

## **RODICA OJOG-BRASOVEANU- WE HAVE OUR OWN AGATHA CHRISTIE!**

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*Abstract: Who is Rodica Ojog-Brasoveanu? She is the paradoxical example of anonymous fame. We have our own Agatha Christie some may say. This is not enough. Her books still fill library shelves and successfully sell a story, an image and a talent. Only few movies based on her books; is this a sign of recognition or is it the public enthusiasm (vox populi) that could build statues? Why are all critics silent? Could it be the old prejudice that this type of fiction belongs to a so-called sub-literary field? Romania has a different background from all points of view: history, society, language, misfortunes brought by communism. These aspects have coloured our writer's fiction. Censorship has broken many wings and talents. My article is a personal biased approach but it is a declared and open intention and invitation to discover one of the greatest talents of our detective fiction.*

**Keywords: detective fiction, stories, society, background, talent.**

The sources I had were unfortunately too few and I hold each word about our author to be priceless. Rodica Ojog-Brasoveanu has all the qualities of a beautiful mind. Her creativity comes from the richness of an exquisite soul. She spices her moments with delightful ingredients of vocabulary that make her unforgettable! Deep down she was a romantic spirit who had to adjust to modern days. And she did it, looking back, now and then, with a nostalgic touch. Florentina Chivu, her editor and friend, said: *'Rodica Ojog-Brasoveanu avea un dar unic al comunicarii; era autoritara si irezistibila, dar totusi extrem de pedanta, atenta la ceilalti, doritoare sa afle, sa inteleaga...am iubit-o atat de mult si am apreciat-o ca fiind Agatha Christie a Romaniei'* (foreword to Madalina Ojog Pascu's book). I have always been interested in authors and books considered of less importance, hidden somewhere on dusty library shelves. They are often ignored by critics and I wonder (in some cases) why? Ion Minulescu, Ion Pillat, Otilia Cazimir, George Topârceanu would deserve much more. A closer look can reveal a wonder world of these authors, without the heroic magnificence of classicism or its huge wings, but such sensibility so hard to find nowadays. It is the happiness coming from small things, it is the heart of childhood and all the wonders of everyday life.

This is one of the reasons why I choose Rodica Ojog- Brasoveanu's books. I accidentally read the first novel, then I looked for the others. I discovered that she had been completely forgotten by critics. Jorge Luis Borges says in *El Cuento Policial*, in 1979, that 'the detective novel is, nevertheless, an intellectual genre; a genre built on a strong fictitious ground; the crime is elucidated through abstract reasoning and not due to an error committed by the criminal.' (p.289)

Eugen Simion declared for the magazine *Pentru Patrie*, in 1995, that he would include a special chapter dedicated to the Romanian detective novel in his *Scriitori romani de azi. (Sistemul totalitar a năpăstuit literatura polițistă*, interviu, 1995, nr.7, p.31). Certainly, only one chapter will not bring too much light and it will not do justice to a genre that has been so mistreated in Romania. Although it is very popular, the Romanian policier does not have the

privilege of owing a dictionary (be it a merely selective one, a reference from A to Z, at least!) or a study on its narrative structures, style peculiarities and distinctive stages of its evolution. An example would be: trying to initiate an analysis of one of the champions of the genre, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu, the only sources we have are her novels, brief notifications regarding dates and years when her books have been printed and a book written and dedicated to her by her niece, Mădălina Ojog- Pascu. Compensating this lack of data, the national television channel TVR has made an inquiry on a sample of twenty-two people of different ages and education levels, thing that brought up a hierarchy of three names of Romanian authors: Rodica Ojog- Brașoveanu, Haralamb Zincă, Petre Sălcudeanu. These are signals of the fact that, in case any researcher dedicates himself to the study of the Romanian policier, will discover, after complicated investigations, interesting aspects of the way the Romanian authors adapted themselves to an old recipe, frequently refreshing it.

