

THE SYMPTOMS OF THE CHARACTER. CASE STUDY: LEIBA ZIBAL

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Abstract: *This paper proposes interpreting some aspects of Caragiale's work using a psychological and traumatological grid. In the first part we discussed Jungian concepts of shadow and persona, which are applicable to the drama. Part two focuses on An Easter Torch novel, sketching Leiba Zibal experienced traumatic situation and its consequences. The symptoms occurred in fictional character rendered in literary techniques of great finesse, at the boundary between tragic and grotesque, it is a real clinical picture of a mental disorganization caused by trauma, fear, anxiety neurosis.*

Key words: *Caragiale, trauma, shadow, Zibal, neurosis, schizophrenia.*

1. Introduction

The human being and its report with reality made from the oldest time objects of study for more subjects, such as philosophy, literature and psychology. Famous psychologists were excited about fiction (for instance Freud's essay about Dostoievsky and the problem of parricide) and many writers were influenced in their works about psychological trends and concepts, especially Freudian psychoanalysis which drew in the romantic writers. The use of psychological analysis is not something new, the Romanian writers from the inter-war period took an interest in polling the human being. Starting with Duiliu Zamfirescu and *Viaţa la ţară* [*Life at the countryside*] novel, where we find for „the first time the analytical page, as the object of the writer is not the man, but a status within a status, studied in a monographic manner” (Călinescu, 1982, p.476), the realist prose of psychological nature of Slavici, BarbuŞtefănescu-Delavrancea's short stories in which appear pathological cases – *Zobie* and *Milogul* [*Zobie* and *The Beggar*] and especially *Hagi-Tudose*, whose character integrated in the prototype of the miser can be identified in the psychological terms as suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder, with intrusive thoughts and the series continues until Dana Dumitriu, with novels that can be analyzed or investigated by the category of trauma. The choice for (self) surprising of psychical statuses becomes a refined artistic procedure for H.P.Bengescu and Camil Petrescu. The conscience, as level of organizing the psychical life of the individual, is the main issue of the novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste ...* [*The last night of love...*] and the psychological analysis gets a statute of narrative technique. The modern novel suggests perspectives, dramas of lucidity, pathological characters (Mrs. T from *Patul lui Procust* [*Procust's bed*]) or biological and social faults hidden under the mask of the elegance of snobbism at the contemporary Virginiei Woolf, H. P. Bengescu, whose works obviously denote the affinity for Freud and for the concepts of repression or subconscious.

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Although in a great measure literature is fiction and the theatre „a simulacrum of the world and real life” (Cap-Bun, 2014, p.230), the attraction between them and psychology is incontestable, bilateral and fructuous for both parties.

2. Caragiale's *Shadow*

From the psychological perspective and according to Jungian ethnical archetypes (regional) put together with general-human archetypes, the critic Mircea Braga analyzes Caragiale's dramaturgy from the perspective of the ethnical archetype, rather being considered a specific modality to react – „it represents only the possibility of a certain type of approach or action” than ‘an inherited representation’ (Braga, 2002).

Defined as *patterns of behaviour*, the concept of archetype „indicates the presence into the psychic of some forms with universal prevalence” (Jung, 1994, p.21), apart from conscience, which has a personal nature, there is „the second psychic system, whose nature is collective, non-personal” (Jung, 1994, p.22). Two atypical archetypes that rather suggest than designate are those called *persona* and *shadow*. The definition of shadow is given referring to the personal subconscious although Jung insists on a clear demarcation of it from the collective subconscious (archetypal). „By shadow I understand the negative part” of personality, namely all the hidden, disadvantageous features of the functions insufficiently developed and of the contents of the personal subconscious” (Jung as cited in Zamfirescu, 2009, p. 443). This thing is not a contradiction but a „non-thematized modification of the definition of archetype” (Zamfirescu, 2009, p. 443). *Persona* (with the origin in the theatre of antic Greece, when the actor puts on his face a mask, a *persona*, embodying until identification a mythical human being) is what we want to show to the world, a social role, namely what the dramatic characters are assigned to be by the author. About Caragiale's creativity it was said that „it appears to be aligned under the sign of night” (Tomuş, 2012) and it is not about the romantic night. The nocturne regime of the world imagined by Caragiale potentiates a „negative dominant”, his characters are kitch characters, excessive tempers from a „society without moral and principle”, as Trahanache said, characters that are shaped with predilection through the dimension and intensity of the *shadow*, not in vain Dandanache is „sillier than Farfuridi and more villain than Caţavencu”, the characterization of the author remained in the memories of I. Suchianu (Cioculescu, 2012, p.232). The puppet characters (we think of Caragiale and of Vişniec), the masks of the theatre are superposed over the distinction of Jung about the concepts *persona* and *shadow*. For instance, the famous AgamiţăDandanache pretends to be „old fighter from 1948”, „My family from forty eight (coming down to the audience) and I, in all the Chambers, with all the parties, with the impartial Romanian ...” (Caragiale, 2010, p.160) and he adjusts his relations with the other characters based on the *persona*, he is the idealized image of his own Self and he is not conscious of his *shadow* as he totally lacks those moral...principles. In his *shadow* there are placed „all those psychological aspects of our being which we hide not only from the others, but also from ourselves” (Nuţă, 2004, p.10) and, from this point of view, this *turbulent theatre* may be understood as a *theatre of the shadow*, of dissimulation, from which the ludicrous laughter does not miss, the result of the discrepancy between the *shadow* and *persona*. The inner archetypal relation, the shadow has cultural dimensions, a Jester for instance, buffoons and court fools or, for the author here mentioned, even „trifler”. Moving from conventional, *the shadow* of the character

