

The Archetype of Woman in Sorin Titel's Novel "Femeie, iată fiul tău"

JANA PÁLENÍKOVÁ
(Bratislava)

L'ARCHÉTYPE DU FEMME DANS LE ROMAN DE SORIN TITEL *FEMME, VOICI TON FILS*

Dans le roman *Femme, voici ton fils*, la partie intégrante de la tétralogie romanesque, on trouve une pléiade des archétypes masculins et féminins. Compte tenu du rôle dominant des femmes nous nous sommes proposé d'y identifier des archétypes féminins (Sophie, Magna mater et la Vielle femme) pour saisir, dans un deuxième temps, différents modes de leur projection dans la construction romanesque. Nous nous sommes appuyé sur la conception de l'archétype et de la structure archétypale selon Jung qui explique ces faits à partir de l'inconscient collectif.

MOTS-CLÉS: archétype, Banat, mère, symbolisme, Sorin Titel

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Sorin Titel (1935 – 1985) belongs to the generation of writers who entered Romanian literature at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. Their goal was to innovate literature and bring it back to the natural development, on the route it had successfully followed in the interwar period. Titel intervened in the literary context of the period as an author of short prosaic works only to succeed in the end as a peculiar

prose writer thematically anchored in his native Banat, i.e. in the west Romanian region. This applies specifically to his novel tetralogy set at Banat with which he had remained spiritually tied until his untimely death. For him, Banat was that familiar Eliadesque "centre of the world". However, rather than to present the primarily realistic Banat in the way he used to know it, Titel offers a mixture of the archaic and modern, a connection of the pre-war region that used to be part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the modern world entered by the post-war generation. Such epic bipolarity got reflected also in the artistic construction means of the erudite writer Titel who had been brought up on French new novels and on modern American, and central European literature which was closest to him. On the one hand, he remained faithful to the traditional narrator, while on the other hand he offered modern methods of multiple narrators and temporal levels.

What is interesting about Sorin Titel's tetralogy (*Țara îndepărtată*, Distant Land, 1974; *Pasărea și umbra*, Bird and Shadow, 1977; *Clipa cea repede*, Fast Moment, 1979; *Femeie, iată fiul tău*, Woman, Look, Your Son, 1983) is the mastery with which he managed to illustrate on the Banat's multi-ethnic world the ever topical issues associated with the metaphysical view of the world and with morality, without any attempts at moralizing. The very first reading of the individual novels makes one feel that they are hard pieces. They require a lot of the reader's concentration and patience and less of their deduction, but when the reader at last manages to get through the building procedures and starts to understand the epic essence, they suddenly manage to touch the reconstructed atmosphere of the past. Titel presented himself as a great defender of the traditional village and petty-bourgeois values. He was not interested in political aspects in literature, nor was he interested in writing to social order. He preferred stable values that would not yield to either domestic or foreign fashion trends or historical circumstances. Quite naturally he arrived at creating archetypes that do not appear just occasionally in individual novels but that smoothly pass from one novel into another one, thus maintaining the basic semantic line of the narrative.

Titel's last completed novel, *Woman, Look, Your Son*, is an apology of Woman – Mother who defeats death. However, in woman, the bearer of life, 'mater dolorosa' is also implicit. Mothers bear

children and young children die tragic death. This novel is the projection of the tragic lives of two boys of the identical biblical name of Marcu. They both die prematurely and are mourned by their mothers of the identical name of Sofia. They are two identical stories of two mothers and their sons which are repeated after more than half a century. First, older Marcu leaves before the First World War to do his military service at Hungarian Szeged. There he meets his double, a Serbian officer Ivo Filipovac and becomes his servant. Then, in the 1970s, second Marcu, a painter and great-nephew of the first Marcu leaves for France to study. At the port of Deauville he too meets his double, a tramp Roger La Fontaine. In symbolism, meeting a double means a bad omen, it is a foreshadowing of death (RUȘTI, 2002: 122). The first Marcu gets brutally beaten as he is mistakenly taken for Ivo Filipovac by a jealous brother of the officer's mistress. Later he dies at the World War I frontline at Galicia. Second Marcu and the tramp Roger were in a car driven by weirdo Momo who crashed it. Marcu gets fatally injured and is taken to hospital where he is joined by his mother who has arrived from far away to save him from the clutches of death. The fates of both sons and mothers bear many similarities, parallels and symmetries as both stories are constructed on a circular plan and on the mirror image principle.

Readers may find the epic structure of the novel intricate, composed of disordered memories in which different geographical areas overlap and where the natural chronology is not observed; from stories which happen both in reality and in a dream, in the world of the living as well as in the world of the dead; in the sphere of the probable and that of the fantastic. In the middle of all this stands man who is subject to determinism, an individual performer in the game of coincidences directed by the omnipotent Fate. However, the unusual character of the text is not determined by the narrative style but by keeping the ambiguity that turns into interchange thus evoking in readers certain feeling of confusion. The reader is not really aware that they pass from the world of one Marcu into the world of the second one or from one epoch into another one. In fact, they feel as if they were watching everything through a foggy glass. It is through this technique of obscuring reality that the effect of ambiguity is achieved. Its other reason is the author's playing with identity, the play of doubles. Two Marcus appear in the novel: one comes from a Banat

