TRADITIONAL PATTERNS AND SYMBOLS IN BREBAN'S NOVEL, ANIMALE BOLNAVE

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Abstract: *The paper intends to focus on the traditional patterns borrowed from Dostoievsky's novel Crime and Punishment by Nicolae Breban and to emphasize the originality of the Romanian writer. Breban tackles the frame of a detective novel, but changes the perspective on the protagonist. Instead of stressing on the struggle between conscience and pathos of Rodion Raskolnikov, as Dostoievsky did, Nicolae Breban seems to go further with the idea of the man competing with God because he follows the alienation of the hero until his destruction. The symbols used by the Romanian writer send also implicit to the Dostoievskian novel underlying, in time, the role of the assumed disciple by Breban.*

Key words: *animals, hum-animals*[1]*, humans.*

The 60th generation of the Romanian novelists emphasizes the unquestionable influence of the greatest universal writers and thinkers like F.M.Dostoievski, Fr. Nietzsche, Albert Camus or Thomas Mann and of our national *magistri* as Liviu Rebreanu, Hortensia Papadat Bengescu, Camil Petrescu, George Călinescu or Mircea Eliade. These interferences are more than natural because they underline the impossibility of any literature to exist in its own. In the generous field of the art and humanities, literature shows that: « Rien ne vit isolé; le véritable isolement, c'est la mort. » (BRUNEL P., PICHOIS Cl., ROUSSEAU A.M., 1983 : 19) Our comparative aim approaches: « les faits et les textes litttéraires entre eux, distants ou non dans le temps ou dans l'espace, pourvu qu'ils appartiennent à plusieurs langues ou plusieurs cultures, fissent-elles partie d'une même tradition, afin de mieux les décrire, les comprendre et les goûter. » (*ibidem*, 150) To sustain the definition above, we will focus on the traditional patterns borrowed from Dostoievsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* by Nicolae Breban and we intend to certify the originality of the Romanian writer.

The Romanian critics have discovered, so far, the Dostoievskian features of *Animale bolnave*. The novel reveals, as Ioan Simuț pointed out, "a narrative density, complexity of ideas and psychologies, and an entertained tension all over the investigation together with a great number of characters masterly shaped and intricate in conflict"[2]. (SIMUȚ I., 2006: 38). By this assertion we could imagine that everything has been told. However, not less important is to discover the art of the Romanian writer who manages to tackle the frame of a detective novel, but to change the perspective on the protagonist. Instead of stressing on the struggle between conscience and pathos of Rodion Raskolnikov, as Dostoievsky did, Nicolae Breban seems to go further with the idea of the man competing with God because he follows the alienation of the hero until his destruction.

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[1] The term was used by Constantin Crişan in his article entitled *The Eros and the Haughtiness of Power*, published in România literară, 15 (XXXVI) September, 1982
[2] The translation of the Romanian quotations belongs to us.

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Breban tells us a story about the attempt of a teenager to find his place in the community of an industrial mountain town. The author mingles the narration with the description of the places, humans and habits, changing the objective perspective with the subjective one and vice versa. The novelist astonishes us with his new vision upon the events because these are "not just told to the lecturer, but they are especially interpreted by the characters themselves with a visible pleasure of discovering the sense and of the hermeneutics in itself." (PAVEL L., 2005: 10)

Breban changes the monoscopic elaboration of Dostoievski upon Raskolnikov with the poliscopic view. *Animale bolnave* starts with the presentation of Paul Sucuturdean getting off in a rail station and the picture is similar in *Crime and Punishment* where Raskolnikov gets out of his cell. Sucuturdean is not the only protagonist because the Romanian writer uses more than one actor as a narrator. He is rather a frame narrator, if we could say so, because he establishes the circumstances, he is the link with the other tellers, he is the instrument that assures a circular development of the story and also he is "the phantom of a writer free from his memories, his first metaphor" who introduces in the novel "the infinite fiction" (MARTIN, M., 1969: 113-114). Through this character Breban maintains the diffuse limits between real and unreal. His verbal virtuosity surpasses the fictional reality and builds endless other fictional unrealities in which the spark of true is very difficult to find out. Paul initiates dialogues with different lecturers, but the flux of his thoughts is so abundant that they invariable end in sterile monologues. To Paul, Breban adds other voices which change the point of view upon the facts, meaning by that the voice of justice, the voice of religion or the voice of love. In this way the author configures the main themes of the novel and the couples that make possible their existence, their complementary or antithetical connection.

