THE CONCEPT OF *BOVARISM* ILLUSTRATED BY A POSTMODERN PROTOTYPE: GHEORGHE CRĂCIUN'S *PUPA RUSSA*

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Abstract: *This paper aims to illustrate the concept of bovarism as defined by Jules de Gaultier at the end of the 19th century, as illustrated by* Pupa russa, *a postmodernist novel written by Gheorghe Crăciun. The thematic approach evinced by the Romanian author is challenging its readership because it follows a rhizomatic literary narration that also encapsulates a historical dimension.*

The focus of the analysis is on the similarities and differences between Crăciun's and Flaubert's protagonists, Leontina Guran and Emma Bovary, and on the fascination and importance of the bovaristic trajectory, with its implications and dimensions. This critical angle unveils the novel's message, as well as a heightened sense of awareness with regard to the realities of personal actions against the background of the communist regime.

The condition of the human being implies both outer and inner growth, yet there are several factors such as the societal conditions one is subjected to that can irrevocably change the future "I". The episodes presenting LeonTina's life are key elements, nodes of connections accessed by an objective and realistic eye. Therefore, all the observations are intended to clarify, to reveal the meanings and to outline the inner effects produced by a circular, closed social environment and how one can or cannot find one's true way. The innate impulse of "becoming someone" can very easily be perceived as "becoming someone else". Thus, the present critical approach is highly relevant to contemporary readers. The apparent freedom possessed by everyone in present times entails responsibility as well as danger. The present comparison is an example shedding light on some issues regarding bovaristic behaviour, which is more and more apparent in the real world.
Keywords: bovarism; postmodernism; Romanian novel; Leon; Tina.

Introduction

Postmodernism is a cultural movement that emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the arts, literature and philosophy and brought about the emergence of interdisciplinary studies. This critical approach identifies postmodernism as different from modernism due to the fact that these connections between distinct fields of study forge a background that combines classical motifs, symbols, myths, legends or stylistic features with

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modernist elements, such as free indirect discourse and a non-linear or non-chronological order of events.

It is quite difficult to differentiate between modernism and postmodernism with regard to literary texts and there is no definition in place that encapsulates the whole meaning of postmodernism, because it is an evolving concept. It cannot be opposed to modernism or set up as a reaction against it, as postmodernism is very much connected to modernism. Theories and definitions related to this concept are still under debate, but the main aspect to be taken into consideration when interpreting, analysing and understanding postmodern texts is that a change of perspective regarding human life first occurred in reality and then in the construction of the fictional world. The emerging crossing of barriers between reality and fiction enabled a fast-paced evolution of thought doubled by advancements in technology.

With their philosophical concept of "the rhizome", Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari developed an image of postmodernism. Rhizomes are actually underground, horizontally running stems that send out roots, collecting all the natural benefits and energies coming from the earth. There are two important aspects that make the rhizome relevant for the understanding and representation of postmodernism. The first one is the visual aspect of this plant, the fact that new roots are continuously connected and created through nodes. Each root can flourish above ground as a distinct flower, but the soil contains an entire world of connections. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call it a "map":

> "The rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing.* Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real." (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 1).

This "map" is the representation of postmodernism at a symbolical level, due to the fact that literary works contain information from many other domains and place the reader in an unsettling environment. This experience is not only unique for each reader but it is also like a puzzle that is deciphered through a novel code with each reading: "Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 1). One can choose how to produce meaning in postmodern writings: the reader has at least "a thousand" ways of accessing that information because the focus is on "the circumstances" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: XIII), all those elements that form the substratum of the writing. Having a broad knowledge related to the particular approach one

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chooses is a key element that leads to an appropriate decoding of a postmodernist text.

