FORMS OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN THE DRAMA OF HORIA LOVINESCU

Alin Ştefănuţ
Assoc. Prof.,PhD., University of Oradea

Abstract: Horia Lovinescu's formative years were spent around books and in an environment that favored any form of literary and cultural expression. Literature becomes, in his case, a state of mind, a palpable internal reality, much more concrete than the external given. This part of Horia Lovinescu's personality extends as if without the will of the author to most of his dramatic texts, which results in the creation of plays that are heavily livresque in nature. Motifs, symbols, characters and situations present in Romanian, European and even folklore literature are repurposed by the playwright in a personal manner, in such a way that the resulting texts can be read as a possible extension of the destiny of the original texts.

Keywords: intertextuality, drama, socialist realism, dictatorship, history, testament, Negru și roșu

When reading the dramatic texts that came out during the time of social realism, we must take into consideration the context in which they reached the printing press, because, otherwise, there is a chance that we may fall into a nihilism that is gratuitous and even comfortable, which is something that does not benefit dramatic literature or, ultimately, the history of contemporary Romanian drama. We should instead choose, in our opinion, to dust off the spines of the books of drama written by the authors of that time not in order to change a canon that has already been somewhat established, and whose zenith is represented by the drama of Marin Sorescu, but in order to attempt to understand and explain to the posterity the reasons behind the existing status quo and the specific manner in which theater was written. On their own, aesthetic criteria are not enough for such an endeavor for the simple fact that, if nothing else, most of the dramatic texts of the time do not withstand such a reading. A different kind of critical mechanism is necessary here, one that melds the aesthetic with the political, which was omnipresent throughout society before 1989. At the same time, we must take into account the condition of the playwright as a writer, a man of theater and a citizen who has submitted to an oppressive regime. It is possible for the attention to nuance and detail, and for the seeking of the symbol and allegory to offer us a much more generous perspective concerning the reception of the message than the primary comprehension of the often contorted universe etched in these texts for the very reason of the former's ability to express even some of the truth that could otherwise not be articulated.

Horia Lovinescu the man is the result of his actions, manifested in a time where the freedom of the individual was palpably in question. We cannot know the extent to which the consequences of his actions – the most important and the most leaden with dire effects being his pact with the Communist regime – were wholly assimilated by Horia Lovinescu's conscience, as the only clues we have on this are his isolation and his belated attempt to re-discover his birthplace of Fălticeni, that place long sought and re-found only through writing.

The main obstacle in embracing socialist realism as a work method is represented, in Horia Lovinescu's case, by the negation of an entire literary tradition and of a humanistic structure, which belongs to a different era than the one in which he affirmed himself. Doing away with this solid foundation is not possible and remains a desire never fully realized, imposed from outside by the social and historical conditions. Imparted with a rich culture, it is impossible for the author of *Moartea unui artist* (*The Death of an Artist*) to recant the major European and Romanian literature. From the very first play, *Lumina de la Ulmi* (*The Light from Ulmi*), Horia Lovinescu approaches literature as a theme of dramatic creation, and we can find a quote or reference from one writer or

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another even in the plays affected by the blueprint of social realism, the model in this sense being, according to his own confession, Shakespeare[1]. A clear evidence of the author's permanent contact with major literature is also the dramatization of Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, finalized shortly before Lovinescu's death.

An intellectual by definition, sober not unlike an aristocrat with a long heritage, as Alex. Ștefănescu characterized him, Horia Lovinescu spent his formative years under the spell of the direct and constant contact with books in an environment that favored any form of literary expression. Literature becomes, in his case, a state of mind, a palpable internal reality, much more concrete than the outside world. This dimension of Horia Lovinescu's personality seems to extend, without the author's will, into most of his texts, which bears the consequence of creating plays that are evidently *livresque*, an aspect that has been repeatedly penalized by the critics. As the playwright puts it in an interview, "the velleity to write began very early, as early as the first years of high school, under the form of "compositions" that were naïve and, of course, devoid of any worth. I think that the instinct was owed, on the one hand, to the climate in our household and, on the other, to the passion for literature."[2] In the same interview, Horia Lovinescu mentions the constancy of the desire to write, admitting, at the same time, that he had never thought of becoming a writer. The author of the play *Jocul vieții și al morții în deșertul de cenușă*(*The Game of Life and Death in the Ashen Desert*) also states that, of all of the literary genres, drama was to him „the most simple, most direct, in a sense, the most „handy" means to establish a dialogue with the world and myself."[3]

In 1983, Horia Lovinescu wrote: „The youth must also learn the truth that we keep buried in our souls, as if after a crime we have committed, while the real assassins do-si-do with our hearts. We each bear in our soul the stench of the rotted cadaver of our lost freedom."[4] This quote is taken from the last known play by Horia Lovinescu, *Negru și roșu* (*Black and Red*), and the words are attributed to a Citizen, who is a character in the play. This final drama is the playwright's swan song, the half-spoken truth about taking a wrong path, never publicly acknowledged, characterized by compromise and opportunism.

