FELIX ADERCA - THE NARRATIVE BETWEEN THE SUSPENSE OF THE TEMPORALITY AND THE EXTINCTION OF THE SPATIALITY[1]

***Abstract**: Felix Aderca was found in the fertile and tumultuous years between the two World Wars, in the center of all major debates regarding the process of our literature's modernization.*

He was an active and listened protagonist of this process who was fighting on many fields (as a poet, prose and drama writer, publisher and mostly as literature critic).

He became too early the most wanted target of the attacks of the leaders and his rivals, defenders of the traditionalism in its most eloquent currents, the "samanatorism "and "poporanism".

Advocate of the symbolism and later, frequent user at theoretical level of the European vanguard movements, he developed a permanent and committed publishing activity for the support of their offers.

He did not ignore the perennial values and experiences of the universal culture and spirituality, from the Greek and Latin classics, running through Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoievski, up to Baudelaire, Taine, Valery, Proust, Ibsen, B. Show, Pirandello or Gides.

***Keywords**: writing, spatiality, temporality.*

Avid reader, with various and up-to-date readings, connected to the most sparkling renewal experiences of the great European literature period between the wars, F. Aderca proves in his narrative works an unusual sense of unusualness.

If, for example, in the novel *The Miss from Neptune Street* as well as in the stories of *The Woman With White Flesh*, modern impulses are preserved at the thematic level, stylistically enhanced with a rudimentary language that has led critics to assign him a high interest for eroticism, Aderca proposes a pioneering narrative experience in *Sunken Cities* offering the Romanian readers a science fiction work of particular interest.

With a no less singular proto-history – the novel was first published in the pages of a magazine, with a different title and with a borrowed signature (Leone Palmantini) – *Sunken Cities* is a fictional parable that has the *Viitorul* magazine orientation, as the author suggests since the title of the first version of a remarkable expression that could not escape the severe G. Călinescu that noted in his *History of Romanian literature*: "*it's a "Viitorul" style fairytale[...], utopian, but miraculously machinist in Wells' style […]*".

In the following we will not deal with a manner applied by this narrative experiment of Felix Aderca. First of all, because the science fiction genre as it is, judged even in its' extraordinary adventure that followed this singular work of the Romanian author, was not at least fully assumed and therefore integrated in the literary world nor in linguistic and cultural areas in which he was brilliant and much less in our country; secondly because we are not quite as well familiarized with the structures and demands of this creative genre. We rationally feel the fear of failure of an adequate approach, knowing that in the context of this literature not only the exegetical arsenal is different,

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but the evaluative means of interpretation claim a particular instrument, if not a specialized one.

However, there remains the regret that the *Viitorul* kind of novel *Sunken Cities* would respond so promising to the theme of the symposium we are participating, even though it belongs to the science fiction genre.

Before getting into analytical assessments of Aderca's other narrative creations we will constrain ourselves to denouncing the disjunctive relationships between time/ temporality and space/ spatiality, categories which in our author's narratological perspective subsume an axis of temporal nature: on one side, in the specific context of science fiction literature, time is suspended somewhere in the distant future (Bucharest, 5000 A.D.), on the other side, space is limited to a certain point underground, somewhere in Eastern Asia; the temporality game is handled in a suggestive manner in an imaginary Bucharest, with skyscrapers where the action-story starts, space is assumed closed through a conversion of the universe-world size to five spherical imagined cities and assigned to a functional autonomy, therefore condemned to a catastrophic end.

As a result, the novel's atmosphere is heavy, partly because of this ambiguous game developed on the temporality – spatiality axis, but also due to the load of a "technological" nature that Aderca had to sustain by a narrative style of a precision which is also required by the thematic coherence. Recognized as a pioneer by the domestic future *Viitorul* writers, the author of the *Sunken Cities* interprets – also in this direction - the active role of informed and persuasive promoter of synchronizing our literature with its' great competitors in Europe.

He was the author of no less than four volumes of lyrics in his early youth in Craiova as a post-symbolist poet, on the French line of an "instrumentalism" that does not anymore seem at all in consonance with the Mallarmé style which otherwise Aderca later defended as a critic. Since his return from the war front in Hungary, where he participated voluntarily to defeat the Red Republic, Aderca began to write prose: he did it under the pressure of Craiova's provincial atmosphere that he will not hesitate to criticize in publishing pages as well as in letter confessions or in "diary style" memories. So, by 1918 he started writing in the same time the novel *The God of Love*, whose first title, namely *The He-Goat*, will appear in its' subsequent editions only as subtitle between commas, and the stories of the volume *The Woman With White Flesh*.

Both narrative works suggest, with a boldness that could not be overlooked and much less forgiven by traditionalism enrolled criticism, not only totally different views of approaching a theme in vogue then, but an unusual treatment, considered scandalous by the defenders of a line of retarded prudishness. It's on one hand the thematic area of the uprooting of which the literary currents developed by *Poporanul* and *Samanatorul* magazines erected for decades a wall of resistance against our literature's modernism and on the other, but in the same area no less hazardous, of the great topic of love, which the young writer gives tribulations, in expression and content, of an eroticism full of cruelties.

