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**CAROL ARDELEANU**  
—  
**OBSESSION WITH FAILURE AND DECAYED SPACES**

**(DOCTORAL THESIS – SUMMARY)**

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Carol Ardeleanu's work has been insufficiently investigated until now. The author was unrighteously maintained in a "shadowy" corner of our literature. Almost absent from the debates initiated by recent specialty journals, and more present than presented in the dictionaries of Romanian writers and in the works of literary history and criticism, the author is little known nowadays.

Trying to reconstruct the suburb trajectory in the Romanian prose of the last century, in her recent monographic study, *Histories of Periphery. The Slums in the Romanian Novel from G. M. Zamfirescu to Radu Aldulescu* (2009), Georgiana Sârbu presents *The Hollow* by Eugen Barbu, *The Waste Land Full of Love* by G. M. Zamfirescu, and *The Baker's Lover* by Radu Aldulescu, etc., whereas *The Consul, the Tanner, and the Actress*, Ardeleanu's dark novel about the outskirts of Bucharest would have deserved at least a short presentation in such a developed study. In 2011, in *The Slums in the Romanian Prose*, Dana Matei raises the awareness of the same novel written by Ardeleanu, and places the author in the category of writers interested in the slums in the Romanian literature. In the same year, 2011, in a doctoral thesis on the interwar Romanian novel, Daniel Luca presents the novels *The Consul, the Tanner, and the Actress*, *The Brothel*, and *Dog's Life*, partially regaining Ardeleanu's vindication. In 2013, a novel written by the forgotten writer (*Worms of Earth*) is mentioned in "Vatra Veche" on account of the album-anthology *Anina – Steierdorf. Viziuni/Visionen* by Gheorghe Jurma and Erwin Josef Țigla and the attention paid to the coal mining region by Nicolae Sârbu. Moreover, Ardeleanu is considered a sort of "outlandish sparsity" because of his interest in Anina in the interwar period. At the same time, Ardeleanu's volumes of sketches and short stories, *Revolutionary Russia*, *In the Streets of Iași*, *The White Dress*, *In the Kingdom of the Night*, the drama *The Junkhouse*, and the novels *A Murder..... (All the Same, Yet No One Like Another)*, *The Fishermen*, *Mister Tudor*, *I Killed God* etc. remain little known to the contemporary readers.

Even if it does not deplete all the issues about Carol Ardeleanu, the present thesis aims to the reconstruction of the writer's life, work, and criticism that concerns his works, and attempts to lighten up an almost forgotten literary spirit. Ardeleanu dedicated not only his talent, but his

entire life to literature; however no one had ever dedicated to him a monographic study. The current demarche is therefore a deed of moral repair and of late yet useful justice. Carol Ardeleanu's works deserve to be brought to light and presented to the large public, literary history and criticism at their real dimension, at least for the author's endeavour to present, in his books, not only the unspectacular daily heroism, but also the uniqueness of several obscure, famished yet very human spaces, little explored or shallowly approached in the Romanian literature before.

The first chapter of the present study reveals the significant moments from Carol Ardeleanu's life and provides the author's portrait from various perspectives: Carol Ardeleanu, the child, Carol Ardeleanu, the teenager, the beatnik, the refugee, etc. The abject slum school, the first years of life, and the years spent at the Beauty Art School influenced the author's later works. Further on, we attempt to highlight the role played by the literary coffee houses in Bucharest, i. e. Carul cu bere, Kübler, and Capșa, since "the devoted one" (Ardeleanu) visited them quite often. In the end of the chapter, mention should also be made about the poor conditions in which the author lived and worked his entire life.

The interwar novelist was initially a poet. Ardeleanu published his poems in various famous journals of his time. We present the author's first lyrical attempts and the poem *Brotherhood*, influenced by democratic convictions, and Carol Ardeleanu's intense and devoted activity in the journals "The Evening Star", "The Literary Romanian People", "The Flame", "Romania", "Branches", „The Fore-top Gallant Sail", etc.

Another chapter is dedicated to the publicist (to the art chronicles and Ardeleanu's collaboration, in 1917, to *A Wanderer's Notebook*, rubric of "Romania").

The *short prose* is an "incision" in Carol Ardeleanu's short stories and sketches. The first results in this respect bring to light an author interested in observation and passion for truth. Various common facts are gathered in the volumes *Revolutionary Russia* (1918), *In the Streets of Iași* (1920), *The White Dress* (1921), and *In the Kingdom of the Night* (1923). The author's impressions from the refuge are collected in the volume of sketches and short stories entitled *Revolutionary Russia*, and the painful happenings from a poor Moldova make up the volume *In the Streets of Iași*. Without creating complex characters, Ardeleanu brings to light sad stories and common happenings in his two last short prose volumes as well: *The White Dress* and *In the Kingdom of the Night*.