appears indirectly from the comic of character, language, gestures, mimic or directly from stage directions, the replies of the other characters or stage means (costumes, stage props, lights, music).

Persona and *the shadow* coexist both in the individual and socially and if we thought that the famous playwright lived in the Belle Époque, which we associate with *persona*, the observation of Tomuş is fair that we „can identify the taste for morbid, violent and satanic of an entire age, which is not the necessary and real reverse of the shadow of that Belle Époque” (Tomuş, 2012). The structure of the dramaturgic universe under the principles of the shadow brought to Caragiale, at that time, harsh critics and persecution, hissing off the stage, being called „big villain” or „the last Phanariot invader” by Veronica Micle and Nicolae Davidescu. This modality of interpretation of the nocturne registry of Caragiale explains why his characters are disorientated, speak without actually saying anything, are trapped in a vicious, fair circle, manipulators and victims. It is often used the emotional blackmail as form of manipulation or at the political blackmail which inevitably lead to the perpetuation of a „chain of weaknesses”.

„Caragiale ‘lived’, at least in the regime of the text, only the signals obsessively coming from that authoritative field made of objectifications, materializations, metastases of the ‘shadow’, initially articulated on narrow surfaces for covering in the end, by accumulation, the entire reality of the age. It is a field that knows the violence of an underlying aggression, therefore not of one that debases forms, but that constantly feeds an eruption of the negative substance” (Braga, 2003, p.61).

3. The Symptoms of the Psychological Trauma

Henceforth, we will limit ourselves to surprise how Caragiale, within a European naturalism superposed over this “metastasis of the shadow” exposes with the literary means the affects, especially the dissociate affects, from which the favourite is the fear (alarm). The physical deformities specific for the classic theatre are replaced with the thickness until exaggeration of affects, the exterior subtly transits towards interior until its total removal. „Leonida’s fear is a component of his psychology” Chiciudean stated (2012, p.96). The fear of „revolution” of Master Leonida, famous republican, pretended to be a psychologist, explains deliciously and ingeniously the way in which a form of anxiety – hypochondria appears, how the perceptions alter, moreover, how the hallucinations appear: „The man, for instance, out of nothing, as he is nervy, out of curiosity, comes up with an idea; has he come up with an idea? the doubt is already there; well! after that, from doubt he falls into hypochondria. Thereafter, obviously even nothing means something.” (Caragiale, 2010, p.89).

The criticism always noticed the „distorting” dimension, deviated from the normality of humanity, which appears to be rather included in the area of morbid and sickness, with a generalized hysterical behaviour, considered a „constancy of a new sensibility at the end of the century, admittedly one of pathological connotation” (Mitchievici, 2014, p.37). Caragiale himself wrote in *Zgomot* [*Noise*] article, appeared in 1889, that „- And yet, with such prodigious minds, the humankind will end up by being crazy. The craziness will be a foretime the normal status of the human being’s mind!” Included in this type of craziness that rather tends to absurd, irrational and that imposed the atemporality and universality of Caragiale, is also found „craziness” as psycho-social disorder or psychological alteration.

