

Paul Goma. Sabina: Social Avatars and the Vectors of creating the “New-Man”

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Abstract

Interested in building the novel based on real events and providing another version of reality, having as primary target the description of a society in which the lack of modesty is an essential feature of the “normality”, Paul Goma takes a proper route avoiding the linearity and faithfully reflecting the disorder of the evoked world. Being an agent of systematization, the narrator shows how the vectors of creating the “new-man” act: Lie, Fear, Terror, Concessions, Reeducation, Equalization and Suspendationalism, creating an autonomous and essential whole. Without having the possibility to shirk, “history is [emphasis added] the woman, with all her versatility and betrayal”, spirally expressed, in communion with the writer’s style. Therefore, in order to support the narrative pulse, feeling the writing in his fingers, the narrator combines the two “realities”, identifying the existence with the transcendence and balancing them through the dignity he demonstrates in both plans.

Keywords: *Paul Goma, Sabina, history, Communism System, amorality, vectors of creating the “new-man”.*

Seeking outside an object of desire, the protagonist reveals it in the very act of writing that he will reflect on the reading too, compensating the real absence of purity by inventing it, in a harsh world of sacredness, in perfect accord with Nietzsche's statement “God is dead”. Exposing the orgies and punishing the desecrators of graves, the narrator demonstrates high dignity, unquenched by the attributes of the communist mechanism: lie, hunger, fear, terror, nationalization, deportation, concessions. Being in the initial point – “dust and ashes. I was still at the starting point as if I had never started; as if I had done a lap of departure, but I forgot to go, or I was not been able to, or God knows, and now I was waiting, on the spot, for «the true starting»”¹ – with reference to the round shape of the

¹ Paul Goma, *Sabina*, 1st ed. (Cluj: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1991), 284.

Bessarabian land, he intersects Eros with history in a spiral generating of deception, the more bitter, the more they become an unavoidable permanence:

“the spiral of history repeating itself (but not exactly) is like my love for Sabina: sometimes it is, sometimes not, on the contrary - but without ceasing to be, very much; sometimes it is precisely, sometimes it is a variation on the same Sabina...”²

Interested in building the novel based on real events and providing another version of reality (“Even if, from the structural point of view, I am not a passionate realist, through a possible novel, realistic as well, without abandoning the real, the reality, I could provide a version of reality (as it is in my own reality),³ having as primary target the description of a society in which the lack of modesty is an essential feature of the “normality”, Paul Goma takes a proper route avoiding the linearity and faithfully reflecting the disorder of the evoked world. He also alludes to simultaneity, illustrating and completing it only in the *Intimate-Novel*:

„And after all, honor to the man who, stretching a point, has to make it a line, pulling out from a split second, to reach the four-minute [...]. *It is sure that in reality it happens somehow like this, it seems rather a succession, but I speak of what happens in relativity: concentration, simultaneisation [emphasis added].*”⁴

However, the narrative grammar indicates a coherent structure, with a mature production design, the more effective the more joining poeticism to history, fairy tale and the play, in a game of combining the opposites, where the art of writing is finalized:

“I am a realist, I cannot afford to jump from one to another without an uniting feature: my hand and thought go elsewhere - but only after thoroughly having studied the map. Or: I dream cock-and-bull stories – but in a real framework...”⁵

Therefore, we have a theme of the double, seen from the description of Sabina and developed within the binary structures, reminding of the previous novel. If in *Astra* the duplicity of the occupant is directly proportional to the tendency to create the “new-man”, in *Sabina* the reader faces the accomplished fact, the achieved “progress”, the binomial showing severe criticism of the regime, where the central character's behavior, as a product of an evil world, finds its full explanation. And on this foundation, the expectation motive postpones the final disappointment, painting the moment during and after removing the “Blaga fund”,

² Goma, *Sabina*, 295.

³ *Ibidem*, 224.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 149.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 225.

appealing to reality, fiction and, finally, denying the first one unable to accept the true dimension of tragic. In fact, this narrative attitude comes from the very psychological structure of the novelist, his mistrust being a definite result of external aggressions that, wanting to protect the reader, he softens, the prepared impact having no longer the same intensity. Internalized and, "possibly, pathetic", the narrator wants understanding, but not compassion, and the addressed perspective, with recourse to irony and humor, clearly proves an opening towards this option:

“– Why do you tell the tragedies laughing: do you make fun of them, of you?

