

# ARCHETYPAL STRUCTURES IN LIVIU REBREANU'S NOVEL "ADAM AND EVE"

Conf.univ.dr. Maria- Tereza Pirau

## *Abstract*

*Liviu Rebreanu is perhaps the most important representative of the Romanian epical realism and the novel that is the object of our analysis here proved difficult to integrate in the orientation the novelist is undoubtedly part of.*

*Starting from the identification of certain archetypal motifs in Liviu Rebreanu's "Adam and Eve", the present paper propounds a reading of the novel which would be different from the ones it has enjoyed over the past 84 year since its publication.*

*Our intention has been not only to generate an encounter which would have been possible – given the fact that C.G. Jung and L. Rebreanu were contemporaries – nor has it been to draw attention upon the complex psychology of the novel, but mostly to dismantle the prejudice according to which, through its incursion into the fantastic, "Adam and Eve" would represent a deviation, a fact of discontinuity as to the „verisimilar realism” of Rebreanu's great novels.*

*We, on the contrary, state that in this novel we deal with contents which, as mental states, are from a scientific point of view as verisimilar as possible, consequently nothing prevents us from considering them – of course, as much as art allows us – as "real".*

**key words: death archetype, Wise Old Man, Anima, Syzygia, archetype of transformation**

Liviu Rebreanu's novel "Adam and Eve" can be read at first sight as a fantastic work bearing the fingerprint of an imported mythology. Because of that reason the novel has been, not seldomly, interpreted as an exception as against the literary realism promoted by the novelist in other works.

The hypothesis we are developing here is that Rebreanu remains a realistic writer in "Adam and Eve" as well, only that in this novel the subject of his analysis is an *exclusively inward reality*. Irrespective of their content, the philosophic hypotheses, the beliefs, fear of death and the acute need for explaining its mystery, love, obsession, raving etc. are verisimilar *psychic facts* whose real existence cannot be psychologically denied.

Seen from the *outside*, the story is simple, even commonplace, in "Adam and Eve": professor Toma Novac, with a rigorously rational education, a bachelor in his early 40s with little interest in women unexpectedly lives, alongside with Ileana Alexandrovici Poplinski, an archetypal experience. Enmeshed in the implacable force of *Syzygia* archetype (the generic, eternal couple), the two lose rational control. They expose themselves, act imprudently, and the professor will be deadly shot by Ileana's jealous husband.

*But, the story is not the outside one.*

As a matter of fact, it is only now that the novel begins.

### **Death Archetype**

First of all, "*Adam and Eve*" is the novel of an agony. The true theatre of events is the *mind* of a dying man.

Death is a primary, archetypal state with the reality of which the entire line of ancestors we descend from was confronted, this still remaining one of the profound silences of the universe, one of its great mysteries, a mankind's „secret of the secrets”.

Awareness of death suddenly and brutally sets in the mind of the philosopher who, badly wounded, awakens lying on a hospital bed. It seems that the obsessive thought “now I've got to die!” – interrupts the chain of “arguments, with no beginning and no end, through which he had in vain forced himself a whole life to come to a satisfactory conclusion of a conception on life and, above all, on death. Ideas of the kind that “death is an hypothesis until the moment when man finds oneself clasped in its arms with no hope of return” – once ironically sent away – “uncalled for” settle in the psychic of the wounded and suddenly get an unexpectedly deep meaning” (Rebreanu, L., 2004, pg. 30).

What complicates the narrative is the fact that, to word in the manner of C. G. Jung, the archetype always speaks “*the language of the subject*”, and here we deal with a learned character, with a mind motivated by the need for explanation, who has the exercise of coherence and the skill of integrating experience, of signifying it through the prism of a “life conception” – in which death, certainly, has its own meaning.

In brief, “the ground” of the novel action - which few writers have had the courage to explore – is the complex stocked mind of a dying erudite.

Alongside with the gradual losing of the state of lucidity, the timeless and spaceless contents of the unconscious mind flood the last flicker of the hero's consciousness. The *mentally represented* lengths of time span several millenniums, while the representations themselves last for a few fractions of seconds; on the one hand, the framework of the *mentally represented* scenes covers the space of three continents, on the other hand, everything happens within the limited space of a Bucharest hospital ward.

Toma Novac, the philosophy professor, is a good expert in history, ancient, medieval, and modern cultures, and to place his own story in various environments does not cognitively rise any problem for him.

## The Wise Old Man

Also called “*archetype of significance*” the **Wise Old Man** generally appears objectified in culture and in the collective mind as a king, guru, hero, wizard, or saviour. According to C. G. Jung, when the archetype takes control of the man’s (male’s) personality, it represents a danger both for him and for the ones surrounding. An individual possessed by this archetype may become a megalomaniac, and, to the limit, a psychically sick man: he believes about himself and tries to persuade the others around that he has “*mana*” – i.e. wisdom (or possibly the magical power of healing); such a character often has disciples because what he is saying comes from the collective unconsciousness, and people, as Jung considers, always recognise this voice.

