A COMPLETION OF THE EXISTENTIAL FORMULA

Ştefan Vlăduţescu

Prof., PhD, University of Craiova

Abstract: In the tableau of the current Romanian narrative, Augustin Buzura enhances within the novel of critical analysis intellectual heroes, memorably defined by means of an existential recognoscible formula. His books, that appeared 3-4 years before 1989 and every decade after this period, focus on physicians, ("The absentees" and "Vanities") or journalists, ("The faces of silence," "Faded roads" and "Requiem for madmen and beasts"). By his latest novel, ("An account of loneliness," Iaşi, Polirom, 2009), the writer approaches the physician that follows after the journalist: Cassian Robert follows Matei Popa from "Requiem" (1999). At the same time, the completion of the existential formula specific to Buzura's hero is achieved.

Keywords: existential formula, communication, identity, psychological problems, panic attack

1. Introduction

Cassian Robert has the characteristics that make identifiable as pattern the protagonists of all the novels written by Augustin Buzura until the present moment: they all stand for "acute, traumatizing, lucid up to despair consciousnesses," beings that "contemplate and judge reality from the angle of an outraged subjectivity, unable to accept the compromise" (as E. Simion shows, 1978). Their presence within the diegesis is justified by the need to display a certain "troubled consciousness," "confusing consciousness" (N. Manolescu, 2008) and analyze the toxic situation present in an explanatory statement, elucidation, clarification.

The book entitled "An account of loneliness" represents an extension of Augustin Buzura's Romanian Poetics. In "Notebook" (Buzura, 1981), the writer was pointing out the fact that "the real, sincere books are but a path against solitude and pain." The passage of time helped a real book go through loneliness, it did not turn into its enemy. The novel under discussion begins suddenly (Cristea-Enache, 2009; Boldea, 2011; Voncu, 2016). After a disease that he himself could not understand, although he was a physician, almost 70 years old, Cassian Robert leaves home and starts living in a small house on the top of a mountain. He leaves his son, Dan and his concubine, Claudia, a note, letting them know that was not going to come back home, without mentioning where he was, as they had no idea about the hut that he had buit in time; they "do not even suspect it exists." The decisive motivation of the leaving-retreat is caused by his helplessness to endure the humiliation of being taken care of and of being looked at compassionately. He thus "sets himself free from the pity and support" offered by his family. Considering his inability to diagnose his own disease to be a major failure, C. Robert searches for contentment in the limits of his otther passion: mountain climbing. Lacking health, affected by negative feelings and dark, gloomy thoughts, he meets Mara again, the orphaned daughter of his platonic love, Teodora, whom he had met while he was a young man. He reveals her his intention to climb Piatra Sfântului, (The Saint's Rock) ("The edge of life"), after two failed attempts during his youth. Although he knew very well that the mountain was "difficult to conquer , if nt impossible," he had decided to make another attempt. By putting this project into practice, the physician hopes to get rid of his obsession with loneliness and failure. At the same time, he invests energy in the process of describing and writing down about what happens to him, hoping thus to obtain the final liberation (Buda, Grigore & Boldea, 2011). He hopes that

BDD-A25615 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:59:22 UTC)

this liberation will fulfill his "need" to live a "normal" life. Once she finds out about the physician's plan, feeling in her turn lonely and wanting to die, Mara decides to accompany him on the mountain, whatever the risks. The discussions help Mara and Cassian Robert know each other well. The confessions they make to one another helped them bond with one another so much that they come to love each other. Acknowledging an argument mentioned by Buzura in "The terror of illusion" (2004), "the moments of confession" prove to be "crucial in a man's life." His decision to save Mara out of love, while they were still on the mountain makes Cassian want to go back to town together with the young lady: "the need to live was taking shape." Their love story and self-analysis deal with just one of the four narrative horizons of the novel.

The second one is represented by the effort to formulate in writing that first eventful horizon (Ciuperca & Ciuperca, 2015; Mangra & Dumitru, 2015; Negrea & Dumitru, 2016).

A third horizon is represented by story of his father-in-law, Darius Pop.

The fourth horizon, delineated by italics, is made up of the reflections on failure, loneliness and death, belonging to several remarkable creative spirits: Borges, Epictet, Tolstoy, Cicero, J. Green, L. Durrelle, B. Pasternak etc.