I found a very interesting, original statement (provided by a good friend from Bucharest) of Rodica's and I believe it is more expressive than any words could ever describe the status of a Romanian author of detective fiction:

*“Deunăzi, un tânăr, înverșunat fan al romanului polițist și nutrind în mod justificat ambiții scriitoricești, m-a întrebat: „Aș vrea să abordez genul. Ce sfat îmi dați?”...I-am replicat fără a sta pe gânduri :”Dacă această dorință constituie o pasiune sfișietoare, însăși rațiunea dumitale de a exista și, totodată, te simți în stare să înfrunți agresivitatea ori indiferența arogantă a criticii literare și a unei ‘elite’ de superintelectuali, dă-i bici, pentru că n-ai încotro. În caz contrar, las-o baltă, îndreaptă-te spre alte zări!...”*

*„, Subliteratură, carte de gang, de drum lung cu trenul, de plajă sau de constipație, maculatură care odată consumată o arunci la prima pubelă”, iată câțiva din termenii și sintagmele care dezmiardă genul, aprioric, cu obstinată prejudecată, foarte adesea în totală necunoștință de cauză. Se omite însă, în voluptatea de a disprețui (ipso facto, trăiești un îmbățător sentiment de superioritate), plăcerea de a înjura. Și ce puteai, de pildă, să înjuri în anii de dictatură a proletariatului ? Temele de lirică patriotică ? Romanele teziste ? „Polimerii ?” Niciodată, indiferent de calitatea producțiilor pomenite. În schimb, policier-ul constituie o generoasă sursă la dispoziția condeielor otrăvite . De altfel, toate regimurile totalitare au torpilat genul care, în ultima analiză, atacînd aspectele dure ale societății, devine roman politic nepastelat, un roman critic. În consecință, a intervenit prompt și brutal binecunoscuta cenzură, impunînd parametri insurmontabili pentru o carte de calitate și interdicții aberante. În Italia fascistă a lui Mussolini, infractorii, Bau-Bau în general, nu puteau fi de naționalitate italiană, iar la noi, același delincvent reprezenta în mod obligatoriu un exponent descompus al fostei clase exploatare, burghezo-moșierimea. De neconceput, blasfemie, un criminal ministru, membru CC, activist sau director de întreprindere cît de modestă.*

*După părerea avizată a lui Patrick Raynal (directorul Seriei Negre a Editurii Gallimard), resentimentele împotriva policier-ului datează de pe la începutul secolului trecut, cînd, fără a se opera o separație între considerentele artistice și cele de ordin moral, nu s-a ținut seama nici de valoarea fiecărui scriitor în parte. Chandler, Chase, San Antonio sunt studiați azi la Sorbonna, Dashiell Hammet, autorul rafinatei Chei de Sticlă și a Șoimului Maltez- este socotit de către critica oficială americană superior din punct de vedere stilistic unui Hemingway. Venind mai aproape și auzind corul exclamațiilor de indignare, să recunoaștem, onest, că Baltagul se constituie într-unul din cele mai reușite policier-uri românești.*

*Și încă unul foarte modern, îmbinînd cu dibacie dezinvoltă cele două variante de intrigă polițistă. Prima, „cine-i criminalul ?”, cu secundo, „cum îl prindem?”.*

*Departate de a fi fost exhaustivă sau de a fi spus ceva nou, îmi exprim certitudinea că romanul polițist reprezintă un fenomen ce poate fi eventual contestat, dar nicidecum ignorat. Hulit ori mult gustat, el există și va supraviețui. Și dacă unii se simt fericiți să-l huiduie, iar alții*

*jubilează avînd de partea lor box-office-ul (vox populi...), se realizează un echilibru amiabil, în cele din urmă, toată lumea e cît se poate de mulțumită. Un exemplu de conciliere.'*

Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu was born on the 28th of August, 1939, in the house where she lived till the end of her days and the place of her father's attorney office. It was a rich, quiet neighborhood behind the Court House, inhabited by members of embassies, lawyers and doctors. According to her own words, her father taught her optimism, sense of proportions and not to bitter her heart from quite any trifle. Her mother taught her good taste and that 'pour être belle, il faut souffrir'. On her subtle sense of humor Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu admits that she does not possess all the features of her birth sign – Virgo: she is not tidy, avaricious, pedantic, she does not count each penny, she is not possessive. In her case, all these things become qualities making her funnier and closer to any reader's heart.

Her first novel, *Moartea semnează indescifrabil*, was written in 1971; she wrote hoping she would be allowed to finish her education, but in exchange she received a fade answer that she had to earn this right and go to work. Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu speaks about her characters, the choice of her topics, the way she writes: '*my characters are usually mixtures between the people I know and those created in my imagination. I even had friends who found themselves in my characters*'. (from the interview). Most of the time the subject is clear right from the start. She admits she has a feeble memory but a great power to focus. She succeeded to part from everything around her.

Her dearest character was Melania, but she believes the most successful figures are the negative ones.

