THE PROSE OF RODICA OJOG-BRAȘOVEANU – A RETRANSCRIPTION OF LIFE?

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Abstract*: My study wishes to be an answer to the question from the title. Is the prose of Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu a retranscription of the writer's life, with all her obsessions, all her passions, all her desires and all her fears? In this study I will only analyse certain aspects of the short prose and of the detective stories in which there is an obvious link between biography and creation. The analysis will focus on the actual detective stories, the Melania Lupu series, the short prose Fat and stupid and Men are pigs. I will try to highlight to what extent the writer has projected herself in her characters.*

Keywords*: biography, literary creation, detective story, short prose.*

In general, a writer's work includes ideas that refer to the biography directly or indirectly: the view of the world and life, aspirations and ideals, certain obsessions. In my opinion, similarly, the literature, more precisely, the paraliterature of Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu is a retranscription of life. The books become the shadows of the author.

Mădălina Ojog-Pascu, a writer's granddaughter, appreciated the eccentric nature, the originality, the inventive spirit, the style, the vast knowledge of the author. "My aunt, for me, was a standard of elegance, beauty, refinement and good taste."[1]. A description made by Mădălina Ojog-Pascu to the writer is confused with the figure of the ladies in her novels: She was bewilderingly beautiful, dressed in a long velvet dress, with rendez-vous and daring decolletage, bright stockings, antelope shoes with very high *crystal* heels, and hair with splashes of sparkling spray. The whole outfit was in silver and black.". An example of a female character built in the same way is Catinca Varlam, who had been a charming but solitary woman, with a male air in the opinion of the character Vladimir Dobrotă, a former judge at the High Court of Cassation:

> You must know she was a splendid woman... The most beautiful woman I have ever seen... In life, I mean, not at the cinema..."; "– Pictures? Nonsense! You should have seen her with naked shoulders and backless dress until the belt. Or in an Amazon outfit, on Victoriei street..." (Ojog-Brașoveanu Rodica, 1985, *Call from the Unknown*, 1985: 197).

Among other things, the taste for the sensational was a constant charcateristic of the author. This was obvious in her distracted attitude, in her and her husband's tendency to appreciate the sensational events. One of these, reported by the author in an interview, is the moment when her second husband, the theater and film actor Cosma Brașoveanu prepares her a surprise: he ties a string to the table that he pulls lightly when his wife comes out of the bathroom. The episode was transferred to the short prose volume *Men*

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[1] Mădălina Ojog-Pascu, *It was Agatha Christie of Romania: RODICA OJOG-BRAŞOVEANU*, Bucharest, Kullusys Publishing House, 2003, p. 52.

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are pigs (2000), with the difference that the character does not taste the joke but ends up tragically through a heart attack.

Like the writer, her female characters impress not only through the adventurous spirit, but also through the preference for luxury. They are women who want to live *in the lap of luxury*. An example is the character of Cora Manu in the novel *Dagger with champagne (2008)*. However, unlike the author, her characters are able to resort to any means, even to murder, to live in opulence.

Strangely, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu believed in reincarnation. In other words, she had the belief that she was someone else in another era. A biographical detail is perfectly integrated into the novel *Nightmare (1992)*. Mădălina Ojog-Pascu relates in the mentioned book that around the age of fifty, Rodica would have found in the antique shop a photograph signed with her name, signed with a date before her birth, and the distinguished lady in the picture looked exactly like her. She does not understand the mystery of the photography on which it was written with a caligraphy identical to hers: „Rodica I am happy – 1928." In the novel, the character Laura Hegețeanu *is living* the same strange event, seeking a rational explanation, but finds only a supernatural explanation: her reincarnation. I will further reproduce a longer quote from the novel with the function of establishing a similarity between biography and creation:

"I was about to abandon the «nothing interesting today» photos – when I felt how suddenly, in the most concrete way, my heart stopped. I had before my eyes the sepia portrait of a woman of about thirty years old: the short hair glued like a helmet; three accroche-coeurs hold the cheek prisoner; the eyes, with an unmistakable expression, are looking at or thinking of the beloved man, the evening dress, asymmetrical, is held on the right arm with a pafts that could be made of diamonds; the head slightly bent over the left shoulder, completely empty, gives her an expression of graceful abandonment.

I turned over the photograph: a big nervous writing shortly noted in 1928, with black ink: «Laura. I am happy.» I was out of breath and I felt the need to lean over the first object which was at hand, a stove fortunately just warm. (...)

