is not meant to produce "public good" or social solidarity generated by "spending"; wealth will rather associate with the idea of sufferance induced to the other major social group. Can we see now another example of genealogy, the one of "popular opposition" towards wealth and aesthetics, capable of explaining the social

attachment to the proletcultist politics that will flourish half a century later?

"Răscoala" describes how collective "disinhibitory" behaviors form and develop. It has a lot of happenings that carry the same reason, the "radical contingency" one, the one of the chance that cannot be missed. The material and symbolic expression of disinhibition is fire. Burning "beauty" and wealth means the transformation of the peasant from "beast" to human. The burning of the mansions brings "the former man", the contractor, in the state of a scared, hunted animal. "The sovereign power", based on the controller's body capacity to move, disappears in fire. When peasants burn the crops they actually announce their new state of the soul. And when they burn the mansions, they try to nullify the landowners and contractors' right to a place in the rural space. Purification of the place means, in fact, destroying the "terrorist-hostage" relation and radically changing the social game. Through "Răscoala", Rebreanu tells the Transylvanians that The Union meant entering a feudal world.

4. Second Analysis: the Urban-Rural Relation

The city is the place of public servants, intellectuals, press, politics, but not of the industry. The city dominates, thanks to the financial mechanism, the rural world. The landowner, Miron Iuga, says: "*there are the masters of the cities that exploit us as they want*"; "*they couldn't subjugate us neither through their banks, nor through their credits and their industry. It's only us who resist them*". Otherwise, the lawyer Baloteanu, the future prefect, in charge with the repression of the rebellion, is accused by the young Iuga, the son of the landowner, that by buying the land he stopped the peasants from buying the estate! In other words, instead of finding

solutions for the agrarian problem, the rural world complicates the situation. Hence, the consequences: first, the absence of a political will able to define itself through autonomic interests as against agriculture; one of the characters in the novel says that the opposition is represented by pensioners and clerks, exactly the ones that were independent of agriculture, hence the logical implication: "*as a matter of fact, clerks and pensioners are the pillars of our bourgeoisie. That's why they imagine that the state has to take care only of them and that everything belongs to them.*" The phanariot era also used the state as a source of personal enrichment. The XXth century continues this tradition – private property is built upon resources obtained through public property control. In this reality we can see that a new one is borne, the one of property transfer, the one of changing old landowners with Romanian, Greek, Jewish contractors, the one of old landowners' sons (which discover the joy of urban life and to which property means law) selling their properties to the contractors, to whom property means work, economy, efficiency, in a lockean way. This is the mechanism in which property is transferred from an owner to another one. Popescu-Ciocoilui says about the contractor who forces out his master from his own land: "*you can see how well he worked the land if he managed to get his master out of his own house and to settle himself here – but the owner might have deserved it, I had never seen him around the estate.*" The capitalist rationality is closer and closer. Secondly, if the government depends on the city's financial capital, the city depends on the agrarian production. The urban inhabitants cannot project their interests into a new possible situation; hence, change cannot be but difficult. Agriculture and peasants' condition represented political debate themes, so that the

opposition, although critical towards the government, is caught in the same economic gearing. Hence, two consequences: on the one hand, democracy, as alternative, did not exist, on the other, the inconsistency between words and practice seemed natural. Language becomes the expression of duplicity, and duplicity is seen as normal. The significant distance between the exposed culture and the real one is also considered natural. The power tries to enforce truth using the language.

5. Third Analysis: the Problem of Speech

The dominant speech is a derivation of the romantic spirit in which peasants represent “the pillar of the country”. Domination and social conflict are disguised under a “Tönnies” ideological veil, under the community idea, under the supremacy of common good over private interests, so that any attempt of unveiling can be considered an attempt to the interest of the state. Another definition of the peasant, still a part of the dominant speech, is the one that comes from the situation in which he was seen as a “terrorist”, making him double-faced, immoral. The contractor Ilie Rogojinariu says: *“you talking like that means that you don’t know the real Romanian peasant! Or it means that you know him from books and from speeches, and this is sadder, because it means that you imagine him as a martyr when, in fact, he is only bad, stupid and lazy”* and he argues: *“but I swear: God forbid if you need the peasant, because that is the moment when the peasant fights you, when you need him the most!”*. Nadina thinks that peasants are *“wild and mean”* and the old landowner Miron Iuga *“had for the first time the impression that these people, which he always considered faithful, are hostile to him in their hearts”*. These two themes, the legality and the

immorality of the peasants, complete and sustain themselves reciprocally in using violence against them. It’s easy to understand why we will not find this in the speech of the political and economic elite. Language cannot be the home of the being; in fact is the prison of what is left of the being, and the violence against it. As a matter of fact, community did not exist; there was just a conglomerate of sub-worlds in a contiguity relation, a spatial proximity and a psychological-affective distance.

Giving this reality of the language defined as a dominator-dominant relation, Rebreanu brings in the novel the speech of the one that can be free [5], the minoritarian, in his ethnic-social state. The first example: Misu, the worker, with communist convictions, who has the courage to speak about the class injustice: *“in other parts of the world people fight against it, fret about it, scream, but us, we see it as normal”*. The second example is the journalist Rosu, who saves his freedom using a game of simulation in the public sphere and one of authenticity, in his private space. The last example is the one of the Transylvanian Titus Herdelea, who can open doors because he carries the signs of the national ideal, because he has no interests in the given situation, being both inside and outside, at the same time, free and oppressed, foreign and “of ours”. Rebreanu announces the entering in modernity using the urban social conflict, the ideology and the idea of nation.

