OF LOVE SQUANDERED. RADU TUDORAN'S FIUL RISIPITOR

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Abstract: *Whereas all of Radu Tudoran's novels cover the theme of love on the background of or paralleled with other themes, in Fiul risipitor the writer approaches love alone, in its multiple metamorphoses. Eva, the female character, falls in love with an unnamed man who will guide her through all the steps of becoming a woman. The perpetual fickleness of the male character, who, left with nothing to squander, squanders himself, encompasses a pathological love on the side of Eva, who is devoted to him to such an extent that forgiveness seems not only absurd, but masochistic. Although the novel has been said to deal with the extremes of lust alone, wothout any metaphysical insight into the relationship between the two main characters, Eva and her squandering lover are entangled in an adventure that reiterates the myth of the Androgyne; the oddity of the characters and of the situations are not mere elements of the sensational, but a frame to enclose an outlook on love in its idealized form.*

Keywords: *love, squander, lust*

Each of Radu Tudoran's novels tackles, fundamentally or subsidiarily, the problem of love. Starting with the short story book *Orașul cu fete sărace*, Tudoran reveals an inclination towards the erotic theme, amplified in the later novels. But most of the times the stories' atmosphere branches into different directions; in the novel *Un port la răsărit* the writer reveals a nautical, waterside world, a multicultural and diseased space, where love is justified through its redeeming valence. Other examples are *Anotimpuri*, where the exploited environment is the world of aviation, on the background of which the romance of young Manueal unreels, or *Dunărea revărsată*, a novel in which, on the backdrop of the socialist work, the protagonist fulfils her erotic destiny. The novel *Fiul risipitor* (*Întoarcerea fiului risipitor* in the 1947 edition), however, is a novel about love and love alone. Undoubtedly, there are auxiliary themes (too few though and irrelevant for the main subject), but, besides the main character and her erotic experience, the novel does not justify itself. Within Tudoran's work, *Fiul risipitor* is the romantic novel *par excellence*, about the ideal, idealized, impossible and maybe even imaginary love, about the protagonist's relentless and agonizind oscillation between sense and sensibility (in Jane Austen's words), in a downfall from which the winner is always the instinct.

Eva is a contemporary Cinderella (the only person to whom she might feel close is her father, after whose death she is left with an indifferent mother, a naive and mean sister and a sexually obsessed uncle, she is always poorly dressed and unwelcome at strangers' visits in the house) who falls in love precociously with the un-named man – a symbold, precisely through this anonymity, for the universal seducer. The entire novel follows the path of this almost obsessive love, covering the numerous episodes in which the departures and the returns of the "squandering son" are each time so disjointed and mean, that each of Eva's surrenders becomes a genuine act of masochism.

Apparently a superficial novel, *Fiul risipitor* has many times been regarded with scepticism by the literary critique. Due to its relatively simplistic subject, focused mainly on erotic experiences, due to the female character who manifests a delirious

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sensuality and not lastly due to the sometimes trivial auxiliary episodes or characters[1], the novel has more than often been analyzed from a negative angle, as a novel abundant in pages of ”absolute pornography” (Piru, 1968: 329), ”a come-back to the old theme: the destiny of a woman, without the addition of the previously proven qualities, only with the drawbacks, even more obvious” (George, 1973: 261), or a novel in which ”the situational, factual and stylistic level is that of the commercial novel” (Popa, 2009: 253), the only difference being the number of pages. To vehemently deny these considerations would be an exaggeration, as the sensational character of the novel is easily noticeable in the numerous situational turnovers and in the characters (especially Eva and the squandering son) who are embodiments of excesses: excess of obedience and devotion in the case of Eva, excess of instability and pettiness in the case of her lover. Nevertheless, given the fact that we are speaking about an erotic apology, the excesses imagined by the author, no matter of what nature, enhance a certain feeling of un-natural, almost impossible, as is the love which Tudoran, through such a controversial couple, tries to ilustrate: the ideal/ idealized love, or what Al. Piru very eloquently describes as love ”above prejudice and social constraints, in the absolute freedom and readiness of the feeling” (Piru, *op. cit.*: 328).

The protagonist’s name is not random, Eva is the feminine prototype that embodies all the atributes of the woman unabatedly searching, or better said waiting, for the recast of the first couple. The meaning of the girl Eva’s aspiration, yet unknown, is delicately revealed by her wish and expectation to grow up, in order to be old enough for her lover: ”Tell me, how much do I need to grow? (…) I’d like to grow faster. What do I have to do?” (Tudoran, 2010: 48). We might say that for him, the only moral censorship is the girl’s age, (physically) not ready to be held in his arms.