– I shrugged – laughing.”⁶

„ Dust-and-ashes - not exaggerating? I am not exaggerating, now? Do I give up to pathetic attitude, to the pathetic attitude I am, to the pathos in every fiber of mine? After so many Russian novels swallowed in one gulp, I would also have started write “Russian” novels, to become Russian (maybe yes, as old people would say? who knows what the golden future of our country holds for us?) trying to defend myself, to prevent aggression, I would have acquired the habit to swell, even to invent dangers – in order to justify my reaction ...; maybe even to explain myself, to justify: what I am and how, namely, I am made; why me, why no one else; the why so, and not otherwise - just like in the Russian prose, eternal and sometimes so bad that, after reading it, you ask yourself if the stupid one is yourself... *Because, on the one hand, I exaggerate, on the other hand (sometimes simultaneously), I minimize some true and especially terrible happenings; brutal, barbaric, cruel and bloody happenings, even fierce - I would say: killing - in any case: mutilating. I mock these ones; I laugh at them because of their pretentions and put them to their places [emphasis added].*”⁷

In order to understand this mechanism and to be able to judge the discursive change, obvious with Sabina’s transformation, we should know the factors that determine this transformation, predicted in the early pages of the novel, having its origin in the symbol of a mask that hide the bestial eyes of the system. Thus, in a society overwhelmed by lie, hypocrisy and concessions, the *economy-of-war*, “unknown during the war against Russians, installed after Russian peace”, will dictate the law, and fear will give birth to the pleasure to mutilate the neighbor, treading over morality and conscience, twinning with stupidity and serve it faithfully. Being obedient to this reality, with a thousand qualities and a great drawback: fear”, Sabina, as an exponent of materialism, denigrate the name of love, giving statements of denial and defying the narrator, as the law of character’s

⁶ Paul Goma, *Sabina* (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi, 2005), 228.

⁷ *Ibidem* (1991), 284-285.

autonomy. At the same time, the *crescendo* of the monologue into a dialog intensifies the protagonist's drama, through a retrospective appeal to the real autobiographical events, in the context of the prison and the interrogation of Medias security in 1949, when the desecration and the dishonoring of the maternal body surpassed all imagination.

Being transposed in the adolescent time and intending to punish in a moralizing way this truth through its accurate record, the narrator summarizes the social orgies, citing the paternal model, thirsty of action and knowledge. However, "the rescue of the fund" contradicts the psychology of the internal-Bessarabian, eager of great deeds ("I was thirsty of action, hungry of deeds, no matter how they were, objectively, what mattered to me was that they were always great")⁸, proving to be "a secret operation [...], perfect due to guards complicity". Being born under the sign of failure, making a transportation act and not one of anti-communist opposition, in despair, the narrator blames history, appealing to sensory suggestions that "govern the isthmus of memory in the recovery effort", hoping for better times:

"I wanted to stretch myself, if not under the hard-and-burial-stone, then in a normal bed of non-sleeping, to lie there a year, or ten, when the disgusting stinky bitch of history would have calmed down, cooled, settled at its home, now old, useless."⁹

How is, therefore, the "textual ethics" formed and what would be the ideal score to analyze the novel?

In order to meet the problems of writing, we intend to penetrate inside the evoked social mechanism, generator of differences and contradictions, which fertilizes the Romanesque movement, favoring the passage from fictional to real and vice versa. What we will see is that, being an agent of systematization, the narrator shows how the vectors of creating the "new-man" act: Lie, Fear, Terror, Concessions, Reeducation, Equalization and Suspendationalism, creating an autonomous and essential whole. Analyzing these categories, we seek to outline an overview to define Communism, the "new-man", to show how these elements function and how they merge with those from the first part of the analysis.