The second main aspect that brings a clearer view regarding postmodernism is the idea of space and its construction as a metaphor, as described by Matthias Stephan: "Deleuze and Guattari use the rhizome as a metaphor in several ways" (Stephan, 2019: 62). Here, "metaphor" is not used in a traditional way, but in a rather new one that has been developed by the cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. They link language to psychology and prove that people apply concepts not only when approaching literature but that life itself is conducted by this inner conceptual system that develops unconsciously within the mind:

> "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities". (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 4)

Therefore, the rhizome is the metaphor of postmodernism because the space of the imagery is discovered not according to a centre, as with the modernist characters that divide their experiences and try to reach self-realization, but it is revealed along with the unifying view that gathers all the pieces of the imagery.

Moreover, the preface of the study belonging to Gill Deleuze and Felix Guattari presents the foreword of the translator, who clarifies the core idea of their book starting from terminology. The idea of a "nomad thought" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: XIII) as the essence of their theory is foregrounded here:

> "Its mode of distribution is the *nomos:* arraying oneself in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to the *logos* of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold the fort). *A Thousand Plateaus* is an effort to construct a smooth space of thought" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: XIII).

The book is an open space and the postmodern book is placed under the metaphor of the rhizome, particularly because it becomes "a map" of connections and characters built through language.

This paper aims to describe such a character that comes to life due to and through words, by means of description, analysis and comparison to the

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archetype, i.e. Emma Bovary. Moreover, this character is a prototype that marks the evolution of "bovarism", a concept defined for the first time by Jules de Gaultier at the end of the 19th century. The focus of this paper is on the trajectory of bovaristic expressions in the postmodern novel written by Romanian author Gheorghe Crăciun, entitled *Pupa russa*. The novel was published in 2004 and it presents Romanian society under the communist regime.

Its significance is amplified by this double effect created through the text: on the one hand, this novel presents a micro-cosm, a picture describing a painful episode in the history of Romania. On the other hand, it has a universal validity through this new context in which the condition of the human is depicted as a reconfiguration of bovaristic destiny, similar to that of Emma Bovary, yet at the same time authentic because there are several elements that differentiate it from the archetype. Along with this unique character, Leontina Guran, the author succeeds in framing a rhizomatic evolution.

The concept of bovarism became very popular after Jules de Gaultier published his study *Le Bovarysme* in French in 1892, translated into Romanian in 1902. Its name was inspired by the central character of Gustave Flaubert's, *Madame Bovary*, a novel portraying a constant search for tranquillity. It attained a global readership because it is connected to humankind's most profound desire and quest, i.e. finding one's identity, both socially and as an individual. Thus, it was defined as: "the power bestowed on man to conceive of himself as other than he is"[1] (Gaultier, 1993: 10).

The archetype, Emma Bovary, became a universal reference in literature, due to aspects that were developed along with the publication of the novel. They are worth mentioning for the understanding of the initial context, of the essence that later on was exposed and recreated in other literatures. Thus, other prototypes appeared and confirmed not only the availability of such a theme regarding the identity of the human, but also the ever regenerating strings and directions of understanding and placing the person in this world and the uniqueness of each new model and mode of revealing it.

Victor H. Brombert highlighted Flaubert's praise of art and survival through art in the form of writing:

> "Flaubert always considered that the highest and purest pleasure of literature is its power to liberate those who practice it from the contingencies of life. Art was for him quite literally an escape" (Brombert, 1966: 5).

[1] All these translations in English are conceived by me. In the original: „puterea acordată omului de a se concepe altul decât este" (Gaultier, 1993: 10).

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It was a way of facing the views and the pseudo-values propelled within real society, Flaubert living in a society dominated by the bourgeoisie. The emphasis on details traced in *Madame Bovary* announced its mechanisms flourishing under those new expressions and codes of language developed by James Joyce and other modernist authors:

> "Above all he knows that he is a poet in search of the magical, incantatory secrets of language. His struggle against words, his love of a sonorous, flexible, muscular prose, his attempt to create plastic effects that would transform words and rhythms into palpable forms" (Brombert, 1966: 7).