Paul assures also the wavering from the external focus "which presents the events like a camera" (GENETTE, G., 1978: 47): "after a half an hour he could be seen passing by the streets of that industrial mountain town, with his carton suitcase," (BREBAN, N., 2004: 9) to the interior one "that follows the thoughts of the character and grasps his conscience" (*ibidem*, 47): "Sometimes you can not sleep because you are too tired, he thought" (*ibidem*, 10). The density in the conflict of the ideas represents a detectable modern feature in both novels proposed to the analysis as well as in the narrations of Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, James Joyce or Virginia Woolf.

Breban's compositional technique corresponds to that of Dostoievski if we consider the time and the space where the conflict takes place: the action in *Crime and Punishment* develops in summer, during several days and so it is in *Animale bolnave*. Svidrigailov is convinced that "in Petersburg many people are walking on the street talking with them. It's a town with most abnormal people. You could hardly find a place where the human soul is submitted to such dark and odd influences like in Petersburg." (DOSTOIEVSKI, F., M., 1962: 242) On the other side in Breban's novel is "sufficient a dreamer and a stranger like that to transform all of those grey and decent streets - those streets with no use for anyone - in something inconvenient and out of place." (ibidem)

Paul has common features with Raskolnikov. His poverty compels him to occupy the bed from above and even if he lives in an agitated community he is most of the time lonely, neglected or ironically treated by the others. Though he is willing to get a job, the author presents this character in a continuous effort to complete his medical papers or the forms for his employment. His lack of social utility corresponds to that of Raskolnikov, but the difference comes from the assumed role of the latter. Rodion refuses to participate any longer to the role imposed to him by the society. He

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consciously abandons his studies and retires in his cell, his only activity being to think at his capacity to annihilate the social evil which is the usurer. The spectacle of the three murders leaves undoubted traces on Paul's behaviour. The psychological effect is increasing with each crime. At first, Paul *sees* the result of a violent impact, a body in agony, and his response to that is rather physiological: "Paul suddenly felt that his ears and his nape quickly got heated and a false sense of alarm was rising from his stomach." (BREBAN N., *op. cit.,* 19) In the second case, Paul *hears* the quarrel between the teenager Dan Dabici and Gaşpar that ends with the apparent killing of the boy. The scene of the immobile body affects now the inner structure of the character: "Paul wanted to come closer to that body, but an imperceptible sign of terror was embracing him so he turned and got out, walking slowly like then when you are in a dark place and you can not run being afraid of losing your mind…" (*ibidem,* 111) A memory from his childhood forebodes the third violent event. The feeling that a mouse has slipped in his stomach producing to him queasy cramps anticipates the hero's astonishment and the final overwhelming grief. Paul, wandering in night along the river, leaves for a while his friend and companion Krinitzki alone. At his return he captures the dispute between Krintzki and Miloia and follows full of surprise and fear the puzzling struggle of the two bodies. The author combines in the scene of Krinitzki's murder the shadow with the light and the sound, the dynamic movement with the soft one, the immobility with silence in order to increase the impact on the lookers. Only when Paul approaches Krinitzki and sees the blood spreading into the water he understands the gravity of the situation and all his petrified senses seem to react: "Then he started to cry like a lunatic. He was shouting as acute as a hysterical woman and because he could not master himself and because his fear was boundless he had the impression of a foreign and repulsive body lying on the ground." (*ibidem,* 277) Turning back into his hut this fragile mind is embraced by delirium which corresponds to that of Raskolnikov before and after he commits the crime.

The Romanian critics have emphasized so far "the dynamics of the relationships based on power couples, on coexisting and contradictory principles." (MANOLESCU N., 1982: 9) The interpretation remains valid if we take into consideration the creation of Breban in itself. But if we compare *Animale bolnave* with the novel of Dostoievski it can be observed in Breban's novel that the significant events, the themes or the main characters are tripled.

