

Pamfil Şeicaru's Literary Portrait

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to forward critical insight into the depictions of Pamfil Şeicaru's complex personality; whether portrayed as publicist, public speaker or politician he is the subject of at least 14 literary works by Ion Agârbiceanu, Liviu Rebreanu, Cezar Petrescu, Marin Preda, Radu Tudoran, Tudor Muşatescu, Mihail Sebastian. Depending on the historical period and its relevancy for the directions and trends of Romanian literature, the works were grouped as follows: a) 1930-1945 – Ion Agârbiceanu, Liviu Rebreanu, Cezar Petrescu, Mihail Sebastian; b) 1945 – the '60s – Tudor Muşatescu, Cezar Petrescu; c) the '70s – Marin Preda, Radu Tudoran. One of the main sources of information for the present study is Silviu Angelescu's almost exhaustive endeavour dedicated the literary portrait.

Keywords: pamphlet, literary character, behaviour, motivation, name

Even if the writers we talk about knew Şeicaru personally or, at least, they had seen him, it is interesting to reproduce the impression which the journalist produces on his contemporaries. One of the first writing on Pamfil Şeicaru, drafted in volume, is a fate irony, a pamphlet written by a certain Ştefan Florescu. The portrait uses by the writers we dwelt previously fixed in the readers' imagination. The feeling of strength and energy is given by the "strong feet", "well-built body", "short but vigorous" neck. Nevertheless, the really "imposing" head is the main element of the portrait—crossed-eyes look, "long, black, curly hair" (Florescu, 1929: 7–8) Merciless is the portrait made by N.D. Cocea, a pamphleteer of the time as feared as Şeicaru, in the volume *On the road to the new Damascus (Pe drumul noului Damasc)*. All the clichés on the Şeicaru's origins are introduced, and the author added his personal note, a memorable portrait: "His twofold origin of gypsy camp member and suburbanite could be read on his face, gestures, habits. He was making suds at the mouth when shouting, swallowing the thick and black lips, looking like two leeches. His eyes were coming out of his head like two onions. He was grabbing with both hands everything which was falling under them: allowances, subventions, decorations, farms, empty lands,

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cement, brick, iron from Reșița or German rotaries. He was swallowing everything” (Florescu, 1996: 6).

This imposing head “decorating” the body, as sarcastically noted Ștefan Florescu, is almost always used as an essential “part” of the portrait. Filipovici had a “genial head”, “curly hair”, “protruding forehead”, “superb lion mane”; Hortolomeu – “pitchy moustache”, “bulging eyes”; Pahonțu–“thick eyebrows”, “black hair”, “wide forehead”; Răcaru – “big rugged head”, “short thick neck”, “long black hair, tousled and uncombed”, “wide forehead”, “staring” eyes, crosseyed; Zopârțan – “big plump face”, “tangled, shaggy hair”; Hristodorescu – thick eyebrows, lion-like mane, green-staring eyes; Vladim – “haughty forehead”, “lion mane”. We also explain the absence of physical references at Alcaz and Țincoca characters by a variation in the characters technique at Cezar Petrescu. Even Patriciu is not characterised physically, he lacks a portrait also by the author’s desire to use the modern literary technique of concentration on the character’s motivation and not on the physical description, as it was traditionally done.

Out of the three portrait gallery (neutral, caricature-portrait; encomium-portrait), it is obvious that it was opted for the second option of caricaturising the character, even not exacerbated, just to suggest certain physical traits, as we are going to see.

Following Tomașevski’s design which suggested the identification of a character by three elements – onomastic (characterisation), masks¹ (external descriptions, clothing) and vocabulary, we move to the speech analyse of Șeicaru’s literary avatars.

