DREAM AS SOURCE OF LIFE IN MIRCEA CARTARESCU' REM

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Abstract: *The essence of Marcia Cărtărescu's* Rem *lies in exacerbating the inner world, focused on the exploration of dreams and imagination. The barriers between reality and dream are overcome by means of a game – The Queens' Game, invented by Svetlana whose dreams lead her to self discovery, but not before the neophyte travels an initiating path, following the surrounding clues. The core of life can be reached through the "ordeal by labyrinth" within dreams and imagination. Thus, all the little girls – Ada, Carmina, Crina, Garoafa, Ester, Puia and Svetlana – the chosen one, sketch the tunnels of the labyrinth through their fancy containing: a place, a colour, a flower and an object. Svetlana's imaginary consists of the seven dreams: the forest, the path, the water, the cup of wine, the golden key, the door, the room and the manuscript, all of these leading to creation, which means life. Their Game turns into a game of life and death; the seven dreams reiterate the seven days of Genesis, the origin of creation itself, a world of dreams defined by a dynamism that emphasizes the sense of life. Dreams are not a surrogate reality, but a concrete world in itself.*

Keywords*: dream, imagination, life.*

Mircea Cărtărescu's *Rem* is an attempt at exceeding, through imagination, the barriers between reality and dream as a limit in self-discovery. Svetlana's dreams and The Great Games animated by imagination take the place of life itself because of the character's deep feelings; the true life is the sinuous path of dream that represents a way out of the prosaic world. The narrator enters the characters' innermost feelings in order to create a parallel world for surviving. The novel begins with Vali's romance and Svetlana's childish memories which represent the stake of the book. There are two coordinates of the imaginary: the dream and imagination which may be not only dangerous, mortal, damaging, but also liberating, redemptive: therefore, they can be a curse or a blessing. Dream is more than a representation of repressed desires; it is a travel to essence, origin. Once this "Pandora's box" is opened, any attempt to escape is illusory because "the chosen one" cannot deny her destiny.

The pearl that Egor gives to the little girl signifies a try to reach the human being's inner essence: "Mystically, the pearl is a symbol of illumination and spiritual birth" (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 2010: 66). The search for the pearl means the search for the sublime essence hidden in ourselves. Through the twelve-year-old girl's dreams, Egor tries to find a sense of life and he is sure he will succeed the moment Svetlana starts dreaming with the help of the pearl; "to interpret a dream doesn't mean to de-construct an underlying intrigue but to get used to a forgotten language" (Pleșu, 1997: 57). Thus, the little girl feels utterly alive when she crosses the forest, the only possible reality: "I remembered nothing else. And I didn't feel lost. Delighted by the colours of the butterflies and by the taste of raspberry, I was walking gaily [...] this was my world, from which I would have never got out [...] I wasn't searching for the way out, the paths weren't ways to somewhere, but the pure joy of walking through wonderland" (Cărtărescu, 2008: 77). Having reached the beyond, Svetlana has access to the primordial world through reconstruction in the seven days like those of Genesis represented by the Svetlana' dreams and the little girls' games, unconscious of their

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sacred connotation. The Artist is sure that true life is not outside, but inside, in the framework of collective memory that enlivens the universe. He looks for "the Chosen One" in order to enter the true world which is created from inside through The Dreams and The Great Games. The center of life is in the hands of the Creator who hatches a plot.

After her conversation with Egor, the little girl forgets Zizi, her doll, for the first time; hence, she changes her priorities. Thanks to the pearl given by Egor and placed under the pillow each night, Svetlana starts having the true dreams because she realizes that she didn't live until the moment she begins to dream. When The Great Games are initiated, Svetlana dreams the forest, a symbol of life, the tree being considered a connection between earth – human being and sky – Divinity. Therefore, the access to transcendence is given, she is "the chosen one".

The Queen's Games last seven days. Each day, a queen is chosen randomly, having some obligations: she has to invent a game like a script using a colour, an object, a flower, a place, with the girls' participation. Aura, the first queen, dressed in violet, has the morning glory flower and the place is the field; the second girl is Ada, the Indigo Queen who orders, having the watch as the designated object, to imitate a certain age; the third is Carmina, The Blue Queen who imagines a town without life, through the opening of the pearl, that the other girls have to cross; the next girl is Puia, The Green Queen, who has the rock purslane and with the cap of her pen as object blows bubbles so that they create seven eggs; Ester with her thermometer put at the sick girl's armhole, transgresses with the girls in another dimension: "I was feeling at the same time a bizarre accessional movement, I was feeling it in all my viscera, in all my body" (Cărtărescu, *op. cit.*: 136). At the highest temperature, everyting is destroyed and a new world is reborn afterwards;the Apocalypse is followed by a new Genesis:

> As the world becomes the size of a apple, the size of a cherry, the size an electron and eventually dissappears into nothingness. And when not even the darkness or the nothingness were around us, seddenly we saw, from the border of sight, coming towards us, a bright dot. (*Ibidem*: 142)

The Orange Queen is Garoafa whose place of playing is the old school, a terrifying place with invasive bats that determine the Queen to lay a fire, a way of purification where the only victim is Zizi, the doll, changing Svetlana's life forever. The girls throw in it everything around, they dance as witches, and clap their hands around the fire: „We had a feeling of utter freedom, a thirst for... for what? We couldn't realize, but there was yearning inside us" (*Ibidem*: 155). Following this gruesome game, Garoafa appointed The Great Court led by herself and with the girls as her aid, executioners, judges. The victim is Zizi, the doll; she is trialed and sentenced to hanging and burning to the stake. Together with Zizi's disappearance, a new age begins in Svetlana's life.

The Great Games end with Svetlana's game of marriage, having as object the ring, and culminates with the kiss given to Ester:"My REM was the kiss I gave to Ester. In that moment, I had Everything" (*Ibidem*: 165). Imagination plays an important role in this game, without it the human being is caught in the morbid, ordinary world. This entire universe of The Great Games is full of symbols, giving a multitude of interpretations; it's a microcosm where life erupts from seven colours that mean a certain energy, a type of rainbow, a recall of the Sacred Covenant.

If imagination is controlled, that comes from our desire to escape the prosaic reality, a good way to create parallel worlds; the dream, even if it is provoked by the

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pearl in this novel, is something beyond our will; our desires have no influence over it, it's a destiny that demands its protagonists. Who is the Master of this world of dream?

The Great Games and Svetlana's dreams almost happen in the same day. At night the chosen one dreams and by day the queens have their role. Svetlana's dreams also have a lot of mythical, religious and literary symbols that emphasize the idea of life: the forest - labyrinth, regeneration, matrix: water - purification, rebirth, reflection; spider - creation, The Creator, destiny, soul, *daimon*; the golden key – mystery, initiation, knowledge.

The meanings of the REM are exposed without any hesitation. Each person is unique and thus has their own REM, but in order to reach it you need to follow an initiating path and recognize the signs from dreams, from day to day life and even from imagination:

> I was, without any doubt, the chosen one, I would enter the REM. [...] about the existence of this Exit, as he called the REM, Egor had told me that people from all over the world knew, bound to each other though the revealing of the mystery and through the oath of keeping it. [...] some say that in the REM there is an infinite device, an enormous brain that sets and coordinates, following a certain plan and a certain purpose, all the dreams of beings. The Dream is, according to them, the true reality where the will of Divinity, hidden in the REM, is revealed... some are convinced that there is only one REM, others believe that there is one for each person and they even composed a peculiar writing in which they present the signs which could help anyone find their REM, if they know how to read them. But which is the truth, wheter REM is a Redemption or a Damnation, only you will find out. (Cărtărescu, *op. cit.*: 128)

At the beginning of the first dream, the little girl has unreasonable, explosive joy, but all this is annihilated by the vision of a rotten block that makes her cry deeply, being an anticipative sign of death. In order to be reborn, the first condition is to be dead. Thus, the third dream is about rebirth because she dreams the water that symbolizes regeneration, purification, being a source of life. In the "forest without limits", she finds a glass with wine and she gets frightened when she sees a huge spider. The tasting of the wine is not determined by the thirst of her body, but by that of the soul: it's about the spasmodic thirst for life, the drink of Gods and it reminds us of the Holy Grail. The spider may be a symbol of the Creator who hatches her in his work, who gave her life, a little Demiurge.

After the forest, the water and the cup follows the big golden key. It's a unique key which in the next dream opens the great door that brings her to the source of life, being a significant step towards Terror or Pleasure. Unexpectedly, she doesn't find a treasure or Heaven, but a place full of rummage: old furniture, faded pictures, broken pianos, books in thick leather bindings, weather-stained clothes, a torn icon; all these compose a past, memories, an identity that is life. Upstairs is the right door. In her latest dream, the little girl fathoms another world, the centre of the Universe, the Creator and any means of returning is impossible. That part of the human being remains there, her essence and the rest are only copies. The next day, Svetlana certainly knows that what happened were neither just dreams, nor reality. Finally, Svetlana realizes what The REM means:

> We are the REM, you and me, and my story […]. Maybe it is only a feeling, a handshake before the ruin of things… a memory of memories. The REM is, perhaps, *the nostalgia*. Or it is something else. Or it is all these at the same time. I don't know, I don't know. (Cărtărescu, *op. cit.*: 179)

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