Rodica's niece, Mădălina Ojog-Pascu dedicated a book to the memory of her beloved aunt, a charming collection of thoughts and details, observations and testimonials, *A fost Agatha Christie a României, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu*. She considers her aunt '*was a model of elegance, beauty and good taste. Of course, the cruel years had a word to say, but her strong personality, originality, her creative wit kept fresh until the end of her days*' (p.12).

Her book *Coșmar* reveals details and it is structured according to these experiences she had lived. When she decided to approach detective fiction, she identified herself with her work. She strongly believed in fate. Hazard was to her the equivalent of fatality, and fatality was equal to destiny. She fought to overcome obstacles in order to have her conscience clear but she believed that the outcome had been already foredoomed. Under the influence of Paulo Coelho and his philosophy, she often quoted him: '*Luck, fate are decided by birth*'.

Rodica defined herself as a '*mixture between a child and a grown woman. Kid stuff, childish attitude and mature thinking*.' She admitted her flaws. She was a bohemian by definition. She did not have many friends because, as she said, she did not have the talent of maintaining social relationships, she got bored easily and she did not like to meet the same people too many times (which is I think fair enough, as long as I consider it a feature of the intelligent and the creative). She liked original people (those one of the kind) with sense of humor. One of her best friends, docent Angela Cerchez said:

*'Așa am cunoscut-o pe Rodica Ojog- viitoare scriitoare de romane polițiste: Abia ieșite din adolescență, foarte tinere, acum aproape cincizeci de ani(!), cînd m-am mutat pe str. Poenaru Bordea...*

*De o frumusețe mai aparte, cu niște asimetrii interesante, pe care cu timpul le-a accentuat displăcându-i tot ce era 'banal'. Am avut o prietenie frumoasă, cu multe puncte comune, dar și mari deosebiri, fiecare din noi avînd caractere tari. Discuțiile dintre noi erau 'aprînse' indiferent ce subiect aveau. Am fost sfătuitoarea ei în tot ce era artă în toate romanele : costume, bijuterii, mobilier, tablouri, în fine, totul ! Mă bucuram cînd îmi dădea manuscrisul să-l citesc, regăsindu-mi 'fișele' în acțiunea romanului respectiv. Cerîndu-mi totdeauna părerea, eram critică, uneori nemulțumind-o.'*(p.84)

As a young woman, Rodica enjoyed the company of older, quality people. She enjoyed literary debates, dialogues on books and authors, actors and plays and she registered precious data. Rodica Ojog is hard to frame and sketch in simple lines. She is moulded of a special essence, with surprising emotions and vivid reactions. Reading was more than a hobby for her, it was 'an organic craving'. She loved poetry, mystery and Paris, and more than that, America. She admired the joy and wealth of the Americans, and mostly, their pragmatism. She met Romanian immigrants who were poorer than they had been in their own country, she met wealthy Romanians as well, but both had a terrible longing for home, friends and family, they never adjusted to their foster countries:

*'Acestea au fost filoanele mari și grele ale romanelor mele, de-aici mi-am extras substanța',* she says. (op.cit. pp88-89)

She knew she could write easily, she had an exquisite, vivid vocabulary and a stylish sentence. Sadly, because of her 'unhealthy origins' (how many talents have been wasted because of this handicap!) she was not accepted to work for any paper. But the world of the fascinating policier was meant for her. Ideas came from anywhere. Once, at the dentist, while the doctor prepared the ingredients for a filling, she was thinking she could get poisoned. The doctor might pour cyanide into the amalgam and that would have a delayed effect and she could die far away from the murder scene and the criminal. This was just an idea for a novel. The atmosphere of restaurants distilled the genuine essence. Together with her husband Cosma, went every night at Cina, Ambassador, Capșa, Casa Scriitorilor and never had troubles finding a good table (the waiters knew they were great tippers) in the right spot near people considered to be interesting sources for future character portraits. Cosma played her funny game and together they studied faces, manners and vocabulary. The clothes people used to wear spoke about the good or poor taste and fragments of conversation determined their knowledge, attitude, habits, etc. They even observed eating manners, the way they addressed to waiters, who placed orders and how they danced, how and who paid the check. If the lady paid the check it would be clear they were married and she called the shots. If the man paid the check anywhere else but at the table (in the lady's presence), one could think they barely knew each other and this was, of course, a proof the gentleman had an idea about fancy manners. Out of few elements cleverly explored, she had already had the sketch of a new novel. Rodica paid attention (always discretely) to her friends' talk, their accounts on marital relationships, friendship, political ideas, debates on theatre plays, comments on a book they read, generally about everything related to life. As a subtle observer, she always managed to draw characters and plots. Gaining experience, before jumping to the action itself, she built a pattern of five or six characters, according to the topic she had planned: *'Personajele mele sunt de obicei mixturi între persoane reale și cele create de imaginația mea.'*(op.cit. pp.93-