Struggling against words meant realizing the effect that words can produce and thinking more of the imprint left by words on the consciousness of the reader. This different concern preceded Freud's psychoanalysis theory and the new philosophies regarding life, arts, and existence itself.

When approaching the theme of the novel, the reader cannot judge Emma Bovary, even though she led an adulterous and illusory life. The first negative reviews of the novel came as a result of the catholic dogmata that had become established in France by the beginning of the 19th century:

> "Young women who did not wish to become virtual servants in their older brothers' households or to eke out a living at menial labor ordinarily had to choose between the religious life, marriage, or prostitution. [...] In Catholic France, no divorce was allowed between 1816 and 1884. Even after 1884, for a time a woman could not divorce in order to marry a lover~. (Porter & Gray, 2002: X).

Nonetheless, the value of this novel was afterwards recognized because it marked the crossing towards a new cultural paradigm, modernism:

> "Flaubert's sharp criticisms of the excesses of capitalist societies—greed, exploitation, and consumerism—apply to our own day. His keen analysis of people's difficulties in communicating with each other in dysfunctional relationships illuminates much of our own experience, regardless of our gender, ethnicity, or background" (Porter & Gray, 2002: XIV).

Faulty communication became an issue, not only in relation to the other, but also in relation to one's own consciousness.

The primary resources used for the drafting of the present paper, mainly the novel *Pupa Russa* and the critical study written by Jules de

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Gaultier, are in Romanian because the significant details pertaining to the protagonist are to be found in the original text. With regard to criticism, the study translated into Romanian represents a gate to knowledge for Romanian readers who want to reach an in-depth understanding of "bovarism".

LeonTina Guran and Emma Bovary

The title of the Romanian novel, *Pupa russa*, announces at a first glance a gradual evolution, from a general landscape to the essence, "the heart". This is the Russian doll, Matrioska, a sequence of ever smaller dolls, all gathered within the one, the biggest doll. Moving on with more specific and close readings, this novel turns the image of a regular Matrioska into a creation of it through language. The significance of the title reveals meaning at a symbolical level. The term "pupa" has Latin origins, meaning "girl, doll, puppet" (Etymology Dictionary) and it portrays the facets of the main character, i.e. a girl having the first taste of education, then a puppet directed by communist submissive people, and ultimately, a doll lost in the ocean of uncertainty and emptiness.

In this novel, the Matrioska doll is the communist regime itself, a suffocating net for its inhabitants, a place where the concepts of identity, trust and evolution are crushed by a *Big Brother*-like figure, the eye watching and controlling everything. Interestingly, the novel itself is a postmodern net due to the challenges generated by the text. Umberto Eco describes the power of language in his study entitled *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. He proposes a classification of the labyrinth when explaining the concept of encyclopaedia competence within the semiotics paradigm. A novel is also visually recognizable in the shape of a book. Therefore, both an encyclopaedia and a book are labyrinths of knowledge meant to be explored by readers and requiring certain competences for their decoding. Relevant for this research is the third type of labyrinth named by Umberto Eco, i.e. the net:

> "The main feature of a net is that every point can be connected with every other point, and, where the connections are not yet designed, they are, however, conceivable and designable. A net is an unlimited territory. A net is not a tree" (Eco, 1986: 81).

This is the postmodern net: an imagery filled with possible and unlimited connections. Crăciun's novel contains this fascination of the net.

Pupa russa is an open, unlimited territory, and the novelty of this research is that it follows the already mentioned trajectory, the development of a bovaristic character placed in a Romanian historical context which is still relevant due to its psychological effects, traceable in Romanian mentality to

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this day. Leontina, duality of male and female, appears as an androgynous character. The narrator himself seems to have a split voice, revealing both genders.

