

THE JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE WORLD UNDER THE SIGN OF RECONCILIATION WITH ONESELF AND THE WORLD

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Abstract

The novella Cînd Nu mai ai pe Cine să Îmbrățișezi [When you have no one to hug], by Răzvan Brudiu, offers a wild and isolated image of a hamlet in the Apuseni Mountains, where old Joseph lives in solitude, strengthened by the power of faith, waiting for the last road to eternity. In the volume we can identify a dialogical construction on the waiting theme, under the sign of silence. If Joseph speaks, it is to banish loneliness, as rarely does anyone cross his threshold, so that in the narrative ego his words and gestures provoke deep meditations on existence. The profile of the central hero is gradually built up through simplicity, modesty, and natural gestures, contrasting with the erudition of the theologian who constantly feels the need to refer to various passages in the Bible, to church events and services, to quotations from the writings of saints or famous writers, etc. Two different worlds emerge from the dialogue between the two protagonists, that of the city, where life is full of daily hassles and worries, where people judge things with a 'correct' mind, and the world of old Joseph, for whom time has already become 'eternity'. These worlds, symbolically confronted, generate meaningful images. The 90-year-old man serenely looks towards death, aware that he does not have much more to expect from life and wishing to be reunited with his wife. He leads a simple life, but his prayer, uttered without worrying about tomorrow, generates in his heart love and longing for the Creator. For him, the end of the world is, in fact, the meeting with God, and everything he does since his wife's death is a preparation for reaching the final goal, thus becoming an example for everyone who believes in eternal life.

Keywords: short story; isolated village; simplicity; the power of faith; hesychast; Răzvan Brudiu.

The novella *Cînd nu mai ai pe cine să îmbrățișezi* [When you have no one to hug], by Răzvan Brudiu, published in Iași at Doxologia Publishing House, by the end of 2023, offers a wild and isolated image of a hamlet in the Apuseni Mountains. Although fictionalized, the story of old Joseph, the central character, awakens pleasant memories for those who have once, even accidentally, arrived in that part of the Apuseni Mountains. Personally, we remembered with great pleasure our hikes, rucksacks on our backs, at a time when one could difficultly reach the villages and hamlets around Rîmeț and Ponorului, with isolated people, very difficult to relocate, for they who would have rather let their houses fall down than sell them.

An important aspect we want to point out in this volume, without encouraging "biographism", is the connection between lived life and reality. This type of writing is referred to as "histoire vécue" in French literature, as "nonfictional novel", in English, while in Romanian literature it has been called, in an approximate translation formula, "literatură document" (Chira, 2023, p. 13). Although in the pages of Răzvan Brudiu's book the connection between literature and life is obvious, although real places are mentioned and a memorialistic inclination is sensed, we are convinced that after a sufficient distance in time and space, only literature remains.

Cînd nu mai ai pe cine să îmbrățișezi [When you have no one to hug] is the story of the character Joseph, an old man who lives alone in his house in “the mountains forgotten by men but not by God”¹ (Brudiu, 2023, p.16), who is visited from time to time by a priest. We can identify in the volume a dialogical construction on the motif of expectation, though permeated by much silence. As he is rarely visited, Joseph speaks to banish loneliness, but in the narrative ego his words and gestures provoke deep meditations on existence. The profile of the central hero is gradually built up through simplicity, modesty, and natural gestures, contrasted with the erudition of the theologian who constantly feels the need to refer to various passages in the *Bible*, to church events and services, to quotations from the writings of saints or famous writers, etc.

The waiting motif is marked from the very beginning by the symbol of the ‘pale’ light in the window of old Joseph’s house. As the plot of the novella unfolds, we see that the only ‘road’ remained to the hero is the one towards death. Modest, with the face graced by “an unseen light /.../. A light that came not from the sun, but from God”² (Brudiu, 2023, p. 39), Joseph confesses that God has given him “too much” (Brudiu, 2023, p. 12), that he is waiting “for the hours to pass, to depart from this world. I have lived long enough”³ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 11), that after his wife’s death, with whom his life had been happy, “the fearful death became for him the true fulfilment”⁴ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 16). The ‘frozen’ homodiegetic narrator, studies the character with fear and understands from his words that “I must keep nothing for myself, that nothing of what I had not offered will ever be mine, that nothing of myself that has not died, will ever be raised from the dead”⁵ (Brudiu, 2023, pp. 13-14).

Two different worlds, that of the city, where life is “tormented by everyday problems”⁶ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 16), where people judge things with a ‘correct’ mind, and that of old Joseph, for whom time “already became eternity” (Brudiu, 2023, p. 15), symbolically confronted, generate significant images. The 90-year-old man serenely looks towards death. He knows that he does not have much more to expect from life and he longs to join his wife. Living a simple life, his prayer was expressed “in total self-abandonment”⁷ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 21) because “Silence, prayer, self-abandonment aroused in his heart the warmth of the Holy Spirit, love and the longing for God”⁸ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 21). By the way he prayed, old Joseph died and revived with Christ.