95). A great method of ‘endowing’ her characters was to transfer her own feelings and moods (op.cit.pp.96-97). When she worked at *Omul de la capătul firului* she complained about headaches, fever and fatigue. Immediately Minerva, her character, had the same symptoms. Then she made fun saying that after she had oppressed poor Minerva with all her aches, she did not need to take pills as she felt better and relieved. This elusion was used again and it worked perfectly. The newspapers wrote the author created complex characters, well designed, credible and extremely funny. People she knew often were troubled as they recognized themselves into her books and refused to accept their relevant flaws (but obvious), on the other hand they felt flattered if found in favourable circumstances. When she was nine her brother tempted her to read Edgar Wallace. Once she tasted this type of literature, she couldn’t stop. She read Karl May and Georges Simenon, her favourite. Eugen Barbu and Emil Manu called her ‘Romania’s Agatha Christie’(op.cit.pp.96-97). What a nice match! And how many things they have in common; they are both strong women on the surface but they had their own fears, insecurities and weaknesses. They both cherished family and had a spot in their hearts for their mothers, always the mother -figure a predominant tune of their soul. Rodica had a native calling for the sensational and a great talent in speculating every detail. The sentence is consistent and vivid. Her novels seem real (as she said) because she had friends to the police who offered her real facts to exploit for her stories. In the 1970’s the detective novels were on top. The publishing houses in Romania had a collection of detective fiction meant for self-support. *‘Eu am ținut cont de regulile economiei de piață chiar și când aceasta nu exista pe vremea centralismului. Am oferit publicului ce-și dorea’.* (op.cit.p.98)

Her novels never omitted two favourite characters: Minerva Tutovan and Melania Lupu. Melania came to life after a movie called *The Airport: ‘M-a fascinat personajul episodic-Ada-, care de altfel a luat și premiul Oscar pentru rol secundar, doamna aceea în vîrstă extrem de delicată și politicoasă care călătorește gratis pe liniile aeriene. De la ea mi-a venit ideea Melaniei, o bătrânică gingașă, cu grații și sfîiciuni de fetiță, în spatele cărora se ascunde o minte ageră și apetituri de gangster’*(op.cit.p.99). Could Melania be a Romanian Miss Marple? I dare say she could.

The books with Melania and Minerva sold incredibly well before 1990. More than eighty thousand copies! The series of Minerva was preferred in Transylvania whereas Melania established a record among the readers of Moldavia and Walachia. After the Revolution in 1989 Rodica had her share of bad experiences. Although she had no proof, she was suspicious her novel *Crimă prin mica publicitate* had been freebooted by the very publishing house that printed it. The book sold for a week, then disappeared for two months to suddenly re-appear for a while. She hired private investigators who confirmed her worries. The same thing happened later with another book of hers, *Cutia cu nasturi*.

Between 1975-1976 the detective novel enters a dark era because of the censorship applied especially to this type of literature. Whole chapters were brutally cut off, sentences amputated, things that led to incoherence and looseness. In the given circumstances, after tiring struggle, Rodica chooses to walk on another path and she approaches the historical novel, particularly focusing on a certain period: the time of Constantin Brâncoveanu. Lawyer Ion Dumitrescu said:

‘Înainte de revoluție stăpînitorii țării au considerat romanul polițist incompatibil cu morala proletară. Atunci Rodica s-a profilat pe roman istoric...Din romanele Rodicăi parcurse de mine, mi-am dat seama, și își putea da seama orice jurist că autoarea trebuia să fie de aceeași profesie, pentru că în desfășurarea acțiunii nu întâlneai nimic fals sau construit de autor, pentru că nimic nu se abătea de la regulile procesuale sau de la logica lucrurilor. În schimb simțeau de la primele fraze că autorul romanului dispune de o temeinică cultură, inclusiv juridică, și tratează cu har amănuntul.’ (op.cit.p.100)

The author's next success is *Plan Diabolic*, as Val Condurache referred to in *Convorbiri literare* :