2. Panic attack

At the level of events, without any trace of tragic accents and after one of Mara's statements, according to which "ever since you have come into my life, I have been seized with panic," R. Cassian describes his suffering as being related to what is called panic attack. From this point of view, Buzura is not a typical literate. On the contrary, as he himself used to say, he is a "human being focused on the knowledge of the human soul and its pathology." As a graduate of psychiatry when the panic attack and panic disorders were not clearly delineated, Buzura makes now the epic experiment of a case of panic attack, pondering on the theme of failure, loneliness and death. As we know, DSM IV describes the panic attack as a fear manifested somatically, (sensation of suffocation, palpitations, perspirations, the feeling of having a lump in one's throat, pins and needles, depersonalization, dizziness, the sensation of losing one's consciousness). The panic attack appears suddenly and it lasts between 1 and 20 minutes, with a frequency of at least 1 very two days; unless it is treated, it develops into the panic disorder. The attack begins with palpitations accompanied by fear; these combine to bring about the thought that "I feel sick," which in its turn results in a lack of air, that gives the sensation of "suffocation;" this is followed by a lump in one's throat that fear turns into the false feeling that "I am going to die," "I am alone and I am going to die". This kind of attack rapidly seizes the anancastic personalities of both Cassian and Mara: perfectionist individuals, lacking self-confidence, animated by their permanent need to delay and check things. There is a standard situation in the book: "You did not have to worry, it was just an ordinary panic attack, that you could not have stopped. With time, you find yourself confronted with certain impossible experiences, obsessions and fears determined by the same ordinary cause: the approach of death. You are alone in front of death, nobody can do anything for you anymore, you must look into its eyes and you are certainly scared. I have written several studies, I have read several others, but they have not been of any help to me, although I knew that this is how things are, that panic does not mean death" (p. 229).

Actually, Cassian Robert is identical with Mihai Bogdan and Matei from "The absentees" (1970). The young psychiatrist M. Bogdan wanted to escape the "bad solitude." He searched for a place where he could "take refuge" and came to the conclusion that such a place would be a house in the countryside. He considered Matei "my senile prototype." Without making use of harsh words, we could say that doctor Cassian Robert stands for the "senile" - wise prototype of Mihai Bogdan. We must take into account the fact that Cassian's son could have considered his father's leaving from home as a "senile wandering." On the other hand, the young M. Bogdan makes the following statement: "There is no way I can lose (...), even if I

BDD-A25615 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:59:22 UTC)

will remain alone," "you are always running from something." The old man C. Robert becomes aware of the following things: "I have loved, I have hated, I have won, but but more than anything, I have lost, similar to any other man;" "I have begun to climb the [mountain – n.n.] ready to lose, not to win."

We can delineate a situative topic of Buzura's hero. The writer's protagonists live simultaneously at three distinct levels: the experiential level, (physical and somatic), the existential and the socio-historical level (world and reality) (Ene, 2014).

At the experiential level, the hero experiences such feelings as: suffering, physical pain, fear, anxiety, helplessness, despair, disillusion. However, this is not the most important level: physical pain is not essential. The basic feeling here is nausea, (Cassian is "much more affected by nausea, than by fear" p. 76). The event that separates the somatic element from the existential one is death (Bogdan, 2016).

The existential level is the decisive level (Popescu, 2014). Moral pain is fundamental in Buzura's works. It is consciousness that prevails here. The novelist that he seems to admire the most, from whom he quotes a sentence on the first page of the notebook, that is supposed to lie at the basis of the novel entitled "An account on solitude," is Camus. In "The myth of Sisyphus," Camus was mentioning that "everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything than by consciousness." Consciousness is fundamental in the existential formula of Buzura's hero. Similar to the others, Cassian Robert represents a consciouness, he is a man that turns to himself. At this level, the basic feeling is futility, ("I experience my futility alone, p. 11). The constructive component of the existential formula is represented by facts, ("the serious sound of the fact"). Both facts and acts are happenings, existential-social events, where humiliation, dignity, pride, retreat, cowardice, failure, defeat, knowledge as "lecture of life and of the lived experience" manifest. The creative spirit must shape universal truths out of ordinary happenings. The spirit's fundamental way of working is lucidity, ("when lucidity is of no help anymore, they turn into a fragile construction," p. 11).

The third level, the socio-historical level, is represented by such values as: truth, freedom, the goog, the beautiful, duty (Strechie, 2008; Militaru, 2012; Cerban, 2012). The significant events are: the defiance of history, heroism, the political intervention. The feeling specific to this level is the absurd. In the case of Buzura, history is weighty, harsh, brutal, violent; it must be endured, tolerated or confronted. History is the domain of appearances. To be able to notice what happens in reality, not just at the superficial level, the individual must refuse routine and search for the ruth and freedom: it is only "the truth that counts." Unfortunately, as Cassian Robert notices, "my table is full of books and truths discovered or understood too late" (p. 59).

In a history overflowing with adversities, the individual can remain a man, even a "man of character." In relation to history, the individual that thinks, that disagrees with somebody or something, that revolts on the strength of one kind of thinking, is really a human being. Man's mission is triple. At the experiential level, he must become free of fear, obsessions, ("I have felt I have become free of my old obsessions," p. 329). At the existential level, man must confront himself: "the big confrontation," as it is described in "The terror of illusion," is actually "the confrontation with ourselves, with our own limits." At the socio-historical level, man must confront history, the world (as form of history) by stating the truth and by the fight for freedom: "should I confront or ignore them?" (p. 307) are the two solutions.

