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THE PROFILE OF THE TRAITOR IN L. V. GINZBURG'S *THE ABYSS*

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Abstract: *The main aim of the paper is to analyze traitor's facets in L. V. Ginzburg's work, highlighting the literary means of portraying the special status of the man under critical circumstances. The paper is focused on traitor's hypostases and on psychological portrayal during the Soviet Russia of the Second World War. The character construction is another concern of this paper, highlighting the literary devices and psychological manner of re-creating the type of the coward and treacherous criminal. As a conclusion the psychological profile of the traitor is pointed out, with emphasis on inner struggle and behavioral patterns.*

Keywords: *traitor, survival values, dealing with conscience, moral view, facing death.*

1. Introduction

One important aspect to reveal about L. V. Ginzburg's book is the fact that it is considered a "journalistic book"[1] due to the subject – the Krasnodar trial of the Soviet fascist criminals – and due to the thoroughly documented exposed facts, starting with the trial accusations and inserting fragments of interrogation and trial itself. The entire title of the book is The Abyss. A Narration Based on Documents. Nevertheless, the book is to be regarded as more than a "journalistic book" due to the special narrative perspective and psychological insight into the abyss of the human heart and into the world of fascist crimes.

The construction of the book leaves clues about the educational role of the literary work, as the last chapter is a narration of a Soviet secret agent and an example of surviving during the fascist occupation[2] without compromising the moral values and the status as human being. On the other hand, the patriotic tone is not the main preoccupation of Ginzburg's book and its content is more than a listing of the merciless or unscrupulous traitors involved in killing their countrymen. The narrator offers a valuable psychological insight into traitor's profile, pointing out the behavioral patterns, the reactions and masks of the human heart facing death and dealing with conscience. The manner of presenting the traitors by listing their acts and criminal involvement due to testimonies, their lifestyle after the Second World War and their reactions while being brought to justice, being interrogated and judged are mere steps in building literary characters inspired by the real life men. This "journalistic book" gives us potential features to highlight the hypostases of the

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traitor and the inner mechanisms triggered by survival issues. The moral view of the book is obvious not only due to inserted reactions of common people to Krasnodar trial, but also due to narrator's comments regarding the survival values and facing death and danger generally speaking.

2. Hypostases of the Traitor

While artistic and journalistic aspects of The Abyss are still subject to analysis, more profound facets are to be revealed – the bottomless abyss of the human heart and the unpredictable motions of the human being under critical circumstances. The matters of survival during the German occupation of the Second World War are brought into the foreground under the thorough glance of the conscience. In addition, the moral and social attitudes are the main preoccupations of a calm and penetrating narrative perspective with a tone of a moral investigator.

Two categories of traitors are highlighted throughout the book – those eager to use the circumstances and the others' misery to establish their welfare and those who were ready to do anything, including taking thousands of lives, just to survive (Ginzburg, 22-23). While re-creating the image of the situations of almost twenty years ago, narrator gives psychological explanations for inhuman behaviour of those who became traitors not only of the Soviet homeland, but also of the entire humanity.

The first psychological step in becoming a traitor is, according to Ginzburg, the search for a solution in order to survive, to gain several days of breathing, while the second one is submitting the entire life, moral attitudes and conscience in a total act of obedience to the fascist occupation. In exchange for the desirable "liberty" the traitors gained slavery, attempting to save their insignificant "I" for countless lives of those who lost their human face in traitors' view, becoming worthy of that inhuman cruelty (Ginzburg, 160).

Several hypostases of the traitor are underlined by the author, emphasizing the various forms of treason and treachery, as well as the human capacity of dealing with conscience after entering the path of various moral compromises.

The most obvious and flagrant cases of treason are those of people involved in Krasnodar trial – Skripkin, Eskov, Zhirukhin, Sukhov, considered jackals and lower than fascists' dogs, lower than the level of human being and animal. But there are other cases of treachery brought into discussion, and although these are not recognized cases of treason and there even was an amnesty in case of people that were not involved in killing their countrymen, the treason issue remains questionable. This is the case of a captive – Tomka – who had signed the paper of collaboration with the fascist occupants and had become commandant's lover for several years, being brought to Germany while the Soviet army was gaining the territories back. Even if she wasn't involved in killing her countrymen, the mere fact that she was alive and knew about the death and suffering of her people was a sign of her moral weakness. Her moral compromise is clear while narrator notices her regret and fear of being judged and condemned for her choice of staying alive even paying that hurtful price.