The priest enjoys like a child the simple world he discovers around Joseph. Every encounter with the old man is a source of delight and, above all, an occasion for meditation, because every image glimpsed with the mind’s eye, every idea, every gesture of Joseph’s arouses in the priest a souvenir, a thought, an association with a Gospel parable, with the verses of a carol, or with passages from the Mass. The memory of Joseph’s brother for example, followed by an idea linked to the episode of the resurrection of Lazarus, or the suggestive story of the snail in *Citesc până mi amorțesc picioarele* [I read till my feet go numb] complete the story of Joseph’s cold winters as a child in his parents’ house. When Joseph regrets that he has a lot of work in the garden and no time for more prayer, the reference to the teachings of St Joan Russian is revealing: “the man who prays much is a

¹ Original text: „munții uitați de oameni, dar nu și de Dumnezeu.”. Translation of quotations belongs to us

² Original text: „o lumina nevăzută /.../. O lumină care nu venea de la soare, ci de la Dumnezeu”.

³ Original text: „să treacă ceasul, să mă duc de pe lumea aceasta. Am trăit destul”.

⁴ Original text: „Înfricoșătoarea moarte devenea pentru el adevărata împlinire”.

⁵ Original text: „Nu trebuie să păstrez nimic pentru mine, că nimic din ceea ce nu am dăruit, nu va fi vreodată al meu, că nimic din mine, ce nu a murit, nu va fi vreodată ridicat din morți”.

⁶ Original text: „frământată de problemele cotidiene”.

⁷ Original text: „întru toată negrija cea lumească”.

⁸ Original text: „Liniștea, rugăciunea, negrija nășteau în inima lui căldura Duhului Sfânt, dragostea și dorul după Dumnezeu”.

good man and /.../ in prayer, time expands”⁹ (Brudiu, 2023, pp 70-71). Finally, even the ordinary work of planting potatoes becomes an occasion for meditation, for “the death of the potato was as necessary as the death of man, for if the plant or man does not die, it will not bear fruit”¹⁰ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 71).

In the chapter *Cel mai bogat om din oraș* [The Richest man in town], an extraordinary idea of the old man on loneliness interweaves the image of death, which he perceives as natural. It is only when man no longer fears death that he begins to have everything. Until then he has nothing. Old Joseph has understood this important truth and through the way he speaks, the homodiegetic narrator notes that “Loneliness is the most painful, indeed cynical, way of experiencing death before its time”¹¹ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 48).

Prayer and faith in God guide Joseph’s steps unceasingly during his remaining life. “Without God we can do nothing” (Brudiu, 2023, p. 70), he muses in the chapter *Când cireșii înfloresc* [When the cherry blossoms]. “The old man /.../ knew the meaning of things. Nothing was left to chance; everything had its proper time”¹² (Brudiu, 2023, p. 74) and there, near the house of this very simple man, “Everything was sanctified, everything was imbued with the grace of the Holy Spirit.”¹³ (Brudiu, 2023, p. 74). With such an overflowing simplicity, the central hero’s faith could not be otherwise. Constantly amazed “by this man’s philosophy of life” (Brudiu, 2023, p. 71), the narrator succeeds in conveying to us all the feelings he goes through in front of the old man who is confident of God’s power and work in our lives. Being confronted with this total simplicity, the narrator experiences humility and the *wonder* which opens the mind to questions.

The life of Joseph, a man who lives alone somewhere in a house in the Apuseni Mountains, weighed down by his years and the weaknesses of age, is a journey that is coming to an end under the sign of reconciliation with himself and the world. For him, the end is the end of the world, which in fact means meeting God. Everything he undertakes since his wife’s death is a preparation for reaching the final goal, becoming an example for anyone who believes in eternal life.

As the writer pr. George Remete remarks on the volume’s fourth cover, “Beyond simplicity, the reader will find in these stories the wisdom of old age, the beauty of life, the essential meaning of asceticism and the power of faith, which can heal, strengthen, beautify and nourish everything”¹⁴ (Remete, in Brudiu, 2023, cover IV).

Referințe:

- Brudiu, R. (2003). *Cînd nu mai ai pe cine să îmbrățișezi* [When you have no one to hug]. Iași: Editura Doxologia.
- Chira, R. (2023), Cuvînt înainte [Forward]. În *Incursiuni în imaginar* [Incursions into the Imaginary]. No. 14. 2023. pp. 13-16.

⁹ Original text: „omul care se roagă mult este om bun și /.../ la rugăciune, timpul se dilată”.

¹⁰ Original text: „Moartea cartofului era necesară la fel ca moartea omului, pentru că dacă planta sau omul nu moare, nu va aduce roade.”.

¹¹ Original text: „Singurătatea este modul cel mai dureros, de-a dreptul cîmic, de a trăi moartea înainte de vreme”.

¹² Original text: „Bătrânul /.../ știa rostul lucrurilor. Nimic nu se făcea la voia întâmplării; toate aveau un timp potrivit”.

¹³ Original text: „Totul era sfințit, totul era îmbibat de Harul Duhului Sfânt.”.

¹⁴ Original text: „Dincolo de simplitate, în aceste povestiri cititorul va găsi însă înțelepciunea bătrîneții, frumusețea vieții, rostul esențial al ascezei și puterea credinței, care pe toate le poate vindeca, întări, înfrumuseța și mîntui”.