Negru și roșu is the third history drama by Horia Lovinescu, following *Petru Rareș sau Locțiitorul* (*Petru Rareș or the Lieutenant*) and *Patima fără sfârșit* (*The Endless Passion*). As in the second history drama we mentioned, the historical setting only represents the pretext for a debate concerning values like dignity and freedom. The historical moment chosen by Horia Lovinescu is situated at the point where verified fact meets legend.

With a title that is reminiscent of Stendhal's novel, the play *Negru și roșu* is a critique of the political regime of Horia Lovinescu's time, but, in *Argumentele autorului* (*The Author's Arguments*),found in the published version, the playwright downplays the impact of his critical endeavor and presents his play as nothing more or less than a tribute to the „Republic," although the connotation of the term has changed over time. The argument of the lapse of time is also furthered in what concerns the notions of freedom and democracy, whose essence, according to the playwright, has been changed throughout history. The plot is placed in Ancient Rome, during the reign of Tarquinius and, although the author, as a precaution, rejects the idea of updating the subject of his writing, the transposition into the present of the debate proposed by the play is visible. More than that, the playwright insists on the textual lifting of certain ideas from Titus Livy's chronicle, which serve as a shield against any possible objections. In the same *Arguments*, we find that the play was destined „for the understanding of the viewer of today," and thus, the playwright

[1]Also see the article *Până la mareșalul Shakespeare* (*Until Marshall Shakespeare*), in „Contemporanul", no. 7/1972, p. 1, 9.
[2]H. Lovinescu, in Amza Săceanu, *Fața văzută și nevăzută a teatrului*(*The Seen and Unseen Face of Theatre*), Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1974, p. 212.
[3]H. Lovinescu, in Amza Săceanu, *Op. cit.*, p. 213.
[4]H. Lovinescu, *Negru și roșu*, the „Rampa" Collection, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1984, p. 22. The quotes from the text are taken from the abovementioned edition.

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contradicts himself in what concerns the „updating" of history and the message that he intends to transmit through this. All of these arguments seem today to be ways through which the playwright tried to keep away any suspicion that he may be criticizing the political regime and its ideological constraints. In spite of this, *Negru și roșu* is the most acerbic critique delivered by Horia Lovinescu to the Communism that he served during his entire activity as a playwright.

The problematics tackled in the play cover a wide range of facts associated with the Communist regime – the confiscation of estates, the cult of personality, the denunciation, the feeling of terror – present across society entire - , the secret police that could ask for and run through anyone's personal information, the exile, the half-spoken truth, the lack of freedom, and, last but not least, the loss of identity and self-respect. The *Clonca maxima* built in Tarquinius' time is also referred to, which could very well stand in for the Danube-Black Sea Canal, and there is also a strict curfew, announced by the Crier, which is a reference to the Communist rules from Ceaușescu's time. The similarities are numerous and build to a phenomenon of identification between the viewers and the citizens of Rome presented in *Negru și roșu*.

With the exception of the characters who stand apart through their names, the other characters from Horia Lovinescu's drama are defined through their quality as citizens, as the inhabitants of Rome are called Citizen I, Citizen II, etc. Their only coordinates are based, according to the definition of the term „citizen" as found in the DEX, on the state that they belong to, which guarantees them certain rights and liberties and towards which they have certain obligations, and, thus, the political direction of the message in *Negru și roșu* becomes clear. Freedom itself, in this context, is not free, and is colored in a political hue, fueling a meditation that exceeds the clearly delineated historical framework.

Through the prohibitions imposed on the citizens of Rome, this final drama from Horia Lovinescu is reminiscent of *Paradisul* (*Paradise*), a play that portrays a utopia whose inhabitants are called Adam. The similarities between the two plays do not stop here. The inhabitants of Rome, in the same way as the Adams, are not allowed to travel in groups larger than three people, being attentively surveilled by the oppressive apparatus of the state, which is vigilant to any form of revolt. The situation envisioned in *Negru și roșu* becomes even more pronounced in what concerns the deprivation of the citizens' freedom through the intention to forbid gatherings that exceed two persons, a decision that favors denunciation and its public nature. The victim, thus, is more easily aware of their executioner and vice versa, which accelerates the state of terror. The lack of communication and the solitude fundamentally contribute to the depersonalization of Tarquinius' subjects, which, in turn, adds to a permanent state of mutual suspicion.

