FANTASTIC AND NATURALISTIC ELEMENTS IN SOME OF CARAGIALE'S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract: Fiction is a frequent motif, met not only in the old literary times, but also in classic and modern period. Ion Luca Caragiale approached this motif in sketches and in his short stories, too. The interference of the dream with the contemporary reality, repetitive and obsessive thoughts, creates the strangest situations leading to madness, magic, witchcraft are some o the motifs the great dramatist used in his writings. This author succeeds with great mastery and talent to create fantastic frames and situations in such a way that his short stories La Hanul lui Mânjoală, În vreme de război, O făclie de Paşte, Calul dracului proove his vocation of a deep, real writer that Caragiale was.

Key words*: fantastic, weird, dream, reality, superstitions.*

In literature **fiction** is a concept that rose the interest of many known exegets and literary critics. Teorezing fiction was very difficult for writers and for readers, too because it is attractive and sensitive in the same time.

Roger Caillois and Tzvetan Todorov are amongst the writers that succeeded to establish the best characteristics for fiction, as a literary genre. In Romanian literature G. Călinescu, Eugen Simion, Adrian Marino, Matei Călinescu, Ovidiu Ghidirmic were the ones that analysed and explained the presence of the fantastic elements and of the fantastic itself in the works of the most important Romanian writers from the old times till modern literature: Dimitrie Cantemir, Ion Budai-Deleanu, Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, Ion Luca Caragiale, Mircea Eliade, Vasile Voiculescu.

Fiction is very present in the European literature and in Romanian literature also, having different forms and symbols and it was considered (through its origin- *lat.* phantasticus, *gr.* fantastikos) to be " something that existed in the imagination, not real, an idea of fantasy *(phantasia)*...extraordinary, bizarre, weird, grotesque, new, absurd, irrational, hallucinating...." *(Antologia nuvelei fantastice*, cu o prefată de Matei Călinescu si un studiu de Roger Caillois, 1970, p. 5.). While the foreign literature saw the concept of **fantastic** more evolved- science fiction, the Romanian literature had simpler fantastic elements like myths, legends, fairies, bad guys and princesses and reached the dream and its components, combining real and surreals realms, symbolic images, magic and whichcraft. During the Classic Period, the fantastic was in Eminescu's, Creanga's and Caragiale's works. The great dramatist, Caragiale, included fantasy in his works not with a special purpose, but for making fun, for satirizing the greatest human faults as: greed, insanity, nonsense, superstitions and popular beliefs.

According to Eugen Simion, Caragiale must be seen not as realist writer, but much more, because "his style overcame the limits of fun...was a deep and witty observer of ridiculousnesss and a remarkable creator of fantastic atmosphere."(Eugen Simion .L.Caragiale*, Opere, Proză literară*, 2000, pp. 12-13.)

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Although he was not fond of real fanastic works, Caragiale succeeded in creating some short stories and stories full of fantastic elements, prooving that he could aso be a very gifted writer, even of this literary genre.

Some of his writings, published in *Momente (Moments)*-1901 and *Schite noua (New Short Stories)*-1910 were classificated as fantastic works as their contents showed.

Florin Manolescu considers that there are two types of 'fantastic' in Caragiale's works: a paraoxal type of fantastic, science fiction and a true fantastic, "concentrated in *Schite noua (New Short Stories)*- but also in the old short stories, like, *La hanul lui Mânjoală-Manjoala's Inn* (1898/1899) and *La Conac –At the Manor*(1900/1901),published in the volume *Momente(Moments).* (Manolescu, Fl., 1983: 177)

A smooth observer of the depths of the soul, as well as a fine psychologist, Caragiale introduced in his works some specific elements due to superstitions, beliefs, paroxistic states in ambiguous frames- combined with elements of dream, delirium and fear. Anxiety and the fear for loosing money or life were gradually presented and analysed having as background the natural frame. "Situated at the limit of the abyss where the human being contemplated his own alienation and tragedy, Caragiale's tragic universe revealed, beyond the contingency, some models embodied forever into myth." (Căpusan Vodă, M., 1982: 208)

All in all, starting from the elements of the myth, beliefs and popular superstitions, Caragiale inserted fantastic elements in his works, even created a fantastic atmosphere in *La hanul lui Mânjoală-Manjoala's Inn* or *Calul dracului – Devil's Horse*.