This type of „craziness” is brought into discussion in *O făclie de Paşte* [*A torch for Easter*] and *În vreme de război* [*In war time*] short stories that Ghiţă delimited to some „narrative voices that can be read in a grid of the fictional theory” (Ghiţă, 2013, p.165). The funny world of the fools, filled up with „caprices”, „whims”, „hysterics” suddenly slides in a pathological universe, deformed by anxiety, neurotic episodes, aggressive factors, stressor factors. The omniscient author appeals to observation also as psychological method, the characters are longitudinally followed, the narrative fiction is not necessarily based in action in the present of the story, rather being a medical case history of the character in which there are written the events lived, coming from relations and symbolic significations. It appears that Caragiale himself was pyrophobic and thus it can be explained the choice of the revengeful action of hand burning in *O făclie de Paşte* [*A torch for Easter*] short story. The states of prolonged uncertainty cause psychical destructions, from dreams, nightmares, obsessions, the passing from normal to abnormal is graduated and the final will reveal a psychopathological case in both short stories. Leiba Zibal is an innkeeper in Podeni, with a „long and not too happy” life story (Caragiale, 1981, p.30) with a „pretty good wealth consisting in money and good wine species” (Caragiale, 1981, p.31) but „what Leiba is more concerned now than trembling because of the chills is a threat” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 31). Gheorghe, the servant hired out of mercy, under the appearance of a man who has just been discharged from hospital who is looking for a job, is brutal and glumly, swears and grumbles, is mean, defiant, lazy and he steals. The innkeeper dismisses him and Gheorghe leaves threatening Zibal with death at the resurrection night. Thus it is continued „the career of fear” (Zarifopol, 1930, p.17). The criticism noticed immediately the transition from the comic to tragic registry and the appearance of the short story, in 1889, brought about different opinions. In the line of naturalism (that has rudimentary psychological observations, though), Călinescu sees in the short story a „case analysis”: „Caragiale treats a clinical case, creating a chart, with hereditary data, antecedents, somatic state, prodrome and the others” (Călinescu, 1982, p.496). „The ingenious cruelty of the man mad for fear: this is the main motif of Zibal’s drama” (Zarifopol, 1930, p.17). We must state that our intention is not to classify the short story as a „psychological” one or for „psychological analysis” (as there were not used narrative techniques specific to this) but we also do not want to entirely affiliate it to naturalism, although the reasons brought by Călinescu and Vianu that the short story is a sample of Caragiale’s naturalism are incontestable. The recent criticism (see Cap-Bun, 2014), by solid reasons, draws the attention that Caragiale’s short story is not just a subtle parody of naturalism, an attempt to his undermining, even using its devices.

We state these things because the recording and writing down of the physiological reactions, „the faint organic feeling, coenesthesia of the heroes” (Vianu, 1973, p.122) are important for us only in the extent in which they tell us more than gloss, the privilege of naturalism, namely a seam well exploited: the human psyche. Regardless the intention of the author, naturalism or parody of naturalism, we cannot help observing the modality in which he uses (conscious or not) the trauma as generating factor and catalyser around which the text is produced.

The trauma is caused in adolescence, the scene of aggression he witnessed (a misunderstanding between two carriers when splitting the gain, ended with a victim fallen to the ground in a pool of blood), and moreover the fact that one of the assaulters threatened him („the recreant hurled from the courtyard and passing by the boy, lifted the hand against him... Zibal fainted with fear”) will start a modification of the development