I was speechless, terrified. I did not understand anything. I just knew that the portrait belonged to me. It is me. I! Without any doubt, me. With an outfit and a haircut that I do not know of. Even the calligraphy on the back belongs to me. And my name is Laura. I, Laura, who is living in the year of 1992, I am looking at my portrait of six decades ago, though I know it is impossible to belong to me. I was born twenty years later." (Ojog-Brașoveanu Rodica, *Nightmare*: 10,11).

If I were to believe a statement of Mădălina Ojog-Pascu that when she was working on the novel *The Man at the End of the Wire (1973)*, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu transferred to the character of Minerva Tutovan her excitement, unintended fever, constant fatigue, it appears that in this female character the author projected herself, at least partially. Thus it appears that the male characteristics of the heroine the most important of which are the intransigence, the authority, the impeccable logic, belong to the writer.

Minerva Tutovan, the heroine of the espionage novels series, is fairly *male*, is a character in action. For Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu the masculine gains towards the feminine. In her detective novels, the women are masculine and the men are effeminate. Two

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conclusive examples are the police couple Minerva Tutovan- Vasile Dobrescu and the Miga couple. The second couple is made of Florence Miga, the more authoritative lady than a man, who believes herself to be omniscient and omnipotent, suffering from excess of superiority, and Șerbănică Miga, the obedient husband, who never wins towards his wife's opinions. The reversal of the male-female ratio results in misunderstandings, conflicts of interests, mutual and constant insults.

The writer's belief was that a woman must be dressed and arranged with good taste. In *The Hunchback Has Alibi (1973)* novel, she punishes the woman lacking femininity:

> A 55-year-old fat woman opened. She had thick lips, with too much lipstick over the natural contour, and was looking crosswise to a ward which was in the middle of her nose. Two chins leaned directly on the aggressive chest. She was wearing a glossy dressing gown with red and blue chrysanthemums. She searched intriguingly the group of three, wiping the corners of her mouth with the back of her hand. She had been raised from the table, it was clear. She recognised Damian and laughed sprawlingly. (Ojog-Brașoveanu, Rodica, 1973:25, 26).

At the same time, she hates the woman with a trivial language. In the detective novel *Investigation in the underworld (1977)*, the victim's fiancée, investigated by lieutenant Lăcrămiță, utters vulgare but also comical words:

> – Look, baby, don't bother with these things! It looks like you have not known Olaru. Otherwise you wouldn't talk through the hat. A beast! Another woman in my place would have played the sanctimonious woman, this way or that way, with tears, with suffering, because when it comes to dead people, one should not speak falsely. It's just that in my case … I wear my heart on my sleeve! It makes my stomach rise when I think that the beast has defiled me. A foul, a libidinous dry old stick and impotent on top of all that. (Ojog-Brașoveanu, Rodica, 1977: 81).

Another feminine character of the same novel, the architect Monica Ciuvăț, lives every moment under the impulse of fear, a feeling that can be read in her look and gestures, in the crouched position and in the hysterical figure. In this sense, the entire seventh chapter seeks an answer to the question in the title: *What are you afraid of Monica?* A similar question asked the relatives, especially the only granddaughter who loved her beyond words, about the writer's fears, who at one stage in life prefers to live isolated, being afraid of everything that surrounded her. So, fear was an unwritten illness of the author that he transferred to the numerous characters. Fear is the element of her prose that keeps the lecturer's suspense, but fear remains a biographical element for *the lady of mysteries*.

In the novel *A Curse with a Stable Residence (1998)*, the character of Olimpia Fabian is created according to the model of the writer who dreamed herself as an original woman. In other words, Olimpia Fabian is another character in which the author has projected herself. The proof is that the heroine *lives* just like her real prototype in the former Operetta neighborhood and prefers the solitude of the extremes. Both of them are cheerful and stylish characters.

The women from the prose of Rodica Ojog-brașoveanu are *the imperfect copy* of the one who created them. Some are dominated by male features, other impress with femininity. Among the feminine features of the heroines, common with the writer's, we

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must mention: the beauty, the sensuality, the grace, the elegance and mystery, the image of *fragile angel*, the candor, the intense fears and the need for protection, the irresistible charm. The male features of the heroines are: the low voice, of a baritone, the masculine clothing, the deformed body in contrast to the angelic look, the logic, the intuition and the strong will.

