

PUIU AND URSU, TWO SYMBOLIC CHARACTERS IN LIVIU REBREANU'S NOVEL, CIULEANDRA

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Abstract:

Universal literature testifies the presence of animals since its beginnings, thus continuing oral traditions of all nations. Animal symbolism was attributed to human beings in different circumstances of life, in accordance with their personality and behavior. Liviu Rebreanu's novel "Ciuleandra" (1927) comes with two characters, Puiu (Cub, in an approximate translation) and Ursu (Bear), and their struggle for a central place after the discovery of rivalry in love. The first one is rich and occupies an important social position, while the other earns everything by himself. While the name of the first character sends to frailness or childish behavior, the second one evokes the strongest animal of the Romanian forests, sometimes mocked at because of its massiveness and slowness.

The field of battle between the two characters is represented by their levels of conscience. Puiu Faranga crosses a series of concentric circles which should represent symbolic stages in his inner transformation on the way towards spiritual harmony. But in his psychological fight with Doctor Ursu, he is defeated for not knowing how to use his own powers. He will thus pass to another stage of his life, followed by the obsession of the folk dance "Ciuleandra", imagined by Doctor Ursu as a scary vortex out of which one cannot escape.

Keywords: cub; bear; animal symbols; struggle for power; L. Rebreanu.

Introduction

Animals, whether fantastical, domestic, or wild, accompany the characters of many fairy tales, legends, and stories by intervening in the natural course of things, generally helping the heroes to reach an announced perfection. They have been present in universal literature since its beginnings, for example, Homer's *Odyssey* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

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In Romanian fairy tales, animals of various kinds take an active part in the action. From winged horses that accompany the Fairies on their way, Scorpions, Three-headed Dragons, Serpents, and the beasts raised by Holy Sunday to ants, bees, or other insects, these beings prove the existence of some powerful connections between men and animals.

In written Romanian literature, the presence of animals is just as old, mentioning in this sense *Divanul sau Gîlceava înțeleptului cu lumea sau Giudețul sufletului cu trupulu* by Dimitrie Cantemir, a book written in Romanian and printed in 1698 in Iasi. This is the first Romanian philosophical work where we encounter medieval disputes about time, soul, nature, or consciousness. Dimitrie Cantemir talks about the superiority of man over other living things, supporting the superiority of spiritual life over the biological condition of man, and tries to define some philosophical concepts to create philosophical terminology. Another Cantemir's book, *Istoria ieroglifică*, written in Constantinople between 1703-1705, is considered the first attempt at a political-social novel. Dimitrie Cantemir satirizes the struggle of the boyar parties in the Romanian countries for rule. This battle, presented allegorically, is represented by a philosophical dispute between two principles, symbolised by the Unicorn and the Raven. The work also contains musings, proverbs and verses that reflect the influence of folk poetry.

Modern literature takes up animal themes for several purposes. Authors use this method to exploit complex identity issues, mask certain human behaviours, or simply for entertainment purposes or to give shape to dreams and fantasies.

In our study, we focused on the novel *Ciuleanda* by Liviu Rebreanu due to the animal symbols it has, such as the names of the main heroes and their attitudes. The dance *Ciuleandra* per se, in addition to its symbolic implications, resembles a snake that swallows its tail. In this sense, there is an image of a line of people beginning to bend, coil and tighten like a fantastic snake until it turns into a "hot pile of meat" (Rebreanu, 2002: 95).

Liviu Rebreanu (1885 - 1944), an important interwar Romanian writer, considered the founder of the modern Romanian novel, was a member of the Romanian Academy, novelist, playwright, and publicist, carried out a rich literary

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activity, crowned with various literary prizes, and even with a nomination for the Nobel prize for literature for the social novel *Ion*. He tackled many Romanian themes, writing social, historical, political, romantic, and psychological novels.

