STRATEGIES OF ARTISTIC COMMUNICATION IN ROMANIAN SHORT STORIES

Odette ARHIP
Professor PhD, Ecological University, Bucharest, arodette@live.com
Ludmila BRANIŞTE
Associate professor, PhD, „Al. I. Cuza" University, Iasi, branisteludmila@yahoo.com

Abstract
The Romanian writers wrote extremely successful short stories dealing with diverse themes, spiritual movements and cultural influences. Trying to highlight the greatest Romanian writers, we comment upon the works of Mircea Eliade and Marin Preda. All these authors wrote attractive and challenging fantastic short stories with undoubted mythological, psycho-analytic and philosophical implications (*At the Gypsies* – M. Eliade, *The Horse* – M. Preda). The paper specifies and comments upon these aspects besides the staging procedure that emphasizes the foreground and the background of the discourse. This interrelation is a fruitful one for subtle significances, interesting insights into Romanian folklore, myths and specific Romanian philosophical aspects. The sudden intervention of unexpected events is supported by incident schemes and specific connectors. The paper also pleads for prerogative perspective which is important for referential continuity. We highlight the impersonal vision and diffuse perspective implying temporal compressions, imbrications and contagions. One of the main objectives of these approaches is to present historical epochs framing Romanian society and national environment in addition to local natural or cultural landscapes.

Key-words: short story, myth, narrative, national landmarks, communicative strategies

The paper is focused upon two important short stories of these outstanding Romanian writers (*At the Gypsies* by Mircea Eliade and *The Horse* by Marin Preda). Both authors showed interest on short stories during the first stage of their creative period. They also manifested a similar interest in fantastical short stories with mythical inferences.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Romanian literature faced various cultural trends and currents, few of them overlapping. Some were modern and others were traditional. Besides, the psychological roots may disclose the original features of the expression level. Thus, if the interpretation spots a fine, revealing detail (Spitzer: 1954), this will offer a key-element for understanding a fragment or the entire artistic work. The linguistic expression indicates a particular interest in spiritual themes. Generally, one can say that most Romanian writers have a preference for the idea of still, recurrent time. Mircea Eliade explicitly developed this conception from a philosophical and theoretical point of view. This mentality has nothing in common either with the current French formula (*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*) or the theory of circles or that of *corso et ricorso*. This is a leit-motif of the Romanian literature and it is related to events, not to the time itself. Human acts become rituals which offer the possibility of an incessant world. This specific way of conceiving the world's course is common to both heroes of the two short stories: the physician Gavrilescu in *At the Gypsies* and Florea Gheorghe in *The Horse*. Although, one may easily notice an obvious difference existing in the social frame: the first one performs in an urban, Balkan context, the latter takes action in a countrified environment (a plain village near the Danube). The fluctuation between traditionalist rural themes and modern town-subjects is also characteristic for Romanian literature during the first half of the 20th century. It had to follow cutting-edge influences and it needed to synchronize with the European spirituality.

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Time-Epitome. Both heroes have the courage to confront the mystery of time and to analyze the coherency appearance *versus* essence. We consider these two short stories a kind of epitome for time as a force able to restore creation (Eliade 1978, 3). This is the basic idea of this paper and we offer a few arguments in favor for our previous statement. These short stories have several features in common, but the paper concentrates on two similar mythical approaches: the myth of Orpheus and the myth of Ulysses which are enriched with various convergent symbolic and mythological features.

a) The myth of Orpheus. Mircea Eliade's character, Gavrilescu, is a music professor, a modern and common version of the classical Orpheus. He descends into hell. The gypsies' house is the place of no return and it recalls mythical origins. Gavrilescu undergoes a ritual death in that house and his fervent wish is to return his two beloved women, Hildegard and Elsa, into his present life. Gavrilescu wants to recreate the Adamic couple. He struggles to regain the feeling of pure love being terrorized by the thought that he has sentimentally failed. As Orpheus, he breaks rules (example: the interdiction to drink coffee in gypsies' house), and he does not succeed in his attempt to accomplish love.