‘Permutarea rolurilor provoacă în *Plan Diabolic* o ‘încifrare’ absolută a enigmei. Planurile intrigii converg cu o precizie remarcabilă spre punctul rezolvării aparente pentru ca finalul romanului să ridiculizeze ipotezele formulate anterior de cititor. Cu aceleași elemente ale ‘fabulei’, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu oferă două răspunsuri posibile pentru aceeași enigmă, dintre care unul singur este valabil. *Plan Diabolic* are configurația unei pure arhitecturi geometrice. Rodica Ojog- Brașoveanu a reușit să scrie o carte surprinzătoare de la un capăt la altul fără să-și permită nici o derogare de la normă. Rodica Ojog- Brașoveanu scrie cu această ocazie pagini de excelentă analiză psihologică.’ (Critica prozei, 4 April, 1974)

Rodica felt isolated into the writers' world, she merely felt tolerated. Her writing was regarded in patronizing attitude. This might be one of the reasons why critics have not paid attention to a genre unfairly considered to be ‘minor’.

In a very demanding line, she is a writer meant for success, an author who covered over three decades and introduced herself as a genuine provider of quality fiction.

Until 1999 she published 35 novels (most of them detective novels), and three collections of stories.

Michel Riffaterre says in *La production du texte* (Paris, 1971), that ‘*the literary phenomenon is not just the text but its reader as well, together with all the presumable reactions of the text consumer*’ (p.332). The detective text provokes the most natural and immediate reactions of a reader- a fact that could not prevent us from considering it a social phenomenon with huge implications in the literary perception.

Most recent researches do not operate with clearly delimited branches, but they attempt to cumulate similarities. We should keep in mind that there are in the detective novel a scene and *mis en scene*, and the reader finds himself protected, at his place outside the novel. He enjoys himself and finds delight in trouble, in something he otherwise would reject: violent disorder, sudden catastrophe.

We deal with premeditated crime and the reader becomes himself a detective in his armchair at home. He understands and accepts that truth remains hidden, but he suffers and indulges himself in delay and the effort of anticipating the moment of elucidation that will put an end to his misery. Thus, we can say that the detective novel is *une machine a emotion*. It is an emotion imposed by the text, as this indicates and controls the reader's degree and quality of emotional involvement.

It is also an adjustment of the reader to the state of violence. He will end up accepting it as a fortunate necessity. L. J. Bony wrote about the heroes of the detective novels: ‘They kill for you. But by killing, they murder you.’(www.archive.org)

One certain fact established in detective novels is that any problem finds its solution beyond conscience, more precisely, without it, as no science plays any part: facts alone, crude indubitability would be enough.

The gestures of an obscure symbolism are used almost exclusively (investigation, tracing, arrest), which means a full physical manoeuvre, and the loyal reader is brought back to normality, in his ideological routine and immediately saved from all his fears and terrors displayed until then. Thus, the detective novel provokes interest in a society that cheats on its own proclaimed principles and creates unbalance. This is the moment when the individual feels the need of his own justification. The eyes of the reader have to see a pre-established order and to justify the means it uses in order to exist, to consolidate and to perpetuate. Also, the reader is helpless in front of his possible, future rebellion: he became the spectator of somebody else's rebellion. The arrestment (punishment) is understood as a game, because the seriousness of this kind of justice is well dissembled. The book somehow deceives the reader; the novel pretends to be just a tool of amusement but together with it, the joking morality is a part of it.

*Cutia cu nasturi*, considered the the author's most prolific, succeeds to build a witty narrative structure and to respect the traditional patterns of a policier and, at the same time, to contradict them. The reader finds out the number of characters involved and he is able to frame a context: the event takes place in the post 1989 Romania. But the omniscient model-author accurately underlines the moment of the dramatic happening: two days before. He eliminates right from the start any possible wrong interference on one hand, stressing without any doubt: '*în realitate*' (obviously, it is the reality supposed by the novel's universe), and on the other, it spots the day (Sunday) and time (at noon). We have all the ingredients, the victim, investigators who will show up, witnesses, so that the reader's horizon of expectation will not be disturbed or contradicted. But in order to do so, the ending is anticipated. The game of bringing back past flashes is alternated by the course of investigation. The ambivalent structure changes the composition pattern of the genre. The characters' stories interfere with the linear track of action bringing up not only the nostalgic recall of a past period, but revealing details for each character (for example the wedding of Dinu and Gigeta). The reader's competence is respected: the 'encyclopaedia' Umberto Eco spoke about is an usual, common one, including a set of values easily recognized by the reader. In addition, 'the blank spaces' that were supposed to be filled by personal interferences, are completed by these flashbacks (of near or distant past) which confirm or contradict the choices that are made: issues of the couple Dinu-Gigeta extended over the other couples (Dora-Nelu, Gioni-Nina, Fane-Lelia) can contribute to the elucidation of the motive that had led to crime. The novelty lies in the fact that this is not mentioned in the end, an end supposed to come up with the well-known versions: the investigator discovers, as a result of a long, dangerous, subtle and mostly brilliant intercession, the motive of the crime and turns the criminal in. Unity and coherence, two major components of the detective novel conferred a solid and compact structure. But, *Cutia cu nasturi* offers a jabbed one, in which duality becomes plurality; the story announced at the beginning multiplies, the drama has many heroes involved in the tragedy, and the details that are meant to slow down the motion, create suspense.

