

[https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2022.5\(2\).08](https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2022.5(2).08)
UDC 821.135.1(478)"19"



A GREAT WRITER IN THE BACKGROUND OF AN EPOCH

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Received: 03. 14. 2022

Accepted: 04. 28. 2022

Abstract. The aspect that mainly characterizes the literary process from the 90s of the last century is the intensification of the process of capitalization on the interwar literary heritage. Many writers are re-included in the circuit of our spiritual values. The publication of their works is followed by monographic investigations. Studies, portraits and essays are written in anthologies and literary histories. Leon Donici is one of the most original and innovative prose writers. Outlined as an artistic personality in the Russian cultural environment, Leon Donici brought in Romanian literature an ostentatious nostalgic spirit: romantic, but also realistic; clear, but also deeply tragic. A well-defined personality, Leon Donici was overwhelmed by contradictory impulses and deserved, on account of this, an unequal acceptance that was dominated by numerous stereotypes.

Keywords: *modernism, influences, lyricism, contradictory, sensitivity.*

Rezumat. Aspectul ce caracterizează în principal procesul literar din anii '90 ai secolului trecut este intensificarea procesului de valorificare a patrimoniului literar interbelic. Mulți scriitori sunt re-incluși în circuitul valorilor noastre spirituale. Publicarea lucrărilor acestora este urmată de investigații monografice. Studiile, portretele și eseurile sunt incluse în antologii și istorii literare. Leon Donici este unul dintre cei mai originali și inovatori prozatori. Conturat ca personalitate artistică în mediul cultural rus, Leon Donici a adus în literatura română un spirit nostalgic ostentativ: romantic, dar și realist; lucid, dar și profund tragic. Personalitate bine conturată, Leon Donici a fost copleșit de impulsuri contradictorii și s-a bucurat, din această cauză, de o acceptare inegală, dominată de numeroase stereotipuri.

Cuvinte-cheie: *modernism, influențe, lirism, contradictoriu, sensibilitate.*

Introduction

A prose writer, a playwright and a publicist, Leon Donici (Russian name Leonid Dobronravov) is a great literary injustice. Very little has been written about him. The publication of the volume *The Great Archimedes* (1997) paved the way for many attempts at multiple interpretations of the author's prose. The volume changes the opinion of the critiques, too unfavorable until then, and places the prose writer among the notoriety of Romanian prose. Although the edition in question is not complete, it allows us to try an

overall axiological judgment. In the meantime, the volume stimulated the appearance of studies and articles signed by Ana-Maria Brezuleanu, Sava Panzaru, Iurie Colesnic, the most knowledgeable contemporary researchers of Leon Donici's work. The creative biography of the writer is reconstructed, rich in legends that circulated during his life as well. The literary models and influences are being identified, including those of Aleksei Remizov, Feodor Sologub, Leonid Andreev. However, there was less talk about the Romanian models of Leon Donici's prose: Mihai Eminescu and Ion Creanga.

The end of the 19th and the early 20th century are marked by a rupture in the social and artistic life of Russia [1]. Philosophical-religious societies are organized, in which intellectuals, scientists, writers meet with theologian prelates to discuss spiritual and religious issues. The approach of the catastrophe is being felt more and more acutely. In literature and art appear works focused on apocalyptic motifs, characteristic of the "crisis" of the modern world: in the end, it acts, uncontrollably, on the imagination of some, producing disordered representations" [2]. In Russian literature, along with these, there is a spiritual renewal, a cultural boom, characterized by philosophical exaltations. It is the beginning of a real silver age in Russian culture, in which Leon Donici is formed and asserted.

Methodological Part

The principles and methods used belong to the exegetical thesaurus of modern historiography. By associating the perspectives of thematic, structuralist, psychoanalytic, typological interpretation, a semiotic analysis of the texts was tried. Particular attention was paid to the historical-literary method, which is the basic tool of the work.

The new historical age has a considerable impact on the writing self and the literary character who judges the world and man's relationship with it from other perspectives. The writer is aware of a drifting world, of powerful cataclysms with serious consequences. The tragic endings in the literary texts begin to acquire an extra-personal, historical, epochal character. Man, at the crossroads of ages, feels "at the crossroads" of worlds and ages. He is going through an acute identity crisis and is experiencing colloidal states [3].