Another form of treachery is represented by a young singer – Larisa Sakharova - who was entertaining German occupants and getting a living in those harsh times. The narrator admits that a young and thoughtless singer with futile dreams of becoming famous, regardless of the war context and of the fact that her countrymen were being killed, could have been overlooked as unimportant and insignificant. The psychological triggers of this subtle form of treachery are to be

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regarded as potential routes for a "greater" form of treason. Vanity and desire of popularity, not only the necessity to survive in that context, become obvious motives in Larisa's behaviour when she chose to depart with the German doctor of the troupe in order to follow her dream in Germany. The ironical aspect underlined by the narrator is that Larisa was ready to entertain the occupants rather than being sent to Germany, but she went there anyway when the German occupation was over. The motivation for the moral compromise was not that strong after all, unveiling the transformation of the moral values into survival values. Her manner of dealing with conscience by coming back to homeland and working as a simple worker may be regarded as a desperate and meaningless attempt of a shallow redemption. The moral compromise and the treachery are obvious from the letter Larisa received from the former doctor of the theatre troupe, letter wrote in a nostalgic tone, remembering "our Taganrog, our pretty theatre", the "golden times, when we were young and full of hopes" (Ginzburg, 160).

The chapter Man under the bed (Ginzburg, 133-140) reveals another hypostasis of the traitor category – the collaboration with the German occupants in order to survive by bringing to police other men, being aware of their imminent death. Although the collaboration as a policeman didn't involve any violent actions against the countrymen, and an amnesty was valuable in these cases, dealing with conscience wasn't easy. Hiding under the bed for seventeen years (even in the case of a death in the family) is the result of "fear" of being judged and punished for this collaboration, for the shift between the moral values and the survival values. The fearful secret of this family was uncovered when the "man under the bed" went to police to recognize his fault - he wasn't confined due to the amnesty. A crying with no tears was a sign of contrition, while a desire of committing suicide appeared after recognizing the dreadful fault. The fear – the essence of this man's life - came to an end, and life lost its meaning.

3. Character Construction

While the analyzed cases of treachery don't involve various figures of speech or special devices of characterization, the other traitors' portrayal seems to have a gradual manner of characterization – the simple and un-engaged telling of the story, the dramatization describing on one hand the traitors' reactions (passivity or active implication, careless attitude or questionable regret), and on the other hand quoting from interrogation process and from the trial traitors' abject motives for being involved in the 10th SS Sonderkommando.

Another technique of character construction is to be pointed out while discussing Ginzburg's re-presentation of real events and persons – alternating various sources of information, be it the case of documents, witnesses' testimonies or criminals' confessions. This alternation of victims' and witnesses' testimonies and dialogues with the traitors, as well as alternation of traitors' detached and detailed narration of their bestiality and crimes on one hand and narrator's comments and moral critique on the other hand are powerful devices used to portray the evolution from a coward to a treacherous murderer.

The path of an innocent fearful citizen, facing death to a traitorous criminal is described, with a few variations, mainly as the road of an unblamable man who, due to an exaggerated spirit of self-preservation, trembling not to lose his life, surrenders to the idea of staying alive "no matter what"

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at the beginning. Later on, he gets more and more involved in fascist crimes to the point of not perceiving the entire meaning of this bestial implication or realizing and not doing anything about it. The usual answer to the question "Why not running away?" is the complacency in this situation and incapacity of breaking the criminal ties of psychological membership against traitors' own country and people.

Nevertheless, traitors had opposite reactions to their unmasking identity and criminal activity – some of them denied their involvement (Psarev sustained his innocence until the last day of the trial), although their "comrades" supported the already existing testimonies, while others were almost relieved by this revelatory event (Buglak stated that the night after his arrest was the first night that he had slept for eighteen years (Ginzburg, 177), while Surguladze left his wedding with no regrets, almost thankful for this change of role (Ginzburg, 174), being eager to tell everything in detail, bringing more facts and aspects of their activity, with a mixed feeling of pride and shame.

Among the criminals' confessions the narrator tells of their attitude toward punishment for their fascist involvement and psychological consequences of their inhuman activities against their countrymen. Some of them speak about their incapacity of killing a chicken, others cry about wife's recent death, while another one talks in a philosophical manner about death - "Death isn't terrible, terrible is only the path to death."(Ginzburg, 66) or writes poems about past dreadful events. All these reactions are almost ironic notes on human abysmal soul and its contradictions, representing facets of the traitor's character construction.

Self-pity is one common reaction of the traitor, analyzed by the narrator's direct and harsh moral glance as being mistaken for regret and remorse. In addition to this mixed feeling the traitor is convinced that exceptional circumstances and something beyond somebody's psychological understanding forced the traitor to become a traitor. Moreover, there is a strong conviction brought out in traitors' minds that the greatest tragedy of all is not the victim's tragedy, but the torturer's (Ginzburg, 181). Self-pity and the instinct of self-righteousness linked together are responsible for the traitors' strong belief that unfortunate circumstances constrained them to become "pigs among pigs" or to dip their hands in blood. The moral implications of such distorted perspective is the fact that anyone who had been in traitors' position would have done exactly the same thing, fact which is vehemently contradicted by simple people's written reactions to Krasnodar trial.

Self pity is thus a form of masking the feeling of guilt, which is either hidden under layers of so-called rational and psychological explanations or mistaken for a mixture of other egoistic feelings. Being asked if they recognize their fault, seven of them admitted, Psarev denied, while Zhirukhin said: "I recognize my fault. Partially" (Ginzburg, 181), adding the latter hastily, as an echo of his strong delusive convictions that he was nothing but a victim of unfortunate events.