The description of the miserable spaces populated by losers and other "human wrecks", the dynamics of the social evolution, and themes such as the discrepancy between the spiteful rich class and the poor workers are pretty convincing only later, when the short story writer lets

the novelist to manifest himself, but the accounts from *Revolutionary Russia*, *In the Streets of Iași*, *The White Dress*, and *In the Kingdom of the Night* include "the germs" of the author's future novels, and announce a prose writer interested in communities living and working in hard conditions and in obscure dramas lived at "the edge of society". The author's short prose volumes might not be successful but their investigation contributes to a better understanding of the author's work; they influence, precede, and explain, to a certain extent, Ardeleanu's forthcoming novels.

A distinct chapter is dedicated to the dramatist, and especially to the drama *The Junkhouse*. Mention should also be made about the unpublished dramas *The Garden of Happiness*, *House of Winds*, *A Man from Another World*, and *The Last Chapter*.

The readings from Dostoievski, Zola, Gorki or Balzac influence the proseman's novels. A large part of the thesis is therefore dedicated to the novelist. Born in the slums, the author denounces the tragical existence from heterogeneous miserable work environments, and illustrates the abjectness that he investigated and felt on his own, the abjectness in which he lived his life. The exploration of the communities touched by debasement and ugliness gave rise to strange and horrible images that seemed to be stripped off from a world perceived like a prison: the universe of the "lowest" unrest from the "edge" of society, undergoing a continuous state of pauperism. In his books, the author therefore brings to light the "outsider" and a type of literature that lacks the romanticedulcoration.

Ardeleanu's first novel, *The Consul, the Tanner, and the Actress*, is inspired from the life the author lived in the outskirts of Bucharest, and represents a proof of the writer's bravery in the interwar years. The literary critics were enthusiastic about the novel. They pointed out the realist description of the tanners' pernicious work and living conditions, and praised the presence in the book of characters such as Barbu Sălceanu and Mezzano, etc. Ardeleanu's outskirts, sheltering a sad and exasperated, yet wistful humanity, remain the author's favourite space, the place where he feels comfortable with himself; it is the topoi that inspired him to write most about bare-footed, decayed humans, and the losers' greatest existential dramas.

*The Brothel* is the book that demonstrates that the veristic novels about decayed spaces little known by Ardeleanu's contemporaries are undoubtedly predestined to the author. The book is practically written for a lustful humanity. The "scent" of the outskirts and the miserable life lived "at the edge of society", described in *The Consul, the Tanner, and the Actress*, is replaced by a story about transient "love", debauchery, and the daily ordure from "prohibited" houses. *The Brothel* is a book about vernacular harlotry and the inglorious secrets of a rotten, yet fascinating universe: the cocottes' world from the interwar Bucharest. The moral principles are

eluded in the bacchanalian atmosphere touched by promiscuity and vices, and populated by women of no morals, no humanity, lack of respect, and lustful men. Beyond the most diverse issues about the illicit prostitution, *The Brothel* is also a novel about the moral and material fall of the house of Buescu.

After the years 1929-1933, the author descends into the coal mining region of Anina. Ardeleanu's wish is to faithfully describe facts and frames that characterise the coal miners' ordeal. The prose writer's moral investigation is determined by a painful reality and the wish to praise the coal miners' work as well. *The Worms of Earth* is a novel about the outburst of an oppressed class, constantly lied and threatened with dismissal and poverty, a book in which the proletarian life and the underground Romanian "slavery" live together. It is not a simple novel about the workers' bitter exploitation. Hell is unleashed at Anina in order to disclose new issues about the great fight beneath the earth, about the coal miners' terrifying life and strive for social justice and freedom. The book unmasks the inhuman treatment from a choky workplace and the tormenting work carried out by distorted bodies in the tentacular space of a coal mine so little known by Ardeleanu's readers. The book also explains the class antagonism, and the causes for which the elements of social harmony between the exploiters and the oppressed community are always destroyed by the first group, etc.

The social picture of the author's next novel, *The Fishermen*, realistically describes the harsh yet secluded life from Vâlcov. It is an "incision" into a strange and autochthonous region (and community) sparsely known in the interwar period of time. In fact, *The Fishermen* is a book about the bitterness of the life in the Delta.