In *La hanul lui Mânjoală-Manjoala's Inn,* the main character, Fănică, narrator but also a witness of the stories, was the one that moved from the real to the fantastic realm. The place where the action took place was a remote inn, considered to be a place for relaxation of the travelers.

At the beginning of the story, the action developed normally, without regressions and useless details. Fănică was looking for the owner of the inn, Madame Marghioala, in order to serve him some food. He was very well received by the woman in the kitchen of the inn and he was served with special food in a "clean room", painted in white: "…such a bed! Such a curtain! Such walls! Such ceiling! All were as white as milk. The lamp and the others were hand made…it was as comfortable as in mother's hands…and a fine flagrance of apples and quinces." (Caragiale, I., L., 2000: 202).

Although he was a passer by Manjoala's Inn, in his way to his future father-in-law Iordache, he thought he would stay only one half an hour, but he took part at some strange facts. Being kindly welcomed by Marghioala, the inn's widowed owner, whom he knew from a very long time, Fanica got involved into a love story with her, although he was going to be married.

Instead of a half an hour, he stayed there two hours and a half and the moment he left in the midle of the night, he took part in the strangest stories. The weather was agitated and dangerous: "the blizzard grew in intensity, moving him from the saddle…the cold was strong, he felt his thighs and arms freezing. Riding with his head down, he started to feel pain in his neck, to hear weird noises in his ears."(Ibidem, p. 205). He did not succeed to proceed and he encountered a "black deer", that proved to be a lamb which prevented him to move on, frightening his horse and making him to go back. He returned to Mânjoala's Inn

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and he was received by the same Madame Marghioala whom he couldn't separate. His father-in-law had to take him by force, to get him to the monastery for prayers and rosaries for a period of forty days, in order to recover him from that strange love story.

The fantastic atmosphere started when he left the inn, leaving the sad woman, Madame Marghioala who was considered a strange person by her neighbors because she succeeded by her own after her husband's death. She was a mysterious, strange person being suspected of witchcraft by her peers. There are a lot of fantastic elements that give the short story a mysterious tendency: the fact that she did not have any icons on the walls, she had a strong sight, the lamb that scared Fănică in the woods, the story of the thieves that tried to rob the inn, the fever the man had after leaving the weird location.

The lamb appearing on the doorstep of Marghioala's house was an irrational thing, because he had taken it in his bags, but he had lost it along the way, but the strangest situation for Fănică was when he found a cornfield after wondering through the bizarre forest. He solved the situation that looked like a maze, by encountering the guardian Gheorghe Nătruţ, who thought the lamb was the Devil himself. Even the final discussion with his father-in-law, Iordache, raised a mysterious fact, because the man confirmed the suspicion that the lamb or the cat were the same, the Devil himself. "The glamour of this story was given not by the magic element, but by the deep sensitivity of life and called him back to the warm room of Margioala's inn." (Iosifescu, S., *Caragiale*: 191-192).

Manjoala's Inn is one of the most profound literary work, full of fantastic elements, although at the beginning did not seem too complicated, some popular beliefs were combined with elements of *miraculous fantastic.*

O făclie de Paşte (A Torch at Easter's time) and *În vreme de război(* During the War) are two o the literary productions of Caragiale, in which the author presented the way the greed and the fear of death and anxiety could produce the most intense states of alienation, next to madness. The unreasonable fear of death, after his former apprentice threatened him, as well as the terrible nightmares of Leiba Zibal, are some of the elements that provide one of the strangest actions of the man. Regarding the fact that he was very ill , having severe shakes Leiba Zibal was afraid of death and the fact he was living in a remote area, at Podeni Inn, made him imagine strange stories that led him to madness. "Leiba Zibal 's sleep and life were a permanent nightmare. There was no bond between night and day, they were connected by fear…during the dream or awake, the way he treated people was humiliating, violently, restless and loneliness." (Elvin, B., 1967: 158-159) In that situation he did not make the distinction between night and day any more, because he had been threatened with revenge in Resurrection's night. "The epic row of this short story followed step by step the destruction the self-consciousness situated next to a threat. Counting the signs of the threat, the sick reactions of Leiba Zibal produced a psychological narrative story, which imaginated what one can do when he approached death." (Fanache, V., 1984: 150).