of the Self and identity but also the premises of neurosis. After having lain for several months after the unfortunate event, Leiba finds his job taken and starts „the difficult fight for life”, being unable to integrate himself in the social environment, neither at that time nor later, after having married Sura as all suffered from paludism. The threat of the carrier as not physically materialized, not the actual violence but the latent, emblemized violence in the gesture that activates mythological codes, as Mitchievici (2014) notices also, is the traumatic event. Thus, the first traumatic experience derives from the direct relation with the environment (the scene of the violent aggression) and the assignment of subjective significations (lifted hand). The interaction between external and internal will generate a discrepancy between experience and behaviour with long term effects that will lead to a *structuralmodification* of the person involved. After this incident, Leiba Zibal did not „benefit” of any adjustment, balance, understanding with the person who threatened him, or at least a social compensation, on the contrary, remaining penniless. Though there is a tardive compensation when after the death of his brother in law, he takes over the inn and becomes pretty wealthy. Now, the welfare and safety of his family and even life are endangered by the person who should have offered him help: Gheorghe. The actual situation interferes with the early traumatic situation, the same “script” being repeated: Gheorghe leaves threatening, thus breaking a trauma-compensatory schema that Zibal had succeeded to built after the previous unfortunate event. Once with the new threat it is activated the memory of the former trauma and neurosis of anxiety. The criticism speculated for this short story the Jewish origin of the innkeeper, being stated that his phobias would be historically justified, that the ancestral memory offers them the inclination to be victims. Călinescu distinguished different qualities of Jewish fear: one of the „normal Jews that are intimidated in defensive forms, whining, flexible...” and the second, specific to Zibal „who suffers from wild fear and chronic terror of traumatic origin” (Călinescu, 1982, p.496). Even if he escaped from poverty, the innkeeper is also at the „social periphery”, not integrated in a social schema for two reasons: because he is Israel’s son, thus in opposition with *barefoot people* – Christian, and because he suffers from chills, in opposition with the others who are healthy. The social inadequacy and Gheorghe’s threat distort the perception on collectivity: „... And people are mean and quarrelsome in Podeni!...Abashments... insults... swearing... accusations of poisoning with vitriol... But the threats!” (Caragiale, 1981, p.31) Gheorghe’s threat becomes an instrument of psychological torture, for intimidation, that activates some mechanisms of defence in a logical order, in order to avoid the causing of a new trauma – appeal to authority – as a compensatory countermeasure in order to control fear. Zibal asks for the help of the subprefect who „started to make fun of the coward Jew and mock him” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 32) and we cannot exclude here a shade of antisemitism. The ironical refusal of the subprefect amplifies the state of anxiety and the feeling of fault that he did not bear with Gheorghe until subprefect’s assistant and the two cavalymen had looked for him, as he was suspected „for a matter” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 32). According to the „string of sick consciousness”(Caragiale, 1981, p. 33), Leiba Zibal oneirically and obsessively projects the scene in which „the time limit of Gheorghe’s promise” will come: Gheorghe, the fool, kills his family in broad daylight, in the community of the „barefoot people” who „authorizes” the crime, assisting impassibly at the scene of sacrificing the wife and child.

According to the principle of the snowball, the feeling of fear accumulates terrifying images also from the relating of a real fact by the two students arrived at the inn: „From

the talk of the travellers the circumstance became clear. At the post office situated upside, the night before a breaking in had taken place ended up with a murder in an inn of a Jew. The murdered innkeeper was also responsible for the horses' replacement. The brigands had stolen the horses, and until other horses could have been found, the curious travellers were able to search freely the scene of the murder. Five victims. But the details!"(Caragiale, 1981, p. 35). The suspense and mystery of causing the terrible murder perfectly match the mental projections and look like the nightmare that Leiba had had and for which he „got sick”. We can also talk about an obsessive disorder caused by the existence of the ideas produced by images that are not real, only suggested. The odious details that Zibal guesses from the discussion of the two students and the image of the murderer with primate physiognomy, (according to Cesare Lombroso's theory *the criminal man* is a distinct anthropologic type, that is revealed from the anthropometrical measurements, theory to which, later, will be added observations of psychological nature) are superposed over the physical shape of Gheorghe amplified by the perturbed oneirism. The innkeeper will feed his own real fear with guessed details, („gloomy, he started to figure out everything he had heard... ”), the psychical destruction being now obvious by his wife: „Leiba is not well at all, he is very sick; Leiba has “ideas in his head”... as what meaning could have everything he has been doing for several days and especially what he did today?” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 37). What the innkeeper had done that night, (he had closed the inn earlier, did not open the door although the voices he heard outside were familiar, he startled, his eyes were filled with „fear”, had become irascible, had sharpened the axe with a nervous trembling and ordered angrily for the light to be put off) are self-protection measures, for prevention, for preparation in order to counter-balance the possible threatening situation, with a profound psychical tension. In the Resurrection evening the waiting of the confrontation with violence and death starts with a potential traumatic event. The Jew hears cavalymen that pass by and a piece of a conversation:

- „He had gone to bed early...
- What if he had left?
- He will have his turn some other time...But I would have wanted”... (Caragiale, 1981, p. 38)