The narrative thread of the novel *Ciuleandra* is simple: the story of a young man who wants to become a doctor and marry Mădălina, a beautiful girl from his village. He agrees with her mother, but before he finishes his studies, in the village, at the *Ciuleandra* dance, the Faranga family appears. The old boyar wants to refresh the family's blood and is looking for a healthy and beautiful girl for his son Puiu. Policarp buys Mădălina from her mother and educates the girl. Unfortunately, Mădălina, a gentle and submissive nature, is killed out of jealousy by her husband, Puiu, because he feels his wife secretly loves another man. Faranga Sr arranges his son's admission to a hospice to avoid prison, on the grounds of temporal alienation, except that the doctor who will treat Puiu is Ion Ursu, Mădălina's former suitor. Closed between four walls, after an objective process of conscience guided by Doctor Ursu, Puiu Faranga goes crazy, remaining obsessed with the *Ciuleandra* dance he attended when he met Mădălina. The author intended to write a psychological novel. However, we meet a complex writing in which several themes are addressed. We mention the interest in the simple man, the personal drama, the theme of the individual's alienation, the psychology of the criminal, etc. The motto from the Apocalypse (II, 17) anticipates the end of the story by presenting the condition of the fallen individual and the criminal instinct existing in the seemingly harmless being: "...and you do not know that you are vile and poor and poor and blind and empty..." (Rebreanu, 2002: 21).

Puiu and Ursu: two symbolic characters

The novel *Ciuleandra* opens with a chorus of young people from a village in Argeș, a symbolic dance with ritual implications which, in the case of the text analysed by us, has the behaviour, the movement of an Uroboros, if we follow the destiny of the main hero, Puiu Faranga, who enters from good luck in the game and will end up being "swallowed up" by the same dance.

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Ouroboros is an ancient symbol, denoting a snake or a dragon that swallows its tail, thus forming, with the help of its body, a circle. It symbolizes the primordial unity, the endless cycle of time and the universe, and can only move circularly. Also, its circular shape is likened to the galaxy in which our solar system is located. In ancient texts, it is encountered as a serpent of light that dwells in heaven. Sometimes the ouroboros appears half white and half black, as it symbolizes the duality of all things, but in harmony and complementing each other.

Ciuleandra is a game specific to the Muntenia area and is considered by some researchers as a Dionysian dance of unleashing. In Romanian, it is a dance of destiny because by participating in this dance, many find their soul mate. Hora and circle, signifying the solar disk, are specific symbols of our ancestors, later preserved through popular culture, dances, rituals, decorations, and others. The serpent hibernates in the earth during the fall equinox. It reappears on the surface at the spring equinox, with the revival of vegetation, superimposing its biological cycle on top of the annual astronomical cycle of the Sun. Because of this, the snake is considered a powerful symbol of the cyclical regeneration of nature, life force, well-being, and fertility. At the same time, it is looked upon with fear because it is a poisonous animal that can produce death. Ciuleandra is a dance specific to young people of a certain age, played when floral explosions appear in nature.

In the History of Religious Ideas and Beliefs, Mircea Eliade talks about the Thracian circular dance played in the sense of the sun's movement in the sky. Raising the hands during the dance signifies a glorification of the sun, and kicking the ground fertilizes the glia with solar energy.

“...Who hasn't seen Ciuleandra can't imagine what the drunkenness of dancing means!” (Rebreanu, 2002: 94) This is how Puiu Faranga, the main hero, begins his confession to Dr Ursu. The dance begins slowly, very sparingly, like a regular hora, after which the music begins to “agitate and speed up” (Rebreanu, 2002: 94). The compact wall of dancers sways and bends, twists and jerks as the fiddlers lead. The louder the dancers get, the wilder the music gets. “The legs of the lads escape violently, sketch figures of tramping, jumps of fright, ecstasies of joy. Then suddenly, all of them, with jumpy and

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swift steps, start in a whirlwind” (Rebreanu, 2002: 94). The old line of people begins to bend, coil and tighten like a fantastic snake until it turns into a “hot pile of meat” (Rebreanu, 2002: 95) writhing on the spot. Then, unexpectedly, it relaxes, revealing the red and happy faces of the dancers. Enraged that the game has been softened, the fiddlers start their song stronger, more insistent. The whirlwind starts again, tighter, more stubborn, coiling and uncoiling, until finally “it closes in a mass of crushed bodies” (Rebreanu, 2002: 95). The boys and girls are shaking on the spot, trembling, and stumbling. From time to time, long tails spring up as if from “time immemorial” (Rebreanu, 2002: 95). The game looks set to continue like this:

“until all the dancers melt their souls in a supreme blaze of unbridled passion. But suddenly, as if cut with scissors, the song breaks, and the crowd of young men disperses in a roar of wild laughter, like the groans of an immense satisfied pleasure, so that even the valleys are filled with an earthquake, as if the fury of human passion it would have awakened even the long-stifled love instincts of the earth...” (Rebreanu, 2002: 94).