Being from those who embody the difference, the narrator places himself, even from the first lines, under the sign of binomial, retelling events from the perspective of a "us" that targets the refugees from Bessarabia and Bukovina. In such a way, he ignores the legal age and emphasizes the one of Bessarabian-refugee. Therefore, being opposite to the others, the protagonist explains the fate

⁸ Goma, *Sabina* (1991), 76.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 291.

of his compatriots by appealing to the endless re-fuge that became the cause of physiological changes and prematurely anticipating the mutations caused by age:

“At my age, we are talking about still-growing, but I have one age, another; the others - anyway, the second being that of Bessarabian-refugee: being aliens-in-our-own-country, we wilt, we pass away very quickly, we come down before getting up, we dry before bearing fruits - at least so I think things are with us. Maybe it is because of the sun: we ran continuously, we sought re-fuge in the West, always in the West, in the sense of walking and the day for us was longer than for the others and we did not rest at night, as much as we needed - when we needed more rest than the others. [...]

I said that we, the Bessarabians, are the opposite of the chicken drained from the egg – maybe we are so, and so, we combine the short with the long and the result is the same as for hard laying hens: short-life – when I look at my mother, I see how she is getting to the end, thinning, close to the end. That’s why. That’s why we, the Bessarabians, don’t grow in height, but in depth – to be closer to it.”¹⁰

After making fun of “the century Romanian-Soviet friendship”, he puts the lie, as first category, at the basis of all injustices, disclosing the truth, being determined to remember and to tell everything. Distorting the reality, the lie becomes a reliable weapon in the hands of fraudsters of mind and matter, allowing misinformation and eradicating any possibility to be part of the normal world. As for fear, still present from the previous writings, it evolves along with the social “development” and gives birth to stupidity, “the gratitude of centuries towards the great Soviet people”, the “gratitude” for mutilation, rape, equalization, reeducation, transformation in aggregate, and finally for losing the identity, the humanity and the confining within the security wall. Being able to capture the entire social perimeter, the fear derives from “too-knowing” or, on the contrary, from the fear of the unknown, contributing to the emergence of contempt due to deep disappointment of students towards the teachers, equaling people through cowardice, spinelessness and indifference.

In order to represent this fact, the narrator compares the *scientists* and the *humanists*. Giving favor of the latter, as responsibility for the taught matter, he illustrates together with his two friends, Octavian and Septimiu, three types of contempt against the former, practitioners of “anti-communist resistance in front of the mirror”. Thus, being in the range of death, fearing of losing the material goods or desiring to recover what has been confiscated, the people cease to be the same, being prone to concessions, forgetting about solidarity, ready to go up to denial,

¹⁰ Goma, *Sabina* (1991), 61-62.

denying the revered values of life and embracing the non-values. Being an anti-materialist, with “overplus” origin, desperately awaiting a model, the protagonist sharply criticizes the lack of character of the writers and sanctions them ironically, using syntactic and stylistic clues, in a collision of assumptions that determine the truth:

“In the first weeks of Sibiu, at Astra, I was waiting for Camil Petrescu (I read all I could find about him). What a great writer and what insignificant man he became overnight through what he had written afterwards [...].

Being a good boy, Octavian wonders whether our great insignificant ones and, the former great ones who became ass-kissers, write what they write... with the gun in the head... In case of Sadoveanu, he claims to know «from a one of our Romanian railways employee that *Mitrea Cocor* was not written by Sadoveanu, only signed – with the gun in the head...» [...]

The-gun-in-the-head... I don't believe it. Not because the security agent would have been good, but the writer was not good. Why should they scare him with a gun? It was enough to pass under his nose a pile of money... If the party promises the great writer that, besides money, he will receive the title of Academician, of President of such and such committee for peace, that he has to travel to the rotten West - and our good comrade Dej gives him a worker handshake, taken by photographs and given to newspaper... [...]

I'm just saying... I do not know contemporary writers, much less daily ones... I do not know where our literature is: if the writer has to make a million compromises, eat a thousand shits, kill five wives, three children - to see his books written, printed? I wouldn't have known, but I know. No way. Because no way – enough! [...]

I don't know. What I know is: I've got no teacher that I can follow, imitate – and love. These ones gave us one alive. There are still a few: Arghezi, Blaga, Barbu, Mrs. Papadat-Bengescu and... and that's about it, maybe there are more, but I don't know them. They know nothing.