The author continues to be interested in miserable spaces and crippled dreams in his last novels as well. The depressed and depressing universe of ramblers and beggars is illustrated in *Dog's Life*, and the interest in the social parasitical life is demonstrated in *A Murder..... (All the Same, Yet No One Like Another)*. Both books describe the unbelievable life of the people living in misery, whose existence has no meaning at all. They illustrate the author's concern for homeless people, poverty, and failure. For this kind of humans, happiness seems to be forbidden.

The last part of the chapter is dedicated to two different novels: *I Killed God* and *Mister Tudor*. *I Killed God* is a metaphysical drama about the religious enigmas of a soul haunted by painting, and *Mister Tudor* is an attempt to artistically present Tudor Vladimirescu's life.

Carol Ardeleanu, the novelist, is superior to the poet, to the short writer, to the publicist, and to the dramatist, even if the author practically employs the same procedure in his novels, short stories, sketches etc.: anchored in the realities existing in our country and not only at national level, he combines the documentation with the epic and presents various dark sides of

the society he lived in in genuine authentic books. Carol Ardeleanu's sorrowful novels destroy or mutilate the reader, who can hardly forget about the overwhelming life lived at "edge" of society, closer to Hell than to Purgatory. The cursed existence of the communities from pernicious environments presented with no adornment by the journalist's eye "trained" by the Russian school and influenced by naturalistic studies (especially by Zola's method) is realistic. However the environments described in Ardeleanu's books are more than mere backgrounds or bleak sceneries. They endow the author with the status of painter and reconstructor of the collective issues about proles, ghostly depths of coal mines, slums and other spaces inhabited by communities living on the lowest levels of the social scaling.

Hymns "dedicated" to the brutal existence and to the nightmare that we call life, Carol Ardeleanu's novels are sympathetic because we find in the author's books characters living beneath the normal human level, on the verge of absorption or destruction generally determined by the environment they live in. Even if, sometimes, the great mass of poor individuals from the "edge" of society is exploited and ends its existence in a deplorable manner, humanity itself is slashed or just dissimulated, but not destroyed in most of the situations. Like in Agârbiceanu's works, one might notice Ardeleanu's sincere love and a certain spiritual congeniality for the oppressed and unfortunate human beings. The corners of the damned worlds ignored by other authors emerge in Ardeleanu's books not only to describe the harsh living conditions of those who are oppressed and the way in which their life is crippled off and filled with terrible tragedies, but also to praise humanity itself, the power, the obduracy, the sincere affectioning, and the conscious solidarity of the oppressed communities and of the simple individual under crucial, overwhelming circumstances. A generous "wave" of humanism overflows in Ardeleanu's dramatic work since the writer praises humanity no matter if the oppressed humans are driven by propulsive forces or they are merely pauper ruins living "on the edge". Even if they do not try or try but do not succeed to change their life in the urban drains and their end is generally depressing, the human wrecks that populate the writer's books and see the hardships of life as something common are loved by the author because they shelter in themselves the sparkle of humanity itself, profound and beautiful dispositions, and that something belonging to the human immortality.

The final remarks and a relevant bibliography complete the doctoral thesis.

We attempt - through the present study - to bring to light Carol Ardeleanu's life and work, and to rectify several issues concerning the author's biography and critical studies connected with his literary achievements. The novelty of research is therefore given by the topic itself: the life and work of a forgotten writer who recreated the novel in the interwar period of

time, by describing, in his books, new environments and various oppressed communities. The author's support for our familiarisation with the tentacular worlds is undeniable. Ardeleanu extended the thematic area of the interwar novel, and introduced the reader in almost unknown worlds where the humble existence and the sultry aspiration cannot be neglected anymore.

The present thesis is also a token of appreciation for the author's strive to present, in his books, not only new areas of existence but also a diverse human material. We find, in the writer's sketches, short stories, novels, etc. a character gallery made up of losers and degraded human beings, and parts of the miserable life lived by petty people. In dramatic pages, the author points out the anonymous effort and tragic "show" performed by the people living "on the edge of society", and especially the unhappiness of being a human, sometimes. The writer's prose, mostly made up of undoubtedly authentic books about the less significant communities and people living in our society, deserves to be brought to light.

The author's contribution to the history of the Romanian literature cannot be neglected anymore. Skilful penman, Carol Ardeleanu completes the complex image of the interwar Romanian literature. The author's novels draw up a realistic kaleidoscope of insalubrious environments made up of items that support our knowledge about the swarming world of the people living "on the edge". Although microscopical universes, the communities described in Ardeleanu's books become "multi-headed hydras" capable to produce seismic convulsions both in the prose writer's heart and the reader's soul.

Carol Ardeleanu's works about a formerly dramatic Romania, unjustly forgotten, once brought to light, have the power to confront the times.

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