We focused on the presentation of the dance as it is a crucial element for understanding the destiny of the main heroes of the novel, who bear symbolic names of animals, respectively, Puiu (Chick) and Ursu (Bear). According to the DEX, Puiu is a generic name given to birds from hatching to maturity or animals from birth to maturity. It also means young plant, sapling, but it also denotes a small, lost child, or child of nobody, a bastard. Also, the term is used as a nickname, a term of disparagement when talking to or about a child.

Puiu Faranga's opponent is Ion Ursu, the doctor whose eyes betray his “peasant origin”. Puiu would say about him that he was “the tool of fate” (Rebreanu, 2002: 147) against him, or, at another time, that “we were two opponents without knowing each other” (Rebreanu, 2002: 147). Then, after he is convinced that his suspicions contain a shred of truth, Puiu exclaim: “He is my enemy!” (Rebreanu, 2002: 125).

A massive disproportion comes, therefore, from the names of the two heroes, Ursu and Puiu. At the novel's beginning, the fur of the glass-eyed bear appears in the father's

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office, which will follow Puiu, accentuating his sense of guilt. The bear, the largest and most powerful animal of our fauna, is feared and revered, but simultaneously, it is the heavy, hilarious animal tricked by other living things. The doctor feels the same way when the “chick” steals his love. The bear is also the possessor of all the powers of nature. He “heals, drives away evil, defends from evil demons, is benevolent and protects the fruits of the earth; but it can also be malevolent, evil and destructive” (Coman, 1996: 146).

The external facts of the novel are only starting points towards the inner, purely psychological plane of Faranga's drama. A single fact is loaded with consequences, the killing of Mădălina being the factor that triggers the quickening of the rhythm, as in the Ciuleandra dance.

In the hospital, time is uneventful and is continued only by the hero's memories. The real war occurs between the consciousnesses of the two opponents, but also inside Puiu's consciousness, the fight is guided by the crazy rhythm of the “stormy” dance. The words of Policarp Faranga seem to foretell this war: “c'est comme une danse de guerre d'un clan sauvage!” (Rebreanu, 2002: 96)

We are dealing with an unequal battle. With the appearance of the boyars at the Ciuleandra dance, it can be seen how the invaders (represented by Puiu and his family) invoke the rights of the masters. However, the forces of nature (represented by Ursu) prove stronger. “Our paths were separated like our worlds” (Rebreanu, 2002: 145-146), states Dr Ursu. The hero's first mistake is to underestimate his opponent, “he is neither handsome, nor intelligent, nor even likeable” (Rebreanu, 2002: 58). Although he and his father sense the danger, Puiu feels an irresistible attraction because, as Leahu had said about Ciuleandra, “it's as if you don't even want to stop once you've started” (Rebreanu, 2002: 68), as he would say that “it's as if a man is also a fool at the Suleandra dance, and another is not!... and they crowd me and hang out at the game until they lose their minds... That's the game, boyars” (Rebreanu, 2002: 111).

Being a child, Puiu leads a quiet life under the protective wing of his father. Adolescence is spent in constant agitation, like the dance rhythm that starts to get faster. After Mădălina is

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killed, the outer universe of the hero narrows inwards, and the circle of his life begins to gather towards the centre. Just like in Ciuleandra, he lives his final agony of the game in a closed space. Like the end of the dance, Puiu Faranga's social life ends suddenly, in a roar of laughter.

In front of the guard, Puiu Faranga remains bewildered, not understanding how a simple peasant, once in the same situation, could control his criminal instincts. Puiu Faranga is not, however, an adversary if we consider his pleasure in watching the slaughter of poultry as a child or because of his behaviour towards women. Some considered him a "sadistic criminal". Because Puiu was petted by its parents, his chances to show his true personality were reduced by being restricted to the status of an immature creature. He does not have to think, choose, or judge by himself because his father did these things for him, as seen throughout the novel when Policarp Faranga, in several lines, says that he has to save him against his will or that he is disappointed by the behaviour of his son from whom he had high expectations.