Man is driven (by the need to feel himself free) towards all the three levels: of defeating negative thinking and feelings, of confronting himself with his own limits, of facing history. Analogously, there are three types of suffering: somatic (fear), moral (the panic attack), historical, (oppression). Buzura's hero experiences three distinct states of mind, namely (the somatic liberation, fulfilled revolt and liberation) and three types of feelings, more precisely,

BDD-A25615 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:59:22 UTC)

(disgust, futility and uselessness – "love and all the other feelings have been useless," p. 200). (Disgust and futility represent specific feelings in "The terror of illusion" as well).

Buzura's hero lives and at the same time analyzes himself. He meditates in relation to himself and the others. furthermore, his capacity of reflection goes towards speculation, to deep thinking in relation to himself and his own facts. Man experiences and dwells upon things: on the one hand, Cassian feels things, on the other hand, he meditates upon things, he analyzes them ("The other Cassian had turned into a pretty indulgent, tolerant person," p. 38; Borges states "I am the other," p. 178).

In relation to his themes, the novelist has a solemn attitude (that E. Simion, 1978, calls "serious view"), a firm, ethical orientatation, (that Nicolae Manolescu, 2008, sees as predominant, considering Buzura to be "a solemn moralist, without the sense of humour") and a meditative undertaking (that N. Manolescu,2008, perceives as "indictment").

Buzura's rhetoric edifies the epic elements by means of the frequent mobilization of the following negative procedures: the narration, the confession, the retrospection, the introspection, the unfolding of a memory flow, the portrait, the short story, the essay, the multiplication of the narrative voices, the concentration of te narrative time, giving up chronology, the monologue, etc.

3. Conclusion

Augustin Buzura's heroes relate to themselves and to the world in gnoseological terms. Their gestures are subordinate to knowledge: the protagonist derives such things as wisdom or knwledge from fear or liberation, from disappointment or dignity. It is from this perspective that we must interpret the last words of the novel: "I will discover by death what I could not discover throughout my life..." Death becomes a method of getting familiar with things. Buzura's gnoseology is unlimited. Everything is experienced and examined by means of a firm, rigorous, categorical consciousness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bogdan, Cristina (2016). Moartea și lumea românească premodernă. Discursuri întretăiate. Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.

Boldea, I. (2002). Sciitori români contemporani. Editura Ardealul, Târgu-Mureș.

Boldea, I. (2011). Romanian Literary Perspectives and European Confluences. Éd. Asymetria.

Buda, D. M., Grigore, R., & Boldea, I. (2011). Cu cărţile pe masă. Revista Literară

Buzura, A. (1981). Bloc notes. Editura Dacia.

Buzura, Augustin (2007). The Terror of Illusion: A Dialogue with Crisula Stefanescu. Translated by Delia Dragulescu. Boulder: East European Monographs.

Cerban, M. (2012). The Syntactic Structure of Complex Sentences. Universitaria.

Ciuperca, E. M. & Ciuperca, C. (2015). Human Subjectivity and Security. In Nagy, D; Borcan, V; Calvano, G; et al. (Eds). Redefining Community in Intercultural Context, RCIC'15, 4(1), 227-233.

Cristea-Enache, Daniel (2009). Vieţile altora - Raport asupra singurătăţii: primul caiet, de Augustin Buzura. România literară.

Enachescu, V. A., & Tarabay, D. (2016). Internet is Changing Cultures. Review of International Comparative Management/Revista de Management Comparat International, 17(3).

Ene, M. (2014). The art of decomposition: Bacovia and european decadence. Alea: Estudos Neolatinos, 16(1), 135-145.

BDD-A25615 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:59:22 UTC)

Mangra, M. G., & Dumitru, A. (2015). Insurance, Reinsurance and General Inventory of Economic Entities. Saarbrucken: Lambert Academic Publishing

Manolescu, N. (2008). Istoria critică a literaturii române: 5 secole de literatură. Ed. Paralela 45.

Militaru, Petrișor (2012). Ştiinţa modernă, muza neştiută a suprarealiştilor. Bucureşti: Curtea Veche.

Negrea, X., & Dumitru, A. (2016). Group and Social Collective Manipulations.

Ali Taha, V., Sirková, M., & Ferencová M. (2016). The Impact of Organizational Culture on Creativity and Innovation. Polish Journal of Management Studies, 14(1), 7-17.

Popescu, G. (2014). Derrida Exégète de Freud: Penser la Spectralité - de l'écriture du Rêve et de l'archive. Analele Universităţii din Craiova, 54.

Simion, E. (1978). Scriitori români de azi, vol. I. Bucureşti, Editura Cartea Românească.

Strechie, M. (2008). Noţiuni de civilizaţie latină: suport de curs. Universitaria.

Vatra, (01), 69-77.

Voncu, Răzvan (2016). Arhitectura memoriei. Studii de istorie literară clasică şi contemporană. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Şcoala Ardeleană.

BDD-A25615 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:59:22 UTC)