The **Wise Old Man** motif is to be found in “*Adam and Eve*” in the person of Tudor Aleman, an older philosophy professor, who has an Asian philosophy inspired vision of life and death. Aleman objectifies here the Wise Old Man archetype firstly because he is possessed by his thesis (see the unnatural interest he is showing in recognising the confirmation of his hypothesis in the eyes of the deceased) and, secondly because, in the logic of the narrative, he becomes a kind of a spiritual guru who manages to understand and anticipate facts. It is worth mentioning that, from a psychological viewpoint, the hypothesis that Aleman *actually determines* these facts is plausible as well, while his insistent explanations become *obsessions* for the hero (see, for instance, the obsessional element represented by figure seven), generating *ideas, interpretations, mental states, facts, and happenings*.

In a way, Aleman is the *spiritual negative* of Toma Novac: while Toma, led by reason and following his doctoral studies abroad, has got an ontological materialist-atheist vision, with “*multiplied doubts*” regarding the possibilities of the intellect, with an agnostic attitude, and with a conscience burdened with the pressure of the unknown (he is the author of a “*Philosophy of the Unknown*”), on the contrary, Aleman – led by emotion and belief, has come to possess exactly what the other one distressingly lacks: *certitude*.

Under the limit circumstances he finds himself in, there is no wonder that the memory of the hero thrusts out to the surface the image of Tudor Aleman and of his seducing conception of death.

According to Aleman’s theory, the soul reincarnates seven times, and the union with the twin soul – most of the times met and recognised during the previous lives – happens during the seventh life. It is only in the last

fraction of second of the seventh reincarnation that the soul remembers the previous lives.

Though having strongly and tirelessly rejected Aleman's theory regarding the divine couple and reincarnation, always contradicting him with rational arguments, Toma Novac, *the delayed bachelor*, has not been able to avoid a certain psychological contamination: he would find himself wondering "and if?" to dismiss the thought afterwards, somewhat ashamed.

This behaviour of avoiding confrontation with his own emotions could explain, though, what will happen later, as: "*you can become a victim of an emotion unless you understand in good time why it has excited you.*" (Jung, C.G., 2007, pg.55)

### **Anima**

It was this non-perceptive background that the experience of Toma's meeting with Ileana was grafted on, Ileana – the woman who will give content to the professor's **Anima** – the wounding of the latter by Poplinski and the living, on the hospital bed, of the mental states preceding death.

According to Jung, Anima is a virtual image of womanliness that man carries in his unconscious. This image becomes actual only due to the concrete experience that the man has with the woman.

As an integral part of the masculine soul, **Anima** represents:

- the feminine principle found in latency in man;
- the representation of man's ancestral experience with the woman.

As we learn from the novel, before meeting Ileana, professor Novac – convinced rationalist – had too long ignored the force of his **Anima**.

Let us also notice the fact that, considering the ending of the story, the theory inoculated by Aleman saves the facts from banality, giving - through a cognitive dissonance mechanism, fully intelligible from a psychological point of view – a high sense to the happenings that brought the hero on the brink of death: *Ileana is not just some woman, she is the very twin soul of the dying man, the half found again at the end of a thousands-year long search.* (How painful professor Toma Novac's life sacrifice would have been before his own conscience if he had not had a metaphysical explanation of such proportions at hand!)

On the other hand, Ileana is a facet of universal Anima, a reincarnation of femininity which could have, in another life, in another place, and at another time, looked differently, and respectively been called Navamalika, Isit, Hamma, Servilia, Maria or Yvonne.

## Syzygia

**Syzygia** archetype – remains the main theme of Liviu Rebreanu's novel "*Adam and Eve*".

**Syzygia** composed of the pair **Anima** – **Animus** includes the following elements, in Jung's acceptance:

a. *the pair, the experience of being part of a couple*, respectively:

- the masculine/ feminine **unit** ;
- **the relationship** between man and woman;
- the parental **diada**;
- **the divine couple**;

b. the feminity quantity of man (**Anima**) and the masculinity quantity of woman (**Animus**);

c. the ancestral experience of the man with the woman and of the woman with the man;

d. the archetypal image of the other sex.

As any archetype, **Syzygia** has a positive and a negative side. Thus, for instance, at the moment the two met, Ileana is already part of a couple. But, the Poplinski couple – the same as Ana and Ion of the Glatenas in the novel "*Ion*", Nadina and Grigore Iuga in the novel "*The Uprising*", Madalina and Puiu Faranga in "*Ciuleandra*", the couple Pahontu in "*The Gorilla*", Apostol Bologna and his fiancée Marta in "*The Forest of the Hanged*" novel – illustrates in a way the negative side of **Syzygia**: none of these men and women is paired with the right person.

The idea of wasting our only chance of existence for a life devoid of love is very hard to bear. Who can say they have been spared the human hope that there exist, between man and woman, absolutely touching encounters? Liviu Rebreanu - the writer who confesses that the disturbing intersecting of his eyes with those of a stranger woman, whom he seemed though to know, has inspired him the theme of the novel – lent this hope to his characters. What makes **Syzygia** to be wished-for, almighty, and feared is the fact that, for each of these characters *there exists*, in the economy of the respective narratives, *a right person*, and the meeting with that one will be enough to make the quiet life of the characters and the whole universe of relationships they are integrated in burst out.