Starting from this identity quest revealed to the reader, Leontina is a new Emma Bovary, one that faces the challenges of the 21st century. Her name is made up of two elements or two halves: Leon and Tina. The first half is a man's name, whereas the second half is a woman's name. It is a clear suggestion for the reader who understands that this character has a double personality. S/he is a human being possessing an uncertain identity, a *sui generis* uniting two opposing natures: "Her name is a word split in two, like night and day, like light and shadow […] with two souls and two breathings and two impulses"[2] (Crăciun, 2004: 37). The only detail mentioned about her name is that it was inherited from an aunt who made a living in America. It becomes a tenuous, fragile connection between these two continents far apart: "It was as if two totally different realities had the same name."[3] (Crăciun, 2004: 12).

This line between Romania and America is a projection of young Leontina into a future grown-up Leontina, but in a changed world. Her condition is similar to that of Emma Bovary, who had this great ambition to escape the rural environment. Emma was living in a society dominated by the bourgeoisie and the only option for girls in 19th century France, coming from rural areas, was marriage. The deceitful values propelled by the bourgeoisie were money and material gain through any means. For Leontina, the escape would translate as freedom of thought. The Romania-America couplet can be paralleled by the rural-urban dyad. Leontina is trapped in a 'village' called Communist Romania, a reality that negatively influences her entire life. Her name is the only gateway towards disobedience and consciousness outside the social system imposed on all her compatriots.

The character's transition from childhood to adulthood is not presented chronologically, but all the episodes register a series of transcendent experiences that cannot be perceived as evolution because she cannot grow and her life becomes dull and purposeless. The constraints of the regime were too harsh for a girl brought up by scared and submissive parents. She is successively a girl, a teenager, an athlete, a mistress, wife, mother, and, significantly, an obedient informer of the Communist Party.

Childhood is the first stage of communication between person and environment, the connections with others being developed and perceived at all levels, but mainly on an emotional level. This moment is decisive for literary characters as well, because the innocence of a child is primarily

[2] „Numele ei e un cuvânt rupt în două, ca noaptea și ziua, ca lumina și umbra [...] cu două suflete și cu două respirații și două porniri" (Crăciun, 2004: 37).
[3] „Era ca și cum două realități cu totul diferite ar fi avut același nume" (Crăciun, 2004: 12).

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affected by all the events felt and perceived on the inside. Those inner imprints shape the personality and the identity of the future adult and the evolution may turn into repressed memories at any time. As a child, Leontina finds a gateway towards simplicity and peace through reading. School holidays at home, in a rural environment, are for her a breeze of fresh and clean air, far from the noise and the crowds of the city:

> "School, boredom, waiting ...waiting... for the holiday to arrive... Two-to three weeks at home, in the village, reading voraciously and cultivating a sort of bored loneliness, without any desire of meeting her old friends, exasperated by her mother's scolding, her father's silence"[4] (Crăciun, 2004: 95).

Up to a point, reading filled that void between her parents, society and herself. The lack of proper communication was determined, in this case, by outer factors such as the educational environment, the moral rules imposed by the regime, the lack of courage and narrow mentality, elements necessary in the process of guiding the future generations of citizens.

Those initial experiences and moments from childhood lead to an insecure and frightened voice, that of the woman Leontina Guran. Unlike Emma Bovary, who had the courage to act irrespective of consequences, Leontina is more like a silenced soul who searches for understanding, empathy and peace until the end of the novel. Great emphasis is placed on the substantiality of her body, this aspect highlighting the challenge of the author to build a character in the flesh.

As Leontina advances in years, sleeping with various lovers becomes a daily occurrence for her and this habit engenders an increased detachment from her already split and insecure identity. These acts dehumanize her and drain her of all her individuality: "She had become the beautiful girl none to be loved by. No one tried to discover how she ought to be loved [...] And, starting with a certain age, this was the way things went on, as if her soul did not exist at all!"[5] (Crăciun, 2004: 160). This fact is amplified by the pressure enforced by the communist regime, established in Romania in the second half of the 20th century.