Among the original characters, which in the doctoral thesis called *Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu –the detective novel* I have named them *lighthouse-characters*, who attract attention either through the feminine look or through the male features, a few must necessarily be mentioned. The first character, Adina Varlam impresses though femininity: grace, sensitivity, elegance, refinement, sensuality, mystery. The physical portrait puts her in the category of *original* ladies:

> Very tall – a height emphasized also by the excessive suppleness– she was not beautiful in the academic sense of the notion, but extremely interesting. The intrigue, especially, was worrying, was fascinating the atmosphere that seemed to give it out and which you thought that had to be a pale reverberation of its inner climate. Investigating her face, it seemed clear that the will, the unexpected decisions, and a sensuality which was hard to master were the basic components of this woman's personality. Bizarre, though, to perplex was the fashionable outfit, as meeting her on the street in the contemporary Bucharest landscape, the pedestrian felt the need to rub his eyes: a silhouette of the 1930s Vogue was crossing Victoriei Street as a ghost and some were wondering whether «they were filming«» somewhere. There was a stupefaction especially in the summer when over natural silk dresses – a mixture of ribbons, slivers and folds – she threw a pair of silver foxes, or when in winter, on a terrible weather, she used to walk in shoes with crystal heels, without a scarf at deep décolletages, en-coeurs split up until the belt. Obviously the make-up and hairstyle kept the line of the same years. Interestingly, though, perhaps because of youth, of the perfect line and of excellent quality things, was that she did not rouse sarcastic smiles. Most considered her only eccentric and the misinformed imagined that she was getting ahead of fashion. Not once, those who had met her by chance on the street enthusiastically confessed to their friends: «You know, straw hats are in fashion again in February … I saw today at Eva a very good woman, foreign I believe. She had a splendid olive bag. I wore one just like that when I got engaged to Petrică. It's about fifty years since then … How extraordinary the way fashion comes back.» (Ojog-Brașoveanu, Rodica, 1984:9,10).

A detail that draws the attention is also found in the novel *Violet in the safe (1986)*. Mary's character, a lady with a male look wants and initiates the marriage with Nelu Diaconeasa:

> Mary was a *marrying* woman, not married, and in ten years she would have all the attributes of an army commander. *And you should see then the instruction and discipline with her man and children.*" (Ojog-Brașoveanu, Rodica, 1986: 195,196).

Among the ladies, the characters of Cătălina Dragoș, "a blonde, diaphanous and a little sad doll" from the novel *The Anonymous of Wednesday (1984)* impress through femininity, Emily from the detective novel *The disappearance of the Statue in the Park (1987)*, Cora Manu and Georgeta Penciu from *Dagger with Champagne (2007)*, Olimpia Dragu, Lia Georgescu, Mioara Popescu, Atena Dumitrescu from the novel *White nights for Minerva (1982)*, the old Matilda Manta from *Violet in the safe (1986)*.

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In the police prose, women dominated by masculine traits are: Ecaterina Sofron, nicknamed *The Terrorist*, Harald Bălăcescu's neighbor from the postwar novel *The Unknown in the Freezer (2002)*, Voleta Bordeianu from *The Anonymous of Wednesday (1984)*, Minerva Tutovan from the series of espionage novels which have her in the centre, the convict Ioana Aragaz from *An Outfit à la Liz Taylor (1992)*, Cati (Erika), the spy from the novel *Violet in the safe (1986)*.

Melania Lupu is a feminine and masculine mixture depending on the circumstances. The heroine is feminine through her physical appearance and has a masculine aura due to the adventurous spirit and impeccable and quick thinking like a policeman's.

In short, what the two types of women in her prose have in common, both masculine women and elegant ladies is the taste for adventure and sensational, that the writer herself felt attracted to. Also, in the police prose, the thirst for killing is a common feature both for men and women. A conclusion is required in this study: the mystery of the writer, as well as of her heroines lies precisely in this paradoxical connection of masculine with feminine principle, present in every individual being in variable doses. In the case of the feminine characters, the masculine and the feminine do not make a discordant note, but on the contrary they fuse. It is atypical for an elegant and sensual woman to decide to be a spy and love Adventure, actions that men, in general, are interested in. As the personality of Rodica Ojog-brașoveanu has automatically woven a mystery aura, so have her characters, to illustrate a writer's creed: "Every man is a mystery, every life is an enigma" (*Minerva is Unleashed – 1974)*. The mystery of the heroines and of the writer corresponds, that the writer indirectly states in the police novels: *Minerva Tutovan c'est moi… Melania Lupu c'est moi...*

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