Especially short prose responds promptly to the challenges of time. It explores the new realities and forms of life more dynamically. It is no coincidence that the writer in short prose, as I. L. Caragiale put it, "feels enormous and sees monstrously." In the short story, the new realities are artistically probed by the short epic genre, a much more dynamic genre than, for example, the novel. The latter even at the beginning of this century puts considerable pressure on the short story, the sketch, the tale until they conform to the recognized canons. The most visible tendency in short species is to make them look like miniature novels. But, unlike the novel, the sketch, the story and the short story have kept a greater freedom of fantasy, a greater promptness of the artist's reaction to the realities of the time.

Results and Discussion

Leon Donici marks his literary debut in 1909 with the story *In Search of the Eternal Truth*, published in *Русский паломник* (The Russian Pilgrim). He continues to publish other stories in the magazines of the time next year. In 1911 he published the short story *Mon plaisir* in *Исторический вестник* (Historical Monitor), which was later published in the German magazine "Berliner Kreuz-Zeitung", translated by Leopold Schmidt. In 1912, Leon Donici published the short story *Bolnavii* in *Исторический вестник* and the story *Mephistopheles* in *Всемирная панорама* (Universal Panorama). In 1915 he published the collection of short stories *Bitter Flower*, reviewed by M. Levidov, A. Derman and others. In

1920, after coming to Bessarabia, he published a series of short stories in the *Country Council*. Thus, in 1921, the story *Requiem* was published in *Viataromaneasca*, which marked the beginning of a fruitful collaboration of the author with Romanian magazines. After settling in Bucharest, in 1922, the writer collaborated with other literary journals. At the same time, he attended the meetings at the Eugen Lovinescu's cenacle, *Sburatorul*, where he reads the short story *The Great Archimedes*. In 1930, the volume *Bitter Flower* appeared posthumously, translated by G. M. Ivanov. Much later, the stories *Antichrist* and *Poet and Woman* in the *Chrysanthemum at the Border* are published, an anthology compiled by Veronica Batca [4].

With a certain crisis of realism, which is being criticized by most critics, a group of self-proclaimed neorealist young writers is beginning to assert themselves. Reflecting on Russian neorealism, Leon Donici notes: "Far from reality, this is the motto of modern Russian literature. This feature is the reaction after decades of realistic, too realistic, photographic-biased literature". Without having a clear view about the methods to be applied by the neorealist group, he went through numerous literary experiments, turning to both naturalism and extreme modernism, in both cases trying "new methods of writing to describe real life." In the same context, the writer reveals: "At first, a storm arose around us. The realists cursed us because we avoided the old methods and well-established practices in their dogma of describing life. We were also attacked by the symbolists, because we described subjects from such a real and sometimes so vile a life." Moreover, the abjection of life is the primary source of inspiration for neorealists. Ultimately, Leon Donici remarks, "we wrote what we thought was good to write and in a way that suited us," and "... we didn't have a well-established literary theory. But I had gone through all the literary turmoil, through the fiercest modernism, sometimes even extreme and excessive, applying the new methods of writing to the description of real life" [5]. M. Gorky is considered to have played a significant role in forming this group. The Russian researcher A. Sokolov notes that the new writers speak out against decaying morals in the name of the "human ideal, close to nature" [6]. Defining the new literary phenomenon, Leonid Andreev argues that neorealism is "neither realism, nor symbolism, nor romanticism," but a happy symbiosis of all these.

The basic way of the new direction in Russian literature is a predominantly cinematic way of presenting everyday facts, without too many comments on them. Namely in the sphere of the everyday, in the gray of the banal, in spaces where nothing happens, the tragedy of the little man takes place and in these vital spaces the artistic universe of Leon Donici is affirmed, about which Nichifor Crainic remarks: "Leon Donici is an admirable case of moral conscience and a great and unique example given to the Bessarabians" [7].

Fascinated by color and sound, the original Russian and Romanian author, Leon Donici harmonizes the two cultures, languages and literatures, completes the knowledge of the Romanian reader with new data about Russian literature, launches and disseminates Romanian literature in Russian media. The register of his writings is rich: from articles, controversies and studies to short stories, prose poems and novels. Leon Donici was a truly prolific writer.

Sometimes his short prose asserts the primacy of imagination, the dictation of fantasy over reality. At other times, the writer is enslaved by the adventure of creation and the fascinating mysteries of the universe. Unadapted to the shakes of everyday life, Leon Donici "multiplied" with intensity and depth in most of his characters, to whom he truly gave authentic and colorful life. The dream, frequently attested in his prose, is a form of escape in an area where the feverish imagination builds other worlds, with a well-established support

in the biography, but also in the ardor with which the writer investigates the world around him [8].