Puiu Faranga owns the family fortune with which he could solve any problem. Gold is solar and is designated by a circle. Dr Ursu's power, instead, lies in his intelligence. According to Chevalier, the sphericity of the human head is an indication of perfection.

The novel's episodes gradually reveal the hero's soul chaos and how the obsession with dance invades the character's traumatized consciousness. Puiu Faranga passes through a series of concentric circles, which, according to symbolism, should be the stages of his internal perfection, the road to soul harmony. From this test, the hero emerges victorious because he does not know how to use his strength.

For the Celts, the circle has magical functions and values. It is a limit that cannot be crossed. To stop the Irish army from invading Ulster, the Celts fixed a circle on a post and "the inscription bound anyone who read it not to pass on without accepting hand-to-hand combat" (Chevalier and Gheerbandt, 1994: 296). By transposition, Puiu Faranga, the boyar class's representative, enters the game, invades the peasant world and, unknowingly, is forced to accept a hand-to-hand fight, more precisely, a conscience-to-conscience fight.

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The circle symbolizes protection. Once out of the hall, Puiu will remain outside until the end because, compared to the line where one can join at any time, the circle closes.

Another important circle of Faranga's life is shouting. According to Islamic tradition, the most beautiful circle is that of the mouth, which has a perfectly round shape. Mădălina's look changes in the hero's soul into a scream that always rings in his eardrums. This image triggers Faranga's desperate scream throughout the novel, "Shut up!... Shut up!... Shut up!..." (Rebreanu, 2002: 21).

Around the solar circle, there are twelve points. A thirteenth point would destroy the balance. So the number thirteen is another symbol that will follow the main character until the onset of madness. "From the first to the last meeting with me, all under the spell of the catastrophic number!" says Puiu Faranga, remembering his meeting with Mădălina.

The circle is very well framed by a square, the quadrature of the circle being, in Jung's conception, a symbol of his *opus alchymicum* in which the chaotic unity of the beginnings is dissolved into four elements united in a higher unity. The passage of four to one was produced by a sublimation carried out in a circular form. Through distillation, we reach the pure form, the quintessence. The circle is a fundamental alchemical mandala, along with the Uroboros. The eastern Lamasic mandala contains a quadrilateral plan called a stupa, which contains a house or temple and enclosed inner space. In the stupa, turning to the left brings trouble, for the left side signifies the unconscious part, while moving to the right is the path to consciousness (Jung, 1996: 120-122). Puiu Faranga tries several times to remember the song and then the dance, and finally realizes that he made the wrong steps because the song does not matter. Furthermore, when he finally succeeds, he dances until exhaustion, "joyful, transfigured" (Rebreanu, 2002: 135), but happy that he found his craft. He will dance until "the room spins wildly and everyone seems to sway" (Rebreanu, 2002: 137).

The Uroboros suggests the re-creation of the self, a constant return and renewal through meditation and analysis. Alternatively, that is what Puiu does. From the moment he begins to dance Ciuleandra physically, he goes spiritually

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through a process of confession in front of himself and Dr Ursu. The circle dance breaks the linearity, marking a change that indicates the transition of the being to another level, usually higher, overcoming the level of animality. However, unfortunately, the self-devouring snake always turns back on itself, locked in its cycle, condemned to never escape from this cycle to ascend to a higher level that symbolizes the eternal return.

Conclusions

The disproportionate fight between Ursu and Puiu is won by the one who respects the law of nature, according to the rhythm imposed by the ritual dance of Ciuleandra. The snake, an important symbol of the regeneration of nature, of the vital force of well-being and fertility, can also bring the end. Seen from the outside, Puiu Franga's drama seems trivial. He goes through a terrible experience and commits a crime followed by madness. The character flees from his obsessions and takes refuge in delirium. His restlessness gradually increases, and he experiences pangs of guilt, and neurosis would be a consequence of his loaded heredity.

Voluntarily entering Ciuleandra, Puiu embarks on a road he cannot complete. Obsessed with dance, the search for the hero can symbolize the aspiration towards another level of life, and Ciuleandra, the dance where he met Mădălina, will remain as a promise. The hero will pass into another level of his life accompanied by the obsession with the Ciuleandra dance, which he cannot forget.

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