Eva’s evolution is followed starting with the girl waiting to grow to the later sensual woman, graciously outlining that ”unique and incomprehensible threshold, when a little girl starts to resemble a woman” (*ibidem*: 41). Becoming aware of her own sensuality is similar to the awakening of a second being, unknown, the discovery of the dormant woman, who is woken by his touch. As the protagonist herself admits in the first edition of the novel, her beauty is an act of will, an inner gesture, made out of the desire to be liked by her beloved. The femininity hidden underneath the poor clothing and the wild hair is revealed through the erotic gesture, in a body alphabet known only by him.

The primordial couple is re-framed through Eva’s symbolic growth from Adam’s rib, here the un-named man who in her eyes is the First man, the creator himself, an architect of her feminine outline:

> You touched my waist and then I saw that the waist became slimmer. You embraced my hips, and the hips grew, as a mash; you rested your head on my womb, and from that moment on I needed your weight, as the ships need ballast, not to tip. (Tudoran, *op. cit.*: 196)

The description made by Eva resembles the biblical verses about the Genesis. The casting of Eva as a woman is indeed the first act of creation – the creation of a world whose sole god is he, the first man.

Essentially, the novel is a reiteration of the homonym scriptural parable: a perpetual wandering of the squandering son, whose return will be each time greeted with tears of joy and celebrated by slaughtering the fatted calf, by a father, in the novel

[1] uncle Alfons, for instance, is a reprehensible character, he gets the maids pregnant and they will later by dismissed by misses Alion, he makes approaches even to his two nieces.

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– Eva, who is much too forgiving, while the devotion of the other son, here Oswald, causes too little joy compared to the (always temporary) return of the one who lost his way. The good coat that the father gives the younger son in the Bible is in the novel Eva's love, which covers him with every return. If Eva behaves precisely like the father from the biblical story – "When he was still far away, his father saw him and felt pitty for him, he ran and fell at his neck and kissed him many times" (Biblia: 1010) – each of Eva's greetings is a variation of this reaction, the two sons differ substatially from the biblical characters. Oswald, as opposed to the older son, manages to understand the nature of Eva's love, an understanding expressed concisely, but very comprehensively, through the lines "Eva, I admire you!" (Tudoran, *op. cit.*: 164) and "Eva, I weep for you!" (*ibidem*). The squandering son, on the other hand, repeats the same mistake over and over again (so that each new repentance becomes both implausible and a clear hint of a later departure – the return is always marked by a future going away), squandering not only the protagonist's love, but squandering himself at the same time.

Within the erotic triangle formed by the un-named man, Eva and Oswald, we can notice a swap of positions in the couples Eva – the squanderer and Eva – Oswald. If in the first situation the man is the one who squanders Eva's love, and she forgives him unconditionally, within the second couple Eva symbolically and unconsciously revenges by squandering Oswald's love and devotion, who, at his turn, forgives her every time she leaves him.

If the moral of the biblical story is summarized in the last verse – "We have to rejoice and to cheer, for this brother of yours was dead and has resurrected, was lost and has been found" (Biblia: 1010), how could the moral, or the point of the novel be summarized? Because the sqandering son remains lost and the symbolic resurrection is undoubtedly ephemeral with every ocassion.

A possible explanation could be found in I. Negoițescu's interpretation:

> The squandering son cannot be considered a real hero, with a traceable outline, even though he gives the name of the novel, hei s just the shadow, the phantom projected by Eva's erotic, primordial tendency. The squandering son is more the attempt of embodiment, of building-up de desired profile that the feminine sexuality imposes in its impulse of giving herself. (Negoițescu, 1966: 330)

In these circumstances, the true squanderer, regardless of the real or imagined presence of the man, is Eva, a squanderer of her own being through each exalted giving. At the concrete level, the man's returns separate the female character from a precarious life and from a painfully acquired balance, untie her from the past, a past that is later denied: "She would ask herself: Had nothing happened in all this time? She felt as if she had been asleep" (Tudoran, *op. cit.*: 338). Similar to the monastery desired by Manole in the ballad *Monastirea Argeșului*, which collapses every night, in the absence of a real sacrifice, the life that Eva makes for herself in the absence of her lover collapses with each of the man's returns. Unable to keep her lover in order to immure him in the foundation of her expectations, Eva immures herself in an insecure construction of a life based on fancy, an imperfect sacrifice which results in the ruins of her lost youth.

For her, the only credible reality is his presence. Thus, the uproot is experienced not only regarding the past or the present, but regarding a possible future as well; the lover's return denies any of Eva's possible beings (the girl, the married woman, the independent woman, the working woman) excepting the being that he continuously (re)creates. In this manner, Eva, through his wanderings, but ever more because of her own roaming, fills perfectly the cast of a singular being: the sensual woman, a slave to instinct and to love for a single man, situation which she cannot

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overpass, not even after his disappearance. Tudoran didn't desire to create a spiritually profound character – Eva's psychology is not complicated, although a certain spiritual delicacy cannot be denied, nor to create a mediocre character, but to make an embodiment of the sensual femininity (or vice-versa), remarkable from this point of view through the unique impulses that mobilize her.