Fear as the psychological trigger of a man to become a criminal is discussed by traitors as the continuous motif for their fascist collaboration and impediment in running away. Even Tomka recognized that running away from the fascist occupants wouldn't have solved her questionable moral choice and would have probably brought her death by the hands of her countrymen[3]: "Where to? If I have already tied my destiny with them" (Ginzburg, 44). The narrative voice leaves this moral issue to a contemporaneous reader who wrote an analysis of this

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pathetic traitors' attempt to invoke humanity and understanding for their inhuman acts. The rhetorical question is why the victims would have to understand the executioners, as if their fate would have been unfair to them. Even if the criminals were trying to convince the jury that not power was their characteristic while choosing to be involved for several years with the 10th SS Sonderkommando, but powerlessness facing exceptional and fearful circumstances, their intercession remained unanswered.

The traitors' character construction in The Abyss is an obvious disregard of the traditional features used by social realism as a result of the literary "thaw" after Stalin's death in 1953. On the other hand, the psychological technique and devices are part of a greater literary direction of the '50 and '60 of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the humanistic values presented from the communist morals perspective still overpass the direct and moral tone of the narratorial voice. The mere fact that the publication of this book was possible is a sign of the relative cultural "relaxation" from the ideological bindings and limitations, making room for reality depiction and a different character construction, using the pretext of the presentation of real events and people. This journalistic and literary event had its consequences in the field of literature and character construction, offering a possible escape from the social realistic typification and ridiculous communist social masks. The last chapter (Ginzburg, 214-278) of the book offers however a pedagogical and moral lesson on the consecrated subject of the great deed of the simple Soviet man, fact that may be regarded as the saving solution for the author to have the book published and the weak point of the book from our perspective. This last chapter with an exemplary Soviet partisan[4] risking everything while playing the role of several fascist commanders reminds of Vasil Bykov's manner of building the characters with the help of opposition good-evil, patriot-traitor. From this point of view Bykov portrays individuals facing difficult choices in the same historical context depicted by Ginzburg from documented sources, offering the possibility of glance at the pure literary creation with no journalistic or documentary approach, but his own life experience during the Second World War.

Character construction of the legendary Soviet spy is rather difficult to analyze, taking into account the label of a "journalistic book" and the difference in writing the last chapter. The entire story has a different narrative voice – that of the hero himself – with the characteristic of a neutral tone of an almost forgotten history. Nevertheless, the same "exceptional circumstances" used as excuses by traitors were valid in Mironov's life, motivating him to serve his homeland and his countrymen, even with the price of his beloved woman's life. The self-preservation instincts were triggered in spy's life as well, but they didn't result in betrayal, although there were situations that might have been considered adequate and reasonable for ending his service and save his life and his beloved's life, compromising thus the entire operation and contributing to other deaths of his countrymen. Still, some antagonistic aspects between the traitors and the "legend" are highlighted, adding profundity and psychological perception of the human character complexity.

However, the obtained antinomy between the traitor and the legendary Soviet spy and the latter's portrait isn't tainted by the social realism norms regarding the character construction with the monotonous profile of the positive hero[5], serving the party's interests and ideals. This is due to that narrative moral

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perspective and due to the adopted documentary character of the book. Although the result of adding the last chapter may have disputable ideological, pedagogical or artistic consequences, it doesn't affect the book in a distasteful and unacceptable manner.

4. Conclusion

The profound perspective and psychological insight into the abyss of the human soul is the characteristic of more than a journalist and sharp observer of a famous Soviet trial, representing incontestable marks of an artist. The complexity of the human heart is portrayed, realizing and finalizing the profile of the traitor, laying stress on psychological analysis and explaining the triggers of treason. Another valuable psychological factor underlined in The Abyss is the adaptation process of the traitors' conscience while facing moral compromise and dealing with the moral degradation.

The motion from moral values to survival values is the most obvious explanation in Ginzburg's view for the entire behavioral pattern of a treacherous criminal, involving the whole self-righteousness scheme and continuous self-preservation issue on the road of facing death. Fear and self pity are traitors' constant explanations for the continuous choice of the moral compromise and decay under pretended exceptional circumstances with no hope for salvation, solution or escape.

Notes

[1] See *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. 3rd edition (1970-1979).

[2] In the social realism tradition the basic and sometimes the unique role of literature is the educational one, helping the Soviet citizen to become a better countrymen, a loyal servant of the party, taking into account the great communist and socialistic aim of building a "golden future".

[3] Tomka told about a situation in which she feared she might have been killed by Soviet soldiers in the moment of fascist retreat from Krasnodar region.

[4] The psychological interest of the author is emphasized in the last questions addressed to this "legend", Mironov, wanting to reveal the "psychology of the partisan's deed", although the entire chapter is Mironov's story about his life as a spy, interrupted in several occasions with details from narrator's perspective.

[5] Mironov may be regarded as the positive hero of *The Abyss*, but probably not in the traditional sense, being given the fact that the narrator's comments are reduced to the introductory words of "huge legend" and "legendary man".

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