Florea Gheorghe, the character of Marin Preda, goes to a deserted, morbid and shattering place; he reaches a large, deep backwoods that is full with corpses. Disarray and confusion are obviously present in this lurid space. This is Tartarus, but an uncommon one. The backwoods resonates with sounds and noises very similar to a strange song. The bones of the old horse which will be killed twiddle tragic notes. Organic, irregular forms and sounds portray a life at its end, at its sunset. The scenery full of bones and signs of death evokes a poetic archeology of prehistoric time. The man and the horse have interfluent lived together. The horse is the metonymy of the life of Florea Gheorghe. Thus, the countryman tries to delay or to defeat his own spiritual disappearance and the tragic outcome. The enchanting music of the nature is for his survival. He also uses a primitive tool (a huge bone) to put to death his horse. Thereby, he rejects modern times and introduces himself as a simple, primitive human being driven by moral law. His regrets and empathy may be explained by his continuous experience in *illo tempore*.

b) **The myth of Ulysses.** Both characters prove eloquence and endurance, being able to cope with crises. They also have the leading part in important initiating journeys towards themselves. Their travels have the symbolic and mythological shape of a labyrinth.

The labyrinth is a complex and very sinuous road implying skills, but especially willingness to find the core of the maze and the essence of the soul. The heroes' efforts are greater and more intimate. They wish to reach a hardly accessible place that is very well watched over (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1995, 191-192). The covering of the labyrinth-road involves also a selection process. Some manage to reach the center, while others do not. The two short stories contain a few symbols, metaphors and metonymies of the labyrinth. First of all, the conscience and the thoughtfulness of Gavrilescu and Florea Gheorghe are coextensive with the labyrinth.

Both persons deal with psychopomps, creatures responsible to accompany the souls into afterlife. A classic psychopomp-symbol is the horse appearing in either short story. Florea Gheorghe has to kill his old horse and walk together obeying the ritual stops of a religious orthodox funeral. Professor Gavrilescu uses a modern version of the horse. At the beginning, he travels by tram and, afterwards, by a cab; the cab-driver stands for a telluric Charon who drives Gavrilescu to the dark woods. The myths update and take new, advanced forms (Durand 1977, 162). The symbol of horse has clear affinities with water and sun, symbolic elements that are present in both short stories.

Another common component is the gypsy-hero. Professor Gavrilescu meets three women, one of them being a gypsy. Ilie, the blacksmith from *The horse*, is a gypsy too; his nickname is *One-eyed*. Any gypsy character inhabits malefic realms. The gypsies' house is such a place and the forge figures a locked devil-abode. Besides, Ilie may be interpreted as an alternative for the mythological Cyclops. Cyclops helps Hephaestus, the blacksmith of the gods. Even, the fight of Ulysses with Polyphemus/Cyclops offers the clue for the combat of a hero with his own obsessions. Professor Gavrilescu and Florea Gheorghe succeed to break loose from the cave of their own consciousness.

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The gypsy people have another devilish feature. They can counterfeit everything, but they cannot copy the primary word *Paraşabda* as it is coincident with the divine *Logos* (Lovinescu 1989, 76). The one-eyed Ilie, one of the characters in the short story *The Horse*, cannot pronounce correctly the word *potcoave* and he says instead *coptoave*. (Besides, the shape of a horseshoe resembles the pound, the harp of Orpheus by which he challenges Inferno.) In Eliade's short story, *At the Gypsies,* the old woman who watch over the house as a kind of Cerberus. She submits professor Gavrilescu to a tricky game: guessing. This game involves deceit, lies, hide, and masks, all of them being symbols of falsehood. This resemblance with Cerberus allows a new association with the myth of Orpheus.

A common symbolic figure in both short stories is the circle. It is a classical symbol for time, but it also evokes the idea of movement, of change. This complex form expresses the aspiration to a superior world or to a higher standard of living. Both desires are common for professor Gavrilescu and Florea Gheorghe. The circle has become the classic image of the intellect succeeding to figure out a mystery (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1995, 296). Gavrilescu's roads are repeated at cyclical intervals (three o'clock, three days, twelve years), the hint of a round period of time being dominant in the entire short story. Gavrilescu lives a temporal compression. The subjective time (several hours) does not correspond to historical time. The supernatural features erase or blur the time-limits. In *The Horse*, the symbolism of the sphere impresses. The food-bites of the old horse and of his master, Florea Gheorghe, are all round and resemble pellets or clods. The water itself takes a solid and globular form when it is drunk. We wish to highlight the fact that the mouth itself is considered a perfect round shape in all ancient civilizations, cultures and folklore. Thus, in these two short stories the symbolism of circle overlaps the epitome of time, of eternity and continuous renewal.

Conclusions.

The two short stories develop the themes of two classical myths adding elements of Romanian folklore. They depict human impulses and experiences that aim to reveal the sanctity of the human spirit. The laic character of the common world institutes a special meeting of the Man with himself and a way to accede to the sacred realm.

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