However, I am waiting. That's my job – I am waiting almost happy: maybe not in a good day, how it is now, at Astra...”¹¹

At the same time, he sketches, based on the construction of a pyramid of bestial orgies where “anything-that-is-done” becomes a motto and a way of rising to the master's boot, the mechanism of the System. Operating with a tested ideology, being aware that the material things determine the spirit, the communists use this reality against man – “the materialism will teach that material things must be confiscated, the owner liquidated”, manipulating it and destroying its inside

¹¹ Goma, *Sabina* (2005), 221-223.

through outside. Therefore, we see emerging a "population" of suspended people busily toiling for the "Para-Romanian Shoemaker-ist Party", far from faith, forgetting about true industrial labor solidarity and reminding about "a feature old as Romania..." – the *suspendationalism*:

"Of course: it was not the proletariat that had the power and the truth of the club. Dad, who feels like a hunting dog (as if he were my son), said several times:

- Listen to me; we live under the rule of shoemakers! What communism? – Shoemaker-ism! What proletariat? – Shoemakers! The shoemaker-ists lead us, enlightens us, they make us happy – after having made us happy with Romanian Shoemaker Republic, where the leading power is the Para-Romanian shoemaker-ist Party!

- Hush! said my mother, terrified.

He does not exaggerate too much: in the country, the management positions: popular council, union, party, kolkhoz, sovkhoz, cooperative, collection, trade – everything, were occupied, if not all, at least most of them by: shoemakers, tailors, furriers, blacksmiths, carpenters – and very seldom by a comrade gypsy. Although the craftsmen had before their workshops, their tools, their materials - in addition: journeymen, apprentices... none was punished as an «exploiter»; on the other hand, a peasant with a watermill (rather a props one), a thrasher (functioning no more than one month per year), a sawmill - that one was an «owner of means of production»: they were confiscating him his means and the owner was seeing my ass at the Channel. But not the craftsman – why? Especially if he was Hungarian? Simple: the craftsman (especially a Hungarian one) was serving the communists – the peasant (even without mill, thrasher, sawmill) did not."¹²

"Turning continuously in the boiler of history", being a supporter of the so-called equality by deportation, Channel, humility, lying, the Communist Party promotes "those placed on two chairs, inside-the-ass, suspenders" who know well the good people, always available for concessions and favors. The result is therefore a society governed by individuals with a "structure, mentality and life philosophy of waiter, of shoemaker", that may remain for years, decades, centuries, well suspended", due to a strong heredity recorded by Caragiale:

"This category is called bourgeoisie: boorishness. I do not think it is right: the cad is a «foreigner», a man got out of his environment and put to another; not knowing the laws, the rules; behaving badly (as a clown), because he doesn't know how to behave in new environment – that scares him... The cad can be «solved»: either he learns the good manners (?) and stays, or he is sent to where he came from. The suspender is not a cad, nooo... – for this reason he may not be pertinent any longer.

¹² Goma, *Sabina* (2005), 283.

Even if he came late to distribution, he knew to make himself indispensable to the bosses, to make his subordinates, even the equal ones, be afraid of him, knowing as no one else has to make it clear that his file is clean, and his back is thick... And as his morality is limited to: Yes-sir-it's-possible, the suspender may remain for years, decades, centuries (as long as the communism will last) screwed into... his suspension. For instance: as Suspensionalism is not a new feature, not a communist one – being as old as... Romania: if we find it in Caragiale's works, it means that it will last for at least another century... [...].”¹³

If the noted group, characterized by servility, occupies the top of anarchy, the example of Bessarabians is its opposite, a category that the narrator considers a landmark of high moral conduct. The “nowadays Jews”, the survivors of the surrender in 1940, of the second surrender in 1944, always fleeing to the West, the Bessarabians demonstrate high culture and creativity – “we invented, not only the (Soviet) hut, but the telephone notice as well”, contributing not only to their own rescue, but also saved other national categories, liquidated and deported to the unknown. Related to the mentioned category, the narrator's mother, lacking “the sense of a man's life and that of a country teacher: Monograph,”¹⁴ being a victim of tailors and barbers, the product of a terrifying destiny, unscrupulous, always alert and in persecution, confirms and completes the humanistic “topography” by the dignity with which she faces the fate, despite the pain and horror she had to endure:

“– Screw that Monograph!, intervened father. It's important for us to be healthy. As nail is removed by nail, let's make, together this time, the Monograph of Agârbici village – what do you say, my girl?