6. The Question of the Body

We said earlier that one of the social machinery wheels is the couple between body and soul, both at the level of peasants and of the elite. In the first case, escaping the dominance mechanism was related to the peasant’s ability to control his body using his soul. The body-soul relation is connected with the love-family dyad. The

absence of property and the absence of autonomy drive the young into a strategic game, with great existential dilemmas, a game of rationality, played by the girl, and a game of affectivity, played by the boy. The young girl had to choose: she could either get married at the moment that she controlled the situation, meaning before the boy's enrolment, exposing herself to a risk – the boy being injured in the army and leaving all the hard work on her shoulders, or she could wait, but then the risk was she could lose her seduction monopole, because the boy, freshly discharged and mature, could make another choice. The boy was rather tempted to get married, driven by "desire" (*"her hot mouth that promised him the joy"*), which gave him the lower hand in the relation, but he was still willing to accept the position because he wanted to avoid the possibility to be forgotten or *"she become in love with another"* thus his desire remaining unsatisfied.

At the other social pole we can talk about the triad desire-pleasure-erotism, which is not exclusively masculine and agrarian; the character that best illustrates the theme is Nadina, "the urban-woman". Messenger of the future - meaning capital shifting, producer becoming consumer, and distance annulment looking for a favorable comeback rate - Nadina is the impersonation of pure desire, as Baudrillard says "the quality of any body that rotates around its own self until it loses its meaning and then shines in its pure and void form." [6]. Rebreau describes her: *"as a matter of fact, she had love feelings only for herself, she considered she deserved anything, she didn't refuse herself anything [...] She used to go around naked in her apartment all morning, so that she could admire herself freely."* We have here the description of the extatic idea of the emptied, self-sufficient body, "the body without organs"

(deleuzian concept), emptied body which, mirrored, offers confirmations, omnipresent body, multiplied in its truth. The mirror is the one that, a hundred years later, will be a current architectural and urban fact, the big companies' mirror walls, mostly banks.

The second truth structure that Nadina procures it's the photo that will make Petre go mad in the scene that comes after the rape and that will make him burn the place, in a saving effort, through memory, of his feelings' uniqueness. But the photo announces exactly the opposite: *"almost naked, fallen over a bearskin, with her arm resting on the beast's head, her small breast seemed stone-still in a voluptuous spasm and her warm hips frolic, while her entire being smiled with a virginal false candor."* The public impudicity, eternalized in the photo, multipliable, announces the upcoming vulgarity, as Simmel says, the repetition of a behavior valuable in his uniqueness but degradable by repeating, and all of these talk about the same mechanical assemblage of the financial capital, of the consumption, of the desire-pleasure machine, of the space that can be quickly occupied thanks to the new "war machine" – the automobile, the expression of an exacerbated body looking for adventure, in the same meaning Simmel gave it, as pure, never-ending living, trying to escape everyday life.

The killing of the main female character is preceded by rape, rape as the suspension of death and death generating conflict, as a way of possession of the body that "escapes", as a meeting place of the "desinhibited", as a sign of change. Killing means suspension, means trying to make this reality, with so much virtues, disappear, means trying to stop the becoming, the speed, hence the peasants' destroying the automobile, means settling things in the land reality as a unique and independent god. For the moment, the

photo, the information visually captured and capable of reproduction will not engage yet with the automobile as a war machine capable to occupy any space. Their concubinage will give birth to an “uncontrollable child” – television – the disinhibitor itself, the magician that will create the illusion of eternity, and will take vulgarity beyond its limits, in pornography.

But Nadina’s photo brings into discussion another element – the hunting: “on a bearskin, with her arm resting on the bear’s head”; the dead bear and the woman-desire, targets of the same obsession or, as Marx announces it, man’s domination over nature is man’s domination over man and vice versa and the first act of domination is man’s over woman during sexual intercourse. Hunting is one of the first moments in the process of labor division and hunting and erotism have a secret relation. In the photo, disinhibition is a unique fact that announces the force of the great erotic-industrial-commercial future disinhibition based on sexual relation and on man’s rape over nature.

7. Epilog

The novel reveals its true meaning in the epilog. We witness the suppressing of the rebellion; hence we witness the triumph of the discipline and inhibition mechanism. Death cancels the temporary victory of disinhibition. We can see the interference of the disciplinary force into the sacred-profane relation; the (military) force defines what is sacred and what is profane, tells who should live or die. We can also understand the way in which Rebreanu suggests we read the national problem. Coming from Transylvania, horrified by

the way the social conflict is solved, Titus Herdelea will still shake hands, at the funeral feast, over the table, as a sign of conciliation, with the soldier that led the suppression, as a sign of submitting values to force. As Sloterdick argued, we can say that this novel is a confession letter that Rebreanu sends to his Transylvanian friends from the future, a sort of “mea culpa” in which the author admits the fact that he could have read the implications of The Union if he had analyzed more carefully the 1907 episode. At the same time, the novel is an impulse for us not to lose faith: the young landowner Grigore Iuga marries Olga Predeleanu, a more temperate and well-balanced Nadina, the two of them leaving by train, not by car; the train symbolizes controlled movement, is a symbol of solid modernity – characterized by the fact that space is more important that time, telling us that things will change, slowly and under control, sometimes with high costs.

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