The fact that he succeeded in the end of the story to defeat Gheorghe, catching and burning his arm, did not represent a victory for Leibaa because human and moral degradation had already reached madness."The final image of Leiba, becoming a Christian after night, wandering slowly to the hill, signified a tragicomic insanity." (Ibidem:153)

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In *În vreme de război* (During the War), the main character, the innkeeper Stavrache had the same feelings as Leiba Zibal, but much more complex. There was a strong fight between the *family feeling*, regarding his brother and *greed*, the fear of loosing the fortune he had inherited. Although he was conscious that his brother, the priest Iancu Georgescu had become rich through theft-being the leader of a band- Stavrache couldn't accept the idea of loosing the fortune. The dreams and hallucinations he had about the possible return of his brother, gone to war and probably dead (he thought) made him become anxious, nervous and thoughtful all the time.

The words that kept coming to his mind and started his madness were "Did you think I was dead?", words he had heard before in a nightmare. Even if he was the legal heir of his brother, a heritage he was announced by a lawyer, Stavrache could not endure the thought of loosing it, if his brother had returned and asked for his fortune back. Inner struggles and irrational thoughts changed totally his behavior and the lust for money controlled him entirely, pushing him to the border of insanity at the end of short story. The innkeeper ended cheerfully; his smile, laugher, scream and the religious song came from beyond his mind, suggesting the idea that destiny could not be changed: *Did you think I was dead?* The character's state of mind came from the fact that his brother had returned and provoked the insanity of this hero of Caragiale.

According to Silvian Iosifescu, *Calul dracului – Devil's Horse* is a short story where the fantastic 'came quickly, intensively', being related to the popular fantasy that inspired the fairy tales. The subject is apparently quite simple, but complex deep down: an old lady beggar met the devil, Prichindel, and carried him an entire night on her back, after she had transformed herself into a beautiful princess. She felt happy about that trip and about the fact she had fooled the devil himself liberating herself from the curse that had changed her.

The metamorphose of the old woman into the beautiful princess, the fabulous journey of the former witch all through the night carrying Prichindel, all these elements conferred fantasy to the story.

The most interesting fact is that, our great dramatist transformed those popular motifs into his stories, blended with popular beliefs and superstitions and succeeded to create a fantastic atmosphere with ironical touch, using allusive expressions and simple words.

Besides the popular motifs, elements of the fantastic and miraculous, Maria Vodă Căpușan remarked even some mythical elements in the short story *O făclie de Paşte* (A Torch at Easter's time). "the most amazing exploitation of the myth in Caragiale's works was in *O făclie de Paşte* (A Torch at Easter's time), a paradoxical and tragic approach of the myth in the act of creation...and Leiba Zibal was seen as a modern Jesus, while the myth of his death and resurrection was celebrated in the ritual night." (Căpușan Vodă, M., *op. cit.,* : 208).

Caragiale tried to develop and combine elements of the fantastic with naturalistic touch; even if he started from simple subjects he created one of the most important works of literature.

According to Florin Manolescu, „Caragiale's fantastic was, most of the times miraculous and beautiful of his stories, all of these being written in the spirit of balkanic

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mythology, where encountering devils, saints and God was something usual and where *the profane* combined with *sacred* for making justice and not for changing one's faith." (Manolescu, Fl., op. cit.: 181).

There are some fantastic elements in the writings of the great author, I.L.Caragiale, elements that proove, once more, his originality and artistic gift for this lite.rary genre.

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