The role played in society was another traumatic factor that shook her existence:

[4] „Școală, plictiseală, așteptare [...] ea așteptând [...] să vină vacanța [...] Două-trei săptămâni acasă, în sat, citind pe rupte și cultivând un fel de singurătate plictisită, fără dorința de a-și revedea vechii prieteni, exasperată de boscorodelile mamei, de tăcerile tatălui" (Crăciun, 2004: 95).

[5] „Devenise fata frumoasă pe care n-avea cine s-o iubească. Nimeni nu încerca să afle cum ar trebui să o iubească pe ea. [...] Și așa a și început să meargă înainte de la o vârstă încolo, de parcă sufletul ei nici n-ar fi existat" (Crăciun, 2004: 160).

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> "She took her work seriously, but without putting her heart into it. She saw everything as if through glass. She was the turtle in the aquarium, the hamster in the jar, the spider in the glass box. The feeling of isolation. Accomplishing her tasks because they were a must."[6] (Crăciun, 2004: 190).

"Must" is a strong modal verb that implies no choice, only one way to act. This lack of choices results in feelings of strictness, coolness and pain. Once she is put in jail, the character loses her way completely.

As a wife, Leontina has the same attitude as Emma Bovary, evincing the effects of an excessively bovaristic behaviour. She has no feelings for her husband. Her marriage is an agreement, a gateway towards living in the city, more precisely, in the centre of the Capital. Pregnancy does not awaken her maternal instinct; on the contrary, it bothers her and engenders an emotional state of unbearable boredom. She tries to forget about her condition by reading Flaubert: "She brought the book on Rodolphe and Emma to lunch and turned its pages… She remembered those men who had been her lovers and tried to place them next to the characters in her books"[7] (Crăciun, 2004: 324). This reference is more than an invitation to draw this comparison. It differentiates the characters: Emma believed in fiction, whereas Leontina is a bovaristic character due to her excessively realistic view. The latter could not escape the feeling of being trapped in a void that was constantly suffocating her.

Emma believed in her power to construct her life like fictional lives in books until the moment of her suicide, whereas Leontina is aware of the chaos surrounding her:

> "She had tears in her eyes, everything that had surrounded her until she turned 33, the mediocrity of her own existence, the licentiousness and coarseness of her bosses, life as punishment, her punishment..."[8] (Crăciun, 2004: 326).

[6] „Își lua munca în serios, dar fără suflet. Privea totul ca printr-un geam. Era țestoasa din acvariu, hamsterul din borcan, păianjenul din cutiuța de sticlă. Sentimentul de izolare. Achitarea de sarcini pentru că trebuia" (Crăciun, 2004: 190).

[7] „Își aducea cartea cu Rodolphe și Emma la masă și întorcea filele [...] Își amintea de bărbații pe care-i avusese amanți, încerca să-i așeze [...] alături de personajele ei din cărți" (Crăciun, 2004: 324).

[8] „Avea lacrimi în ochi, tot ce o înconjurase până la 33 de ani, mediocritatea propriei existențe, trivialitatea și mârlănia șefilor, viața ca o pedeapsă, pedeapsa ei..." (Crăciun, 2004: 326).

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Not just Leontina, but the whole of Romanian society was oppressed by a regime of blind pathways, a regime that made people lose their identities and sense of life.

Like all citizens in Communist Romania, Leontina was a mere pawn on the chess board of Communist leaders:

> "The flow of things and human beings became the rewind of a film you could not turn your back on or run away from, since the whole world was a screen. People were playing parts, they were the pioneers of the chess board"[9] (Crăciun, 2004: 171).

As an athlete, Leontina becomes painfully aware of her split being:

> "she must tend to Leon more assiduosly. She didn't have the right to neglect this moody lodger of her body who had made a name for her as an athlete… Tina was therefore obliged to retrieve him…this nice boy"[10] (Crăciun, 2004: 178).