Generally, the characters are characterised by verbiage. Alcazis talkative, babbler, gossipy. Țincoca is the demagogue who threatens and seduces the masses, his speech may be adjusted to the audience; depending on the situation he may shout, offend, threaten, all in an amalgamated process where one is not aware if “he gets other drunk or he gets himself drunk” by the words?”. Borcea’s language may be bombastic, uplifting, precious, depending on his interests, but the purpose is always personal, cynical; versatile, he knows how to get the attention of an academic teacher, shouts at his subordinates and janitors, threatens or retracts in the negotiations with the millionaire Bușan. There are also good speakers Hristodorescu, able to animate the masses by oratory and well-chosen and formulated slogans, Vladim, a “huger and vehement orator”.

¹ In Latin, the term *persona* named the mask worn by actors on stage.

The language aggressiveness is used in personal relations (Zălaru speaks briefly, almost barking to his employees, whom he offends dirty, like always dictating; Hristodorescu and Răcaru, the same; Alcaz addresses to the waiter with the Caragiale's word "miserable"), but also publicist-like (Pahonțu even proposes a definition of the pamphlet, just like Șeicaru, when he says that "between violence and cursing is the difference between academy and the gypsy camp"; Zălaru loves the invective; Răcaru is aggressive and polemist – "writes and swears"; Zopârțanis the "terror"). The general image is of oratoric avalanche hiding intentions wished to be dissimulated.

Sometimes, the characters use elevated quotations such as Filipovici, who quotes from classic and modern authors, Răcaru with quotations from the preferred polemist, Leon Daudet. By far, Pahonțu's speech is the most elevated, more intellectualised, more rich in ideas. The same could be accounted for Vladim, only that, in this case, the character does not seem plausible, the ideological divagations and perorations on social justice, Marxism, revolution, etc. seem to be forcedly introduced by the author.

These characters' entire behaviour suggest strength, energy, impetus, interior restlessness: Țincoca is of "perpetual agitation", causing physical fright inclusively by his verbal charges; Alcaz is a *perpetuum mobile*, infinitely oscillating between Capșa, editorial office and Parliament; Zopârțanis "unsettled, barbarian and passionat spirit"; Hristodorescu has a volcano humour; Vladim, an "energetic", "virile" behaviour. Most of the time the surplus of energy causes uncontrolled outbursts, as it happens with Țincoca, who has "spasmodic outbursts".

A transfer of energy takes place between the manager and the newspaper, most often translated into an unusual aggressiveness: the *Voința* program, conceptualised by Alcaz, resumes to "attack and energy"; the same, Pahonțu's *România* is violent, understanding by violence the "natural attribute of the interior impetus"; Zopârțan's *Vatra Veche* is a revolver-journal; *Conștiința națională* owned by Zălaru intends to hit "where it has"; and, finally, the journal *Pământul* unmask, slanders and contains caricatures of "ferocious" cruelty. Hristodorescu encourages the reporters to eliminate their opponents according to the principles "Hit him in the head!", "Cut in fresh meat!"

The Pahonțu lofty walking, his energy and enthusiasm unite in the desire to change the world, the surroundings seems to him to be suffocating, "impetus killer", it is an encomium of the lofty youth, of the exaltation specific for that age. The initial energy turns gradually to verbal violence bias the journal, and then in physical violence, by the movement of chums whom he supports. The energy and the force become tyrannical, suffocating the other characters: Alcaz beats his fist

on the table, telling his rebel subordinates, “In here, I am the master!”; the same behaviour is for the intimidating Zălaru.

Most often the managerial office is the location where the characters are placed. The financial welfare is suggested, sometimes even the snobbism. At Filipovici, the walls are decorated with portraits of Miss, while at Iorgu Hortolomeu, the politicians’ caricaturised portraits are on the walls. It is the “collector’s” perversity, holding pieces, who establishes with his collection a personal relation, who is feeding from the “pieces” which become his creation, setting relations of possessor and possessed object between them. Zălaru’s office is of intellectual impostor, snob and blackmailer where, at a certain point, there are in one place volumes over volumes, works of art, one iron safe suggesting the capitalisation of the journal dishonest income. After three years of journal intense activity of the journal, Alcaz buys a villa in the Filipescu Park, with luxury furniture and works of art. Țincoca is the only one living at the hotel, accumulating debts, totally not interested by the way he lives, being obsessed with the politics and the power achieved by it.