The characteristic of the **Syzygia** archetype of being out of time, out of space, and, at the same time, of manifesting itself in a unique way in the life of the individual, is magnificently depicted by the author. Thus, though the novel observes the logic of temporal succession, most of the book

chapters, except for the first and the last, could be very well read in any other order, without this altering in any way the intelligibility of the message.

In the mind of the dying man, there succeed one after another, following the line of Aleman's theory, seven hypostases of his love story, placed in seven different cultures and epochs: he is a pauper, keen on wisdom Indian, in the time of King Arjuna, then son of a noble Egyptian kindred with Pharaoh Kufu, is reborn in Sumer after the reign of Hammurapi, is reincarnated as a noble Roman at the time of Jesus' presence on Earth, is a German monk at the end of Millennium I and the beginning of Millennium II A.D. a doctor during the French Revolution.

In all these frameworks and hypostases he meets *Her*, under different faces.

In brief, philosophy professor Toma Novac is but one of the seven Faces of one and the same character. Beyond him, part of the core of his being, are *Mahavira*, *Unamonu*, *Gungunum*, *Axius*, *Adeodatus*, *Gaston*, who have been incarnated in him and in which he finally recognises himself.

A psychological achievement of exception is the case of Monk Areodatus – so different in what regards the conception of life and so alike in what regards the mystic living of the archetype: it is obvious that the soul of the religious man is not built differently from that of the laic, and religions – real "psychiatric systems" as Jung calls them – have been created after the profound patterns of the soul, if they are not by any chance mere projections of those patterns.

In order to write this book the author had to make the effort of getting, together with his character, into the intimacy of everyday mentalities and life of ancient India, Egypt, Sumer, and Rome, into the atmosphere of Medieval German monasteries, of the French society before the Revolution of 1879.

Transfiguring the **Syzygia** archetype into very diverse cultures, mentalities, contexts, psychologies, Rebreanu demonstrates the unifying force of the archetype: beyond differences there undoubtedly exist profound generally human experiences we are all taking part in, which join us all together as humans, despite the places, times, languages, or beliefs that are separating us.

The force that solders the eternal couple – a kind of ancestral "voice of love" – transcends the directed separations of circumstances and contexts. The twin souls, *He and She*, seek each other for thousands of years, recognise each other anywhere, and their attraction is above all barriers – social, moral, of reason, of the characters' mere sense of survival.

This is, to word after C.G.Jung, like an eternal story that repeats itself again and again.

### Transformation Archetype

Read through the prism of our Christian culture, Liviu Rebreanu's novel "*Adam and Eve*" may leave the impression that the writer would be an *intuitive / imaginative* spirit rather than a rational, objective one.

We personally think that things are more subtly differentiated.

In his "*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*" (2003, pg. 122-123), C.G. Jung distinguishes among the multiple meanings of the transformation archetype, mentioning the following forms of rebirth:

- a. *metempsychosis* - meaning the transmigration of the soul that can reincarnate itself in very different bodies, including in animals (we find the idea in Hinduism and Buddhism, but also with the ancient Greeks – see, for instance, Er's myth in Platon's dialog "*The Republic*");
- b. *reincarnation* - according to which rebirth takes place in another human being with the possibility of that person to be able to remember previous lives (see, for instance, Shintoism);
- c. *resurrection* – indicating the foundation of human existence after death; continuation of being in another dimension (see life after death in Christianity);
- d. *rebirth* - indicating renewal, renovation, healing of the being; including transmutation, transformation of the essence, transformation of the material into the spiritual (see, for instance, transfiguration of Christ or the Ascension of the Holy Virgin in Christianity);
- e. *participation in the transformation process* – indicating the participation in a ritual of transformation (e.g. ceremony, liturgy or mass) “where the participant takes part in the offering of grace” (e.g. the transformation of substances during the Christian liturgy).

It can be noticed, from this brief presentation, that the *reincarnation* Rebreanu speaks about in his novel "*Adam and Eve*", as well as the *Christian resurrection* are *images* – differently objectified, that is true, from a cultural standpoint – *of the same archetype*.

Which means that, in different cultures, populated with people who are as real as ourselves, death is read as possibility of reincarnation, and this

belief is, *in its quality of psychic fact, as real as our Christian belief in resurrection.*

Still, what makes, in our opinion, the force and charm of the novel "*Adam and Eve*" is the fact that Rebreanu actually leaves it up to his reader to decide over the psychological, religious, and philosophical interpretation of the narrative. "What was it about?", the reader asks oneself at the end of the novel. Was it about *the anamnesis as a final study of a defined range of reincarnations?* Or about the *delirium* of a dying man educated in the cult for reason, whose mind scrapes together, from the data of his own substance, a last coherent articulation, a sophisticated and plausible explanation for the embarrassing fact of having been – like a hot-headed callow youth – the victim of irrational passion?

The answer belongs to the reader and is the projection of ones own conception of life.

*Translated by lect. univ. drd. Lucia Gliga*

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