The series of inner interrogations regarding the identity of the cavalymen and their intentions produce stress and „a terrible cervical pain”...Only the thought that Gheorghe could have been is enough for starting unconsciously the mechanism of fear that annihilate any action: his powers die out, pieces of incoherent thoughts interfere in his mind, becomes light-headed, the tickle of the clock bothers him, his throat becomes dry, his hand trembles. Without being direct and immediately threatened, comes out on the porch and hopes that the second half of the night to pass at least as the first passed. The bell of the church up the hill is heard that announces the Resurrection. But under the veil of darkness steps and voices are heard again and the incertitude that the danger is still there is confirmed, becoming certitude. The exacerbate fear produces now nervous tensions and sensorial excitations, Leiba identifies the noise of the steps in the sand, „he gets up pushing his chest with his hand, and trying to bring back a lump in his throat ...There are more men outside Gheorghe is also!...”(Caragiale, 1981, p. 40). The imminence of the near impact with the aggressor paralyzes him, leans himself in his left palm near the gate and covers his eyes with the right hand as in an instinctual, ancestral, refusal, a mechanism of self-defence. The fear is more powerful than the reasoning and the mechanism of self-defence alters his consciousness having as result certain symptoms

that are related to psychiatry. The result of perceiving the near danger state is, sometimes, the reaction of remaining motionless. A fall in the abyss „by an unexplainable caprice of the familiar games” in which it is heard loudly and clearly the voice of Sura threatening him that the mail coach was coming, the projection of a state of happiness and of a previous time, the time when he had hoped that this moment could have been avoided. The state of motionless, the lack of reaction is manifested by a confusing state of short time in which the innkeeper repress the reality of the aggression dreaming with his eyes wide opened an exact opposite situation. He experiences the escape from reality and depersonalization (fall into abyss) hearing in this short episode the familiar voice of Sura as a sort of mental homage with the role to reduce anxiety based on the traumatogenic factor. „It was undoubtedly the voice of Sura... A warm ray of hope... a moment of happiness... it is a dream again!” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 40). The possibility of coming out of the situation is cancelled, is already tardive, almost impossible as the tactile perception of the bit that stung him in his left palm brings him one step closer to the accomplishment of the threat. He remains paralyzed and helpless, anticipating with the eyes of his mind what was about to happen, the whole scene of the murder.

The aggressive action in progress affects more the fragile dynamic, biological and psychological balance of the innkeeper. The sensorial perceptions are altered, the hyperesthesia, the lowering of the sensorial limits, supersensitivity at stimuli and macropsia appear:

„In the brain that was burning, the image of the bit gathered some unimaginable dimensions. The tool, continuously spinning, became bigger and bigger, and the hole also became bigger and bigger, so big that in its round shape the monster could stand without bending. What happened in that brain was coming out of the area of human thoughts: life had come to a stage of exaltation from which all were seen, were heard, were touched having giant, chaotic dimensions” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 40). We are on the field of the „monster” from the Grand Hotel, as the main greedy eater of normality, of profanity and as accessing point to spirituality. The tool (the bit) with which Gheorghe stings the gate provokes unconsciously a prospective dimension of death (not a life retrospective), a visionary construction of it, in which the bit becomes the object of the murder „the instrument of torture”. The mental internalization of the image of the bit is associated with the destruction of the body: „the bit in the living bone of the chest, deep, deeper, until it reaches the heart, which it would stop from the mad twitches and hold it still.” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 41). The reaction of motionless is fast and the human body suffers serious disorders: the suprarenal system provides adrenalin and the stress hormones fast, the blood pressure and oxygen increase, the heart beats faster, the skin gets colder and the perspiratory glands are dilated. It is exactly what the victim experiences: „A death perspiration invades the whole body of Zibal; his limbs become weaker and he falls on his knees, as a cattle that bends its throat under the last hit” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 41). The imaginary construction of the death scenario through pain and torture, as Leiba is more scared of what it could have been rather than what it is, causes the power of subconscious to react in limit situation, waking up the instinct of defence-aggression. Passing from the state of motionless to the state of reaction is sudden, „a weird phenomenon, a complete revenge; his trembling stopped, the divergence disappeared and his disfigured face after such a long crisis, took a bizarre calmness” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 41). The defence-aggression is superposed over a psychotic hot flash, this „bizarre calmness” marks the beginning of an acute episode of psychosis and what comes next tends to cancel the idea

that Leiba „defends himself”. Under the appearance of a healthy man, Zibal commits a cruel deed: he catches the hand in a halter, and „with an eccentric inspiration”(Caragiale, 1981, p. 43) will burn it with the flame of the torch until it becomes carbonized, symbolically changing his religion: „Leiba Zibal is not a Jew...Leiba is a *barefoot* ...As Leiba Zibal lit a torch to Cristos” (Caragiale, 1981, p. 44). Magisterially described, almost accurately, by a narrative technique focused on accumulation and narrative syncope textually marked that could symbolize in the psychic plan a rupture, a fragmentation of the psychic life, the symptoms of the character (psychomatic surprised) are included in an authentic case study, a clinic image of schizophrenia.

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