Both her outer and inner crossings through life are described in detail. Her experiences at boarding school with its series of apparently childish, but actually erotic games, the basketball training camps, her unbalanced slalom among colleagues, men, lovers and family led to confusion and resulted in a constant run that reached an absurd peak, a nonsensical present.

All the projections of the character seem to be mere illusions because she does not find herself. Her temporary escape into fictional worlds and all her deviations prove that she is an identity-deprived bovaristic prototype, whose course ends in death. Whereas Emma Bovary chose her own death and decided to end the sorrow of life by suicide, Leontina is a victim. Her death is placed under the sign of the unknown, the criminal never to be found.

The novel is entitled *Pupa russa* because the narration is built from several segments aligned on the same scale. Leontina's hypostases develop the rhizomatic string of the story perceived by the reader through language:

> "Pupa russa is the novel of a world that comes to life through words, indeed a world, translated through words [...] Thus, the whole of

[9] „Curgerea lucrurilor și ființelor din jur devenea derularea zumzăitoare a unei pelicule de film în fața căreia nu puteai închide ochii, de care nu puteai fugi pentru că lumea întreagă era un ecran. Oamenii jucau niște roluri, erau pionierii tablei de șah" (Crăciun, 2004: 171).

[10] „trebuie să se ocupe cu și mai multă insistență de Leon. N-avea dreptul să-l uite pe acest năzuros locatar al organismului ei ce-i adusese faima de mare sportivă [...] Tina se vedea obligată să-l regăsească [...] pe acest băiat de treabă" (Crăciun, 2004: 178).

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existence becomes a game of gradual revelation/discovery through the word-a *pupa russa* of sorts"[11] (Popescu, 2018).

The string of the character's evolution unveils an integration of words within the being of the character, this conjunction between literature and corporality being discussed by Carmen Mușat as a reinstatement of the subject's human body and identity on the stage of literature: "A striking awareness of the bipolar spirit/body dyad allows Gh. Crăciun, the discussion of this mediated rapport between literature and corporality once more"[12] (Carmen Mușat as cited in Ursa, 2000: 91). Surprisingly, this work conveys a new postmodern vision, along with a unique prototype of bovarism, one that is centered on corporality, gender and identity.

The specific historical context described by this novel places the concept of "bovarism" in the contemporary world, as a phenomenon traced and observed in people and illustrated by characters. The social environment and the strict rules of a regime leave scars mainly on a psychological level and their results were shown in this analysis of the character Leontina Guran.

Romanian society faced incredible pressure and persecution and the effect produced cannot be erased due to these seeds of fear generated and developed within people for four decades. Gheorghe Crăciun turns this novel into a sort of testimony and a warning for all the readers who are not aware of this great impact of dictatorship, the case of Leontina highlighting at the same time the dysfunctions and the outcomes of the bovaristic behaviour.

In conclusion, this analysis attained its purpose and there are clear arguments and examples and also a theoretical background that expose this Romanian novel, *Pupa russa*, as a valuable work, both as a literary creation and as historical reference.

The concept of "bovarism" has not only been revealed in a new light but it has also been shown how this innate bovaristic thought/impulse leads the human towards destruction when trying obsessively "to be/come someone/something else" (Almeida, 2016). Moreover, Romanian literature proves once again to be a rich source of information, inspiration and knowledge. Its literary realms can be placed alongside those of world literature at large, due to its specific and universal features.

[11] „*Pupa russa* este romanul unei lumi care capătă viață prin cuvinte, o lume, mai exact spus, tradusă prin cuvinte. [...]Întreaga existență devine, astfel, un joc al dezvăluirii/ descoperirii treptate prin cuvânt – un fel de *pupa russa*" (Popescu, 2018).

[12] „O pregnantă conștiință a bipolarității spirit/trup îi permite lui Gh. Crăciun să repună în discuție raportul mediat dintre literatură și corporalitate" (Carmen Mușat as cited in Ursa, 2000: 91).

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