The 'investigator', a character believed to be indispensable to the story, is reduced to a role of textual construct, a voice whom the answer is offered to by an extremely concise

dialogue, limited to the essential data of an investigation that merely advances. ‘The investigator’, who is troubled with tangled declarations and the gravity of a crime allegedly committed out of passion, and his partner, a sort of a ‘Watson’-like character reduced to an abstract entity, are the point where the author separates from the well-known pattern, without abandoning the rules of the formula. If in the standard patterns, the detective, an amateur or official representative of an institution, had a distinctive portrait, personalized by features or habits, Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu’s novel cancels them, exclusively underlining the textual circumstances: ‘*Anchetatutul zbieră:- că nici ceilalți din jur nu rămân normali! Toți parcă înnebunesc la ficat*’, says an investigator who loses his temper now and then, and makes comments (p.107). An interesting fact is that the investigator used to keep a log of each investigation. Brief novelties (impressions, suspicions, perplexities) helped him see the situation clearly, as a whole and in detail. These are revealed by the model-author, who as an omniscient authority, knows everything right from the start and makes this assertion to thicken the necessary complicity of the reader. Paradox: although reduced to the status of anonymous voices, these characters-the investigator, his partner- behave extremely ‘humanly’, they raise their tone, amuse themselves, use writing as a therapeutic habit, comment more or less sarcastically: ‘*Să fim serioși! Dacă ar fi s-o mierlească câte unul de fiecare aventură extraconjugală, s-ar rezolva de la sine și fără cheltuieli de înarmare problemele lui Malthus si ale Mariei-Theresa...*’(p.190)

In the attempt to overcome the codes that structure the novel, the very gesture that neutralises this intention breaks out. This simultaneity proves, in fact, what the avant-garde once tried: to abolish the ‘bourgeois’ fiction through ‘literature’; the distance from the pattern and the pattern itself are caught at the same time- it is a merit of the novel, that of noticing the double movement. This simultaneity becomes of tremendous importance in detective novels proving that elements of sainted literature, unpredictable lines, can occur here, as well. A very flexible genre, the detective novel reflects the theories that support the abolition of all frontiers between ‘elite’ and ‘mass’ in fiction and culture. The narrative structure of *Cutia cu nasturi*, so very unspecific to a detective novel, makes of this book one of the best of Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu’s and brings another proof of quality meant for the recognition of the rights of the so-called ‘literary minorities’.

This juxtaposition of elements, so specific to the genre (the victim, the detective/investigator, the murderer, the motive) and the way of solving the case, together with denial or their replacement: the minimum input of the investigator, reduced to a simple impersonal voice who will finally close the case, the model-author who reveals the identity of the murderer but does not clarify the motive, the fake criminal, the reader’s expectation, are confirmed by accurately following the rules of the game and pointed to all the blank spaces he is supposed to fill.

*Cutia cu nasturi* is the first Romanian detective novel where new and old structures are present together. The title may appear simplistic or the scenes could mime genuineness (Gigeta’s misery), and the soap opera-like romance between Dora and Dinu looks rather unnatural. The personality of Gigeta (the victim) is traced in thick lines (it seems that everything convicts her: attitude, behaviour, aggressive pride doubled by stupidity, briefly she is the ‘negative character’ who has to die), while the political scene after December 1989 is



limited to noisy meetings, meaningless assertions and numberless journeys (never taking place without the pretty, omnipresent secretary, always in love with her boss).

Rodica Ojog Brasoveanu faced censorship, communism, times and places which were not always friendly (if she had had the advantage of writing in an international language, maybe her fate would have been different). She is a superb storyteller, a talented woman who succeeded to cover over three decades. I believe she proves, through her books, that she is a genuinely crafty writer and above all, a praiseworthy spirit, entitled to join the great family of universal values.

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