Raskolnikov kills Aliona Ivanovna on purpose, considering her a term of a social equation that can be omitted and Lizaveta, her sister, by accident, because she appears in the wrong place and at the wrong time. In Breban's novel Miloia commits crime three times. He deadly attacks Simonca to preserve his master's freedom of expression, kills Dan Dabici who has the audacity to maculate the Holy Scripture, but also Krinitzki because his goal is not to become a religious ruler, but a dictator "born from an unsupervised metamorphosis of a mediocre man." (Ştefănescu A., 1994, 10) Breban discretely anticipates this development of the character introducing in the fiction the parable of the servant that buries the gold. Miloia does not understand the significance of the words. Assuming the role of the fanatic disciple, Miloia approves the action of the servant, because he proclaims himself, in this way, as the keeper of the religious believes and not as Krinitzki as the voice of the true faith. Unlike Aliona he is the abstract usurer that reveals the hidden symbolism of the usury. In Miloia we can observe "a continuous growth against nature, producing a body wear, which occurs as a kind of sick cell proliferation." (MARINOV Vl., 2004: 224) In his fanaticism, the character changes the perspective on the good servant which has mistaken being afraid

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of his master, with his ambitious to surpass this fear even if in order to accomplish that he has to kill the master. Miloia's crime expresses "his will of power that fails in the act of pure bestiality." (CROHMĂLNICEANU, 1981:193) If Raskolnikov can be interpreted as a *hum-animal* developing the final feature *human*, due to his believe in God and in Lazarus resurrection, Miloia seems to present the prior characteristic of the Russian hero, captured in his physiognomy: "he appears to all of them like a he-goat, with his long and shaved head, with his long moustache pricking the air." (BREBAN N., *op. cit.*, 41) In the events' development Miloia does not evolve towards humanism because in his soul there is no sign of anxiety or of remorse. He is willing to dominate his companions beyond the human limits and assumes in the first two murders the apparent role of justice. Killing Krinitzki, Miloia demonstrates that he is aware of his incapacity to love and to control his instincts as his religious master. He even predicts Krinitzki's end including himself in the group of those who envy the preacher: "They hate him and they are going to kill him because he overwhelms all of them with his kindness and with his power, given by the Lord, to control his instinctual impulses." (*ibidem,* 79) Miloia becomes the sick *animal* that certifies the failure of religiousness, the failure of humanism.

There are also three major themes that give shape to Breban's novel: the religious theme, the theme of justice and the theme of love. At the moment when *Animale bolnave* was written any form of resistance to the church was appreciated as more than pleasant by the communist regime. The presence of a preacher is considered like a revolutionary act since he can point out a general dissatisfaction regarding the church defined by the faith formality. These considerations are implemented in the novel by the warrant officer, Mateiaș, "a represented narrator"[1] from Wayne Booth's point of view, and underline the effect of Krinitzki's reading upon people. At first, the lines of the Holy Scripture whisper their knowledge for those who are staying in the worker's hut, but the audience increases in a short time due to the impact of the crimes upon the collective mentality. Breban includes in the novel the gathering scene where the people who listen to Krinitzki are divided in two groups: the sympathetic one and the reluctant band that stultify the faith either their inner self is incapable of perceiving the holy thoughts, either they are manipulated by the communist party or by the police. This gathering scene reveals the reactions of those who are present and indirectly sustains vanity confronting humility. Within the religious theme Krinitzki functions as a hyperonym whereas Miloia, Mihuți and Paul become his co-hyponyms[2]. Krinitzki is the gentle giant smothering his inner impulsive strength. His lecture in front of the community signifies his option to show his humility, his intention to annihilate other unmerciful thoughts. This character certifies that the human being "is guided by an evil force that lies in the very substance of man's composition (…) and only his continuous effort to get rid off this fatal encircling ennobles him." (DIMISIANU, 1970: 68) Krinitzki's capacity to control this malefic force draws the others' envy and pushes him to the role of the master. Even if in relation with Krinitzki, Miloia is mentally weak, hidden and even with slight violent outburst of pride, as Ioan Simuț underlines in the