The antagonist *par excellence* in Horia Lovinescu's play is Tarquinius Superbus, who appears as a tyrannical, brutified leader who does everything in his power to rule by his own whim, without minding his subjects or any other administrative bodies. He is opposed by Brutus, his nephew, who knows all of the Roman citizens and addresses them by their names. Playing the fool, he has the possibility to plot against his uncle and, at the same time, protect his own life, as it is known that the king killed all who were close to him, aside from his sons. The city of Rome, under the rule of Tarquinius, is not the city of its citizens, but of its ruler, and the notion of democracy is drained of its essence. The features of the city are those that are desired by the supreme leader and have nothing to do with the wishes of its citizens.

Brutus' ideal is represented by the definitive excision of tyranny and, through this, the regaining of the dignity and freedom of Rome's inhabitants. In order to save the Republic, he is capable of sentencing his two treacherous sons to death. The political attitude of the two rulers takes shape when measured against their position towards humanity, an argument in favor of Horia Lovinescu's constant preoccupation with man and human values. While, for Tarquinius, „people bear no value," Brutus embodies the ideal of giving the people back „their respect for themselves"[5].

[5]Horia Lovinescu, *Argumentele autorului*, in *Negru și roșu*, *ed. cit*., p. 7.

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The truth is articulated in this play, at least in part I, *Roma* (*Rome*), in a manner that is as direct as possible, as the Aesopic metaphor and nature of the play are considerably toned down in favor of a brutal expressivity. The first part of the play resembles a testamentary endeavor written with desperation. The confession of the playwright takes center stage, which we can tell from the lines spoken by the Citizens of Rome. The next part of the play, despite the tragic events that it houses, no longer reaches the tension of the first part, when the truth was in the streets, among the simple folk, who have perfected their survival techniques in an oppressive regime. The truth has descended into the streets, which are not given their privileged role as an agora anymore, and the truth is barely articulated, always surreptitiously, always in fear. There are two ways of expressing the truth in the play, and they are represented by the inhabitants of Rome and Brutus: the fragmentation of the discourse, masking the truth under the veil of praise for the leader, and the portrayal of a harmless buffoon, thus avoiding a direct confrontation with the leader. Histrionics ensure Brutus' survival and offer him a series of liberties that he would otherwise not have access to.

Radu Popescu has noticed, in the case of this play, the relationship that Horia Lovinescu establishes with history, the latter being perceived as an exterior, imposed given, which demands unmediated contact.[6] History itself is prime, as an entity that travels throughout the eras, whose nature is iterative and has the power of subjugating the destinies of the many. History appears as an uber-character that brutally imposes its changes without caring for those who attempt to create it. As it is more powerful than they are, history assimilates them and, when they are no longer of any use, it contributes, one way or the other, to their oblivion. A capricious character, history follows its path unmoved by what it leaves behind or what this endeavor entails. And the last act of the play is also dedicated to it, being placed after the proper ending of the text: "What will come, history shall decide…" (p. 96).

Placing the action of *Negru și roșu* in Ancient Rome does not leave in the distance, in the past, the issues brought forth, as they are eternal. The audience and the readers, respectively, are asked for a certain degree of complicity to perceive the meanings of the play, since what is important is for the readers to see themselves in the characters and situations brought to life on the stage. History repeats itself. If Tarquinius can be found in the society contemporary to Horia Lovinescu, it rests upon the spectators to identify that Brutus who is still cloaked in anonymity and who will never have a clearly delineated identity specifically because of the historical moment that makes its affirmation inopportune. History appears, according to HoriaLovinescu, as a *magister vitae* who organizes its didactic acts according to the moral principle it intends to transmit. The material can have its source in a very far away past, as is the case with *Negru și roșu*, or it can be rather recent, as with *Patima fără sfârșit*.

The relationships with history and between human beings prove to be far more complex than the political factor within the society contemporary to Horia Lovinescu had wished them to be. Literature and theater represent the space where they benefit from the full expression and freedom that society refused to grant them. The drama *Negru și roșu*, through the historical images it contains, proves, for the largest part, to be a satire of Romanian society during the time of Communism.

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[6]See Radu Popescu, in *Programul de sală al spectacolului* (*The Programme for the Show*), in Horia Lovinescu, *Negru și roșu*, ed. cit., p. 99.

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