It is true that the literary work is not a faithful transposition of the life and experience lived by the writer, but, on the contrary, following the laws of creation, it makes a leap beyond the real and reaches the areas of the dream. The universe created by Leon Donici is an essentialized form of the real one; it has a surplus of life and gains, with each work published, in authenticity and sublime. Moreover, from this discreet fusion between the real and the imaginary, it can be concluded that, at least in a first layer of knowledge, epistemologically, but also ontologically, the writer's life can illuminate and explain his work.

The lyricism of Russian origin is characterized as a deep one with tones of romance. Demostene Botez notices the synthesis between "melancholy and Moldovan resignation" and "that uneasiness disturbed by the Russian" [9]. Leon Donici has full confidence in the power and suggestiveness of the Word. Lucian Blaga reveals in Leon Donici's writing "admirable poetic thoughts, sometimes subtle, hiding their meaning with a lunatic smile, sometimes apocalyptic with depths of prophecy" [10]. It has been observed that the vein of Russian sensibility is defining in the prose of the writer. Leon Donici plants the values and the Russian spirit in the fertile soil of the found homeland. Reflecting on the human and writing destiny of Leon Donici, Mihai Cimpoi notes: which, he said, retains patriarchal features not found in the West or in Russia" [11].

Diverse as thematic, varied and bizarre as worlds, characters and geographies, Leon Donici's short prose is also characterized by heterogeneity of poetry, but is unitary by lucidity, lyricism, sincerity, nostalgia, bookish, elegance and refinement of style. Writings in Romanian are characterized by clumsy handling of the word, countless Russian-language calchieri, regionalisms. The setting is preferably urban. The dense lyricism of the prose intensifies precisely the psychological analytism, the drama of the narrative discourse [12]. The lucidity with which the author transfigures the immediate reality into literary journalism remained essential, giving a strong reply to the revolutionary romanticism materialized in utopian works about the Russian revolution. Leon Donici's short prose is more difficult to fit into the patterns of naturalism or realism, it is a combinatorial burn of several poetic elements from different sources.

Donici's prose thus breaks the patterns of traditionalist prose. The writer inaugurates, with the novel *The Russian Revolution*, the anti-utopian theme in Romanian literature [13]. His short story *The Great Archimedes* is one of the first literary works to warn humanity of the Bolshevik danger, of the horrors of the then rising communist regime. His prose makes a new philosophical interpretation of man and his time, diversifies the interwar Romanian literature and enriches it considerably from a stylistic point of view [14].

The variety of narrative techniques used by the prose writer nuances his epic discourse, makes it more complex and engaging and, ultimately, contributes substantially to the (re)reaction of the image of the world, to the substantialization of narrative discourse. The way the prose writer writes is a cinematic way of presenting the pulse of reality, of everyday facts. Namely in the sphere of everyday life, in the immediate reality, the tragedy of the little man takes place and the artistic worlds of Leon Donici assert themselves [15]. The writer is truly the only character in his work, expressing self-confessions, in numerous autobiographical disguises, easily decipherable. In other words, the writer fits sharply into the modernist canon and through the syncretism of the arts, through the anti-utopian dimension and the intertextual dialogue artistically explored in the spirit of the time. The

modernization of the Romanian narrative is achieved by deliberate renunciation of the human narrative court. Donici thus anticipated the very productive prosaic experiments of the last century.

Conclusions

The writer's prose is undoubtedly an artistic document about the tragedy of the intellectual's existence in a drifting society, attesting in it some similarities of destiny of the Romanian intellectual at great historical crossroads. Although his intellectual is a loser, deeply experiencing the social and humanitarian catastrophes of the time, he becomes a promoter of human values.

Beyond the Russian influences – Alexei Remizov, Feodor Sologub, Leonid Andreev - the Romanian literary models are also identified: Mihai Eminescu and Ion Creanga. Leon Donici is organically part of the Romanian literary tradition and by reinterpreting the fundamental myths. the myth of Sburatorul, for example, is reconstructed in an impressive parable about love, where the eternal myth of creation reaches unexplored depths. The writer illustrates, among the first in prose from Bessarabia, the Romanian Mioritism. He creates memorable characters that bring to the fore the authentic Romanian spirit and sensitivity.

Leon Donici certainly established himself among the values of Romanian literature, among the founders of modern Romanian prose. His short story is a unique creative show, fascinating by the wide breath of reality, captured in its various poses. The qualities that his prose displays are: a certain amount of unadulterated life, a density of emotion, refinement and elegance of style.

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