[1] In his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* Wayne Booth considers as represented narrator the reflectors at first person. Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Bucharest, Univers, 1976, p.91

[2] Hyponymy is defined as an inclusion relation of a specific term into another more general term. It supposes a correspondence in meaning between lexical unities, applied to the referential but also to the reference terms. (see Dominte C., http://ebooks.unibuc.ro/filologie/dominte/6-5.htm)

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quoted article, in the group of his master's followers he is the aggressive force opposed to the passive attitude of Mihuți, or the dissimulating and subversive presence regarding innocent Paul. Miloia is the beast of pray who actions when he has the opportunity. The flaw of his nail, depicted rather as a claw, anticipates his bestiality, mirrors his secret character and, in the end, reveals to the police the real killer. Miloia remains despite Krinitzki efforts to teach him "the prisoner of his proper evil that determines in an inevitable way all his reactions and all his behavior." (DIMISIANU G., *op.cit.,* 68) His link with religion does not come from his inner structure like that of Raskolnikov and that is the reason why he hasn't the power to surpass the appearance of his religious believes. He falls "on the lowest degree of his destructive instinct, namely the crime." (CROHMĂLNICEANU, Ov.S, *op. cit.,* 194)

Any murder requires the reestablishment of the equilibrium and justice has a significant importance in this matter. A group of investigators together with a local detective is chosen from the center to clear up the mystery of the crimes. It can be observed the same structure of a superordinate category represented by the prosecutor Remus Alexandrescu and his subordinates: major Voştinaru, lieutenant Cambrea or warrant officer Mateiaş. Though in this hierarchy the military rank becomes a real classifier, only the last member of the team seems to be featured with a "diverging thought" meaning by that the detective's capacity to leave away the schemas and the existing models in order to come to a new solution. The warrant officer is also endowed with "contact intelligence" (BOGDAN, 1973: 198) which comes from his psychological intuition, but also from his experience. If we take into consideration Valeriu Cristea's assertion that: "two principles, masculine and feminine, produce and sustain through their confrontation the entire dynamic of the human relationship," (CRISTEA, 1976: 202) which is true for other couples or situations, we should renounce to some of the justice's members. In the group of the subordinates the aggressive type is major Voştinaru, who seems to shadow even the prosecutor. He is brutal with Irina Dabici, not only by investigating her in odd places and at the most impossible moments, but also in his attitude or his too colloquial, vulgar and menacing speech. The weak link of the chain is lieutenant Cambrea, who is interested rather in admiring his beautiful and clean hands and who participates very detached to the official or unofficial inquiries. This antithetic binomial is broken by the warrant officer, Mateiaş. He "has technique and logic, but also excels in imagination which is the subjective condition in accomplishing an investigation." (IRIDON, 2006: 267) At this point Mateiaş differs from Porfiri Petrovici, because he does not prove any sign of sympathy for the killer. Mateiaş proves certainty when he declares that Leca is not guilty, amazes Gârda with his familiarity when he accompanies the latter at home, keeps a discrete eye on Irina's movements, infers the real nature of Krinitzki's power and demonstrates courage and tenacity in Gaşpar's surveillance. Following the clues and analyzing the suspects and their interest or relations with the victims Mateiaş discovers that Donesie Micula, Miloia nicknamed, is the real killer. The final explanations of Mateiaş seem to have the same function as the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment*. One of the novel's narrators has solved the problem and shares it with us, the lecturer. But Breban's novel does not end here, because not all the characters have configured their place in the novelistic puzzle. The role of their settlement goes to the frame narrator, to Paul Sucuturdean. He is the *homo viator* who assures the connection between the themes and the characters of the novel. Paul becomes friend with Krinitzki, even if he does not assume together with that the condition of the religious disciple; he is an incredible witness in two of the murders

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"and the ingenious thing is that you can not pass over his fake histories whereas they are weaved within the real data." (CROHMALNICEANU, *op. cit.,* 195)