- Of course we'll make it...

Even today it had no chance to be done - and won't have tomorrow either. I think I know what he is thinking about: it's too late to start anything, even a Monograph. My mother got suddenly old, from the inside first, then from the outside. My mother's soul got old, withered, wrinkled – the body does not matter now. But even in the state in which she was (conscious), I never heard her saying: What else...?, although she had all the reasons to say that...”¹⁵

Putting love at the foundation of everything, as Apostle Paul¹⁶ sings in the hymn of love, and criticizing the pseudo-equality imposed by the Communists, the narrator gives glory to the humanistic sciences, claiming the metaphysical force of

¹³ Goma, *Sabina* (2005), 287-288.

¹⁴ *Ibidem* (1991), 279.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 13, 1-13.

the word and showing that the man lives not only with earthy bread, but also with heavenly bread, with the word of God. Being foreign to the "new world", this judgment loses its poignancy, the system acting in accordance with the theory of reversed principles, relying on re-education and showing how the apprentice will surpass his master in brutally:

"– Sure, right, but there's another way: Of course, all evil came from... the Light from the East – damn the cesspool with lavalier! – but in terms of repression, after the machine began to function, unlike other sectors, it was left to colonized, to the aborigines. Does it mean that they left us more freedom? The NKVD left for the Security, not freedom but a spirit of initiative – and for us, the victims, a much harder destiny, because... *Who drew the eye? The brother... Aha, that's why he drew it so well...* [emphasis added]."¹⁷

Thus, "the freedom of man to hurt the man"¹⁸, the Communism transforms the stupidity into an effective weapon, justifying the motto "Work, do not think". Challenging this formula and sanctioning it through Sabina that illustrates "the «division of communist labor»: me with the hoe, her with the portfolio", Paul Goma builds his novel coveting an active reader, in a writing that meets all the qualities of a woman: alluring, mysterious, sensual, taking *Her* name and form, through a series of galleries and obstacles the more hidden, the more tempting to discover:

"The books are like women; listen to what I say because I know the matter: the more hidden, the more forbidden, the more tempting they are; the more wanted, the more designed to think to."¹⁹

Being placed in two separate plans, differentiated at the beginning with a "world of lascivious sleepiness"²⁰, represented by erotic games on the writing, the protagonist perceives them as a whole, as a result of disillusionment and betrayal occurred in both spheres. Without having the possibility to shirk, "*history* is [emphasis added] the woman, with all her versatility and betrayal,"²¹ spirally expressed, in communion with the writer's style. Therefore, in order to support the narrative pulse, feeling the writing in his fingers, the narrator combines the two "realities", identifying the existence with the transcendence and balancing them through the dignity he demonstrates in both plans. Appealing to "the messianic

¹⁷ Goma, *Sabina*, 184-185.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem* (1991), 265.

²⁰ Nicoleta Sălcudeanu, *Graffiti* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1999), 49.

²¹ Nicoleta Sălcudeanu, *Patria de hârtie. Eseu despre exil* (Paper fatherland. Essay on exile) (Braşov: Aula, 2003), 107.

time, in which perpetual converts into eternal,²² in a clear hunger of expression and from the desire of a perfect writing, Paul Goma aims beyond being, “thus bringing us to the virginity, hereafter inviolable, of the feminine,”²³ as a symbol of perfection, distinguishable and, at the same time, unbridled in evanescent contact with creative voluptuousness.

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²² Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalitate și infinit. Eseu despre exterioritate* (Totality and infinity. Essay on exteriority), Translation, glossary and bibliography by Marius Lazurca, Afterword by Virgil Ciomos (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 256.

²³ Lévinas, *Totalitate și infinit*, 231.