The characters’ motivation is precise. Most often it is indicated by a short sentence-like phrase. Țincoca lives only for politics while Filipovici is strictly interested in the journal success by any means (“the audience buys it”). Classical upstarts are Alcaz, Hortolomeu, Hristodorescu, to whom the dehumanising wish for earnings is added (“Pay me to keep quiet! Pay me not to attack!”), Vladim (“the secret is you to sculpture your statue while you are alive”) and Zălaru (“I want to succeed by any cost!... I want to go up). In exchange, Pahonțu starts his adventure as character like an idealist, concerned by the social justice, wishing for a new country, and then interested in his own destiny (“My star is rising!”), and in the end, he arrives to have just one purpose in his life, his relationship with Cristiana.

The characters’ names are suggestive just in few cases. One element of realism is at Pahonțu, who is indicated by his real name, Popescu. In an effort to transform his personality by changing his name, Vlad becomes Vladim, though the surname was Străvolniceanu, suggesting an old, peasant but noble lineage which the young upstart abandons. At Hartular Hristodorescu, his nickname Șperțular Șperțulărescu (Bribelar Bribesmith) ends up to be used as name. Pantelimon Răcaru and Bartolomeu Zălaru are the most transparent references to Pamfil Șeicaru, both with reference to professions – răcar (crabs-catcher), the one who caught crabs, and zălar, the one who makes armours, just as șeicar/șăicarmean pontonier.

As for the time of the characters’ first entry in the work, the introduction, it is only for Pahonțu where we can notice an exception.

Though he is the character around whom the epical thread is woven, Pahonțiu is introduced later on for an increased effect, but also to suggest the differences between him and the other character, the exemplary destiny which this young man has, who initially is refusing the high society. For the rest, the characters are introduced since the beginning, like Vladim, or gradually according the ranks of secondary characters.

Another method for identification with the person Pamfil Șeicaru is the reference to the publicist profession. Without exception, the characters are presented as members of this branch, in various stages of the career: in the beginning Alcaz is political reporter, author of small articles and chronicles, then he ends up running his own journal through which he gets rich; Filipovici, ex night reporter, arrives the manager of the first illustrated successful magazine in the media; Țincoca is already at the top of the social hierarchy, deputy, journal manager, and continues his ascent as minister; Hortolomeu is journal manager, educated in Paris; Pahonțu is a polemist without journal, a deputy's secretary, and then journal manager; Răcaru, journal manager; Zopârțan, corresponding editor, then manager of political journal, candidate in general balloting; Borcea, journal manager; Zălaru, journal manager; Hristodorescu, journal manager; Patriciu, journal manager.

The past is suggested only in case of some characters, but as social *pattern* the modest origin can be identified: Pahonțu comes from a peasant family, embarrassed by this at the moment of his turning; Zălaru comes from a modest family, a laundrywoman and a gypsy; Hristodorescu's family was established by a horse dealer; and Vladim's parents were plowmen.

As it can be noticed, there is a pattern which partial or total features are respected by the authors. The possibilities of Șeicaru's identification with the mentioned characters are multiple: direct identification (by proper nouns and descriptions, physical portrait) and indirect ones (actions, emotions, biographical elements, the myth "floor and blackmail", the professional activity etc).

Paradoxally, Șeicaru ends to be type of character – of the blackmailing journalist, polemist, verbally aggressive, getting rich by dishonest practices – representative for the Romanian society for the period between the world wars on which he himself had big reserves and which he criticised in multiple editorials and speeches (the imperfection of the Romanian democratic regime, also suggested by own sympathies for the Italian and French fascisms, was one of the journalist's preferred subjects).

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