Paul even dreams at the mysterious feminine figure that enchants him in the train. Irina Dabici is the woman in black and the step mother of Dan Dabici. This beautiful widow who has the feeling that she must expiate an unknown guilt corresponds to Sonia Marmeladova. They almost share the orphanage, the resentments of the society and even a kind of prostitution. What else could it be Irina's need to get married with an older man, without being in love with him? This gorgeous an inconceivable proud woman is destined to be sacrificed and she resignedly accepts her fate. Though the novel contains a gallery of feminine heroines, if we take into consideration the daughters in law of Gârda family or even Irina's retort character, Irina remains the center towards masculine desires and energies forward. Another triad configures the theme of love. Titus Gârda is the possessive and passionate lover. He insistently follows Irina and forces her to join him in the forest or to consent at his violent sexual impulses. They both "perpetuate fragile ties that undermine the common order and vex those who approve the lawful harmony." (UNGUREANU, 1985: 593) To the opposite pole we encounter Paul. He longs for Irina from the first time he sees her, but his idea of loving this particular woman differs by far from Gârda's ideal. "He will never be brutal since he couldn't act like that, but this helplessness will be his unbeatable charm" (BREBAN, *op. cit.,*, 68) Gârda and Paul certify the disjunction between sensual and tender love[1], another loan from Dostoievski's novel, if we think about the lust of Svidrigailov perceiving Dunia or about Raskolnikov's relation with Sonia. Unlike Titus, Paul dreams to be gracious and submissive leaving to the woman the dominant role. In the end the winner of Irina's pursuit is not the aggressive or the innocent type, but the tenacious one, namely Gaşpar. He is the perpetual lover, the man who has constant feelings for Irina, the man capable of bribery only to get closer to her, the patient pretender who can offer her safety and protection.

Within the themes we have already discussed we can observe that each superordinate category is featured with a distinctive power i.e. religious power - Krinitzki, hierarchical power – prosecutor Alexandrescu or power of attraction - Irina Dabici. Still, each hyperonim has a negative side. Krinitzki hides his fear of his own strength in lecturing the Holy Scripture, Alexandrescu shadows the boredom of his profession visiting at first doctor Gârda instead of starting the inquiry, and Irina protects her believe that she brings unhappiness to anyone by getting married with Dabici. Their co-hyponims certify that the constant and innocent type survives within the triad (Paul, Mateiaş, Gaşpar) whereas the aggressive and the passive individuals are excluded.

Following his Russian master, Breban includes in his novel some significant symbols. If Dostoievski inserts in his fiction the dream of Raskolnikov about the reddish mare to anticipate the relation of the killer with his victims and to diminish the boundaries between real and unreal, Breban uses a group of six donkeys which appears three times during the story. In the universal symbolism the ass signifies the ignorance and the dark instincts. They mirror the workers gathered in the hut because they are "poorly nourished and untidy, without a master and a specific goal" (BREBAN, *op.cit.,* 21), but they also correspond to Paul's nature because they are shy and obedient. Paul like the donkeys represents "an undefined individuality, an instable soul who lives in a state of sleeping or being semiconscious" (DIMISIANU G., *op.cit.,* 69). The animals

[1] The terms are proper to Freud's study *La vie sexuelle*, Paris, Puf, 1982, pp. 56-59

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reveal Paul's agoraphobia because they are not only tame, but also threateningly as some of the characters Paul encounters in the fiction. Breban's art comes from his ability to change the ordinary fact, to modulate it according to his fictional requests. In this way the common hens found by Paul in Irina's kitchen receive apocalyptic features. They grow into the beasts of prey, anticipating Miloia's intentions to kill, to surpass his human limits. In this manner we assist at "a naturalistic deformation" because "in the absence of the reason people become monsters, sick animals." (UNGUREANU, *op. cit.*, 599)

Breban presents in his novel a chaotic world, where the "anarchist type creates the major narrative initiative and disturbs the peaceful relations of the others." (UNGUREANU C., see URL) He uses a gallery of portraits that outruns the Dostoievskian double "revealing an unexplored human profoundness in the Romanian novel" (SIMUȚ, I., see URL)

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