What makes the erotic theme from *Fiul risipitor* different from the other novels is the subsumption of love in the sphere of pathological feelings. It cannot be disputed, Eva is a slave to a primary impulse, to instinct. The erotic act is extrapolated at a universal level, associated with the unleashed nature: thunder, earthquakes, storms. Aware of the transiency of her pleasure, Eva admits to being an enthusiast of (physical) love, fulfilling a curse hidden in her female profile:

> She thought that a curse must follow all women whose body is mane only for fruitless pleasures; they must pay somehow this privilege given by the devil, otherwise why wouldn't she be allowed to stay where she found stability? Maybe she was damned for this to have happened to her, to her and to all of the same ilk, to tear her heart and her flesh, going from hand to hand and weeping at crosses, abandoned, loosing their hair, stretching their arms to others so that they tingle their body, leaving them void on the inside and going with the wind. For she had gone from one to the other, through the mediation of one alone until today, who returned different every time. And she was his slave, faithful, not to him, but to love; through him she had enrolled in the escapeless legion of the exalted. (Tudoran, *op. cit.*: 280-281)

As a matter of fact, the novel is abundant in erotic episodes, with allusive language. Without being great artistic accomplishments, but not mere "erotic platitudes" (Piru, *op. cit.*: 329) either, the scenes of physical intimacy (oozing a certain spiritual nakedness as well, but willingly left untackled) are often well created, covered in an ingenuous indecency, pervaded by a waft of incandescent dew.

Eva's love is unaltering, devoted, unconditional even when it becomes ambiguous – "A man whom she didn't love anymore, but who, as she knew him, represented her sole reason for being" (Tudoran, *op. cit.*: 341). In the protagonist's exalted imagination, the man earns a cosmic stature, he is a superman, an earthly deity through physiognomy and strength, a man of superior intellect atoning an un-named curse: "the curse of being something else than what he had wanted to be" (*ibidem*: 354).

The man is the exact opposite of the female character: instable, mean, frivolous. What for Eva becomes fatality, for him is a mere manner of filling his existential gaps or of avoiding boredom. Like all things in his life, Eva is a borrowed lover whom he leaves mechanically without thinking of what he means to her. As in many of Tudoran's novels, the epic tension resides in the rivalry between love and distance, important coordinates in most of the tudoranian charaters' destiny, one always representing an obstacle for the other. The adventure of distance is preferred to the sentimental adventure; thus, the acceptance of a complete love by the man wanting adventure would signify a betrayal. This results in the predicament that triggers the heroine's drama and the novel's subject.

Who, or how, Eva's lover is eventually proves irelevant; he is esentially a projection of her desires, an ideal, imagined in such a manner to overlap a pre-created form[1]. Eva's obssessive love materializes in a parellel reality which compesates for his

[1] This overlapping is considered by Jose Ortega y Gasset love at first sight.

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absence from the material world and transforms him in a permanent presence. She chooses to ignore the immediate reality and the real character of the man in order to encompass him in an imagined perfection. This behavious recalls Stendhal's crystallization theory, according to which falling in love is possible only by projecting imaginary features upon the loved person (similar to the salt crystals that embellish the branch from Stendhal's story), a phenomenon followed, according to the author of the theory, by an inevitable process of de-crystallization, meaning falling out of love. "If in the paroxysm of our love we could suddenly see the object of our love from the normal perspective of our attention", says Jose Ortega y Gasset, "its magic power would be annulled" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008: 43). Accepting the hypothesis that love is an "impulse towards perfection" (Ortega y Gasset, 2008: 28), or, as Plato considers, that love is the apiration of "procreation within beauty" (Platon, 2003: 130), all these imaginary projections are natural and justified. But Stendhal's idea sustaining that love can be done and undone is not entirely sustained by Tudoran's story, and this because for Eva the process of falling in love is irreversible. De-crystallization, which equals at a concrete level the discovery of the real person, doesn't end in falling out of love. The heroine's feelings oscillate between love, pitty, hopelessness, but love prevails.

Jose Ortega y Gasset enriches Stendhal's perspective on love and adds the term of "metaphysical engraftment": "This type of love in which a being remains attached once and for all and entirely to another being (…) an ontological cohabitation with the loved person, loyal to their destiny, whatever it might be" (Ortega y Gasset, *op. cit.*: 27). Starting from this idea, Eva, despite the reproaches made by several critics, beyond the woman of "awoken sensuality" (Negoițescu, *op. cit.*: 330), is the primordial woman who aspires to the re-enactment of the androgyne unity.

The end of the novel favours the same idea. Disappeared following the bombardment of Bucharest on the 4th of April 1944, the squandering son doesn't disappear due to what he represents. Eva's (rethorical) question "Are you here?" thus becomes redundant: he is always here, in Eva's heart and imagination.

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