As for the theme of uprooting, it must be amended in the spirit of a more just location of the author by the topical nature transfer that Aderca makes from the village towards the slum: a universe theme of the slum borrowed to Craiova's suburbs where he lived in his adolescence and he developed intellectually. He wrote about this slum in 1932, as follows:

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> We have a so original, picturesque, ancient and deep slum life that it is surprising that the Romanian writers who approached it - all - they have remembered only the anecdote, vileness, grimace and parody [...] Only recently a few young writers had the courage and independence to see the deep human character, neighboring with Dostoyevsky's tragedy, of the Romanian slum.

We could propose here a hypothesis that escaped to the past and present critic that in the classical binomial village-town, in which the traditionalist criticism had barricaded itself in order to defend of any effort to modernize our literature, Aderca insinuates the slum as a distinct common theme, in a transitional way between an opposition between the past which had to be left behind and the future that would be faced, including at the Romanian level. Thus, as H. Zalis appreciates,

> [...] the sacred geography of the rustic hearth continued a temporal paradox. The need for progress, for normality by modernity, captures the prose horizon after the appearance of the Great Romania/ The Romanian Union. Therefore, an artist as F. Aderca, so familiar with Lovinescu's theses, believes in the urgency of the connection to the imaginary induced by the change of identity. The village means in a largely manner the past as physical world, as typology. The present and especially the future lies in the simultaneity of city plans […].

It would be simplistic to study a writer's work in an excessive manner based on the "theme" of a work such as *The Miss from Neptune Street*, an author obsessed since adolescence by the autonomy of the aesthetics. He could not resume his literary stakes to the thematic option. First he paid attention to the style that he explored at the great contemporary writers, not only from the domestic literature but also from other European literatures.

Here's how this work of his youth begins, with images that will set a framework as accurate as possible in a language that was not even belonging to the dominant Romanian prose at the time, as it seems:

> Going down the road up to the (wind) mill, Păun Oproiu left the chain straps of the oxen to fall on the grub and he walked forward keeping his look down and the whip thrown at the back of his neck.
> Behind him was moving and softly screeching the cart in which the peasant kept all his family and wealth that could fit into: his withered woman with a sleeping girl and the other girl taking off the seeds from a corn cob for the shriveling chicks nearby.
> If ideas would line up as threads on the warp, it wouldn't be hard to interpret in words what a troubled man thinks. Otherwise? Paun Oproiu is a little bit lisping and since his short childhood so far, when he gave the universe his being multiplied by three, he has never lined up a few words together of which at least one of them would be well-chosen. His ideas were like his front teeth: twisted […]

The character, subsequently followed in the text more by the relationship with his daughter Nuta, the true protagonist, without revealing, under the pen of the author, memorable features, is not a humorous person, but one that "thinks", as it does in when, with the carriage suspended on the road to town, stops and takes a last look at a world that he decided to abandon. By his gesture a movement just beginning to manifest at all levels of postwar Romanian society was thus illustrated.

The departure of the peasant Paun Oproiu from Răcari is an act of will which the narrator reveals us, the third person who assumes from the beginning the role of omniscient. The story fits from this point of view, the traditionalist horizon. Some critics are entitled to some extent to criticize the author that he continued somehow the

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prose that he started, right in that moment, to disavow in forwarding articles that will quickly throw him in a long lasting debate.

Further, the narrator places himself on whole pages over the voice of the character that although "reading his" thoughts keeps him away, since the lexicon and especially some interventions of the narrator have nothing in common with his knowledge horizon, thus writing that *"even when the idea of migration devastated the last signs of his rustic worries, the Town remained the confused part, of ignorance and risk that he was afraid of"*. The author simply takes Paun Oproiu away the "right" to (re) present himself and only this way we can further recognize the writer's as much as disguised intention to dominate, judge, eventually punish the world he created and of which, in Balzac's tradition, he feels "responsible" for. Here's an example that seems more than obvious:

> [...] Lord, if the frightened peasant had known the history of nations' foundation, he would probably find consolation and strengthening of soul in the ancient biblical picture, so resembling with his one: Moses on Mount Nebo looking towards the Promised Land, where a group of slaves would become the chosen nation ![...]

What must therefore "know" the peasant from Răcari and the author knows? And why he feels obliged as authorial voice to intervene so "unpredictable" and without a major narrative reason crossing thus the "thoughts" of his protagonist on a route he already chose. I insist on such issues of "style" just in order to detect in this first stage of narrative creation of the author, those links that will explain its' sinuous evolution in this direction of asserting his versatile personality.

First of all, with his varied readings, but in the same time so selective, Aderca could choose any of the successful narrative "models" at that point in his career. I believe that the author was fully informed and aware of the formal and thematic assumed options: as many sources can tell, he read the great universal prose writers, from the Russians of the second half of the nineteenth century to the classic French writers. He knew very well Balzac and Flaubert, he treasured Anatole France, he was up-to-date with the new aesthetic ideas established by French post-Romantic poetry, from Baudelaire to Mallarmé and, especially, to Valéry, not to mention that he just discovered Proust and Gide. He knew quite well the new challenges coming from new major artistic movements in the West and he was familiar with German Expressionism and even with the Italian futurism.

One of the reasons he was not registered among the protagonists of modern Romanian literature as writer, as in fact he was, should be searched beyond the known circumstances of his biography, and in his writing features: precipitated, diverse, in many fields, without particular concern for construction; Aderca was a restless spirit, paying attention to anything that meant changing, and not rarely he seems a victim of the desire to "give evidence".

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