village, a soldier who dies in the war, the other one is an unhappy painter and a car crash victim in France. Then there are two caring mothers who live with a deep feeling of guilt for the misfortunes of their sons: the first Sofia is looking in vain for her son Marcu at Szeged before his going to the frontline; the other mother Sofia with the identical feeling of guilt sits by the son's hospital bed in a Parisian hospital. Identical names, though not identical characters. Titel slowly moves from one story to the other one. There is quite a big time difference between them and the author moves between them with conscious risk of their being swapped. The confusion can occur only too easily because both Marcus come from one family (they are a great-uncle and a great-nephew) although they could not have met in their lifetime. Each of them has his own specific life but they both are persecuted by identical fate and protected by an identical generic mother who suffers for her son's absurd sacrifice. Apart from this seemingly superficial play at doubles of Marcus and Mothers, more doubles are identified in the novel. The painter Marcu meets the tramp Roger La Fontaine who resembles him as if he were his twin brother. This reminds Marcu of his great-ancestor, also named Marcu who had died in the World War I and whose face he once saw in a photograph. This Marcu much resembled his superior. Through the identity of names and physical resemblance another theme of the book is thus underlined: loneliness and uniqueness of each human being.

The law of stereotype and repetition is noticeable in this tetralogy. They create the effect of variations of one theme. The overlapping of temporal and narrative plans falls in the sphere of archetypes which create the deep epic structure. A woman with a child who is destined to suffer and die stands in the centre of the tetralogy, specifically, as it is suggested by its title, in the novel *Woman, Look, Your Son*. S. Titel's fictitious novel world surprises with its horizontal width as it does with its vertical depth. As if at archaeological excavations we uncover, layer after layer, different motivic levels, e.g. the remnants of the myths of the Habsburg monarchy, old rural rites and fetes, biblical motives and literary archetypes. The archetypes represent a kind of mysterious underground of the world of the novel and they correspond with the author's desire to write about substantial, timeless topics and extreme situations such as love, death, happiness, unhappiness, loneliness, suffering. Shortly before his death

Titel said: *"I have always wanted to write about fundamental issues. (...) A woman with baby-Jesus in her arms, as he is portrayed in our old iconography and in the famous world paintings, is one of the elementary topics in art. I keep seeing the image of mother and child ... I am obsessed with this topic."*¹

In one of his letters addressed to his mother, Ivo Filipovac describes a short anecdote from his childhood when he had been stopped on a pavement by two older girls and they were surprised that he would not remember them. *"The women I know seem to be coming from my own past which I don't remember. And so I have this feeling, a strange and difficult to explain feeling that I used to know them once. They emerge from the recess of my memory over which hangs a heavy canvas of impenetrable darkness. 'How come you don't remember us?!' I often read in reproaching looks... This fore-existence veils them in an impenetrable secret: yes, I am almost sure that I do know them from the times immemorial and yet, you see, I don't remember them!... That is why I see all women as if they had been torn out from me during the amnesic sleep (or the past)."* (TITEL, 271-272, footnote J.P.) The underlined expressions are crucial and they point at the fact that an image of woman as an archetype emerges from the collective unconscious, from the primary archaic times. The image of woman that is transferred from generation to generation in human subconscious and projected in all beings of female sex whom Ivo Filipovac encounters is distinct and clear although his own mother had died at his birth and he grew up as a motherless child.

As a Romanian, Sorin Titel undoubtedly knew Eliade's works on myths and archetypes. He also knew Jung personally as he did his work dedicated to archetypes. It is not surprising then that in his novel we find archetypes that are identical with Jung's scheme of archetypes. Jung defined archetype as content of the collective unconscious. The basic ones with which he was concerned in his studies comprise: a persona, a shadow, anima, animus, a wise old man, a great mother. These images of the unconscious are manifested predominantly in dreams and arts. In S. Titel's entire tetralogy where

¹ Întotdeauna am vrut să scriu despre lucruri fundamentale (Sorin Titel – Caiete critice, Flacăra, 12/1985).

a dream and the issue of artistic creation play an important role one can identify, behind the fine veil of realistic view of the world, the incredible land of archetypes. As female figures prevail, we tried to identify the archetypes of a female character and to notice the way they had been projected into Titel's construction of the novel.

The Anima archetype (as the counterpart to Persona) has four developmental stages corresponding with Eve (representing purely instinctive, biological relations), Faustus' Helen (representing romantic aesthetic level), Virgin Mary (representing the level of spiritual perfection) and Sofia (the embodiment of wisdom). Anima embodies the personal and collective unconscious manifested in the images of archetypes. It prevails in moods, responses, impulses and in all the other spontaneous mental manifestations of man. It represents a collective image of woman in man's unconscious which enables man to understand the essence of woman. The first representation of this image is always mother from whom it is then transferred on women who represent bearers of emotions to men.

The Great Mother archetype (Magna mater) has positive qualities, e.g. wisdom, discretion, love, care, upbringing. She rules over the unconscious world of emotions. From the archetype of the Great Mother comes the archetype of the Old Woman who embodies the female mythical ancestor. In Romanian mythology she is related to early spring days when the workings of female principle begin to be palpably manifested in the life of nature and society. However, in the novel she is identified with the wisdom of advanced age. In the first place, both Sofia (as the top stage of Anima) and the Old Woman represent Mother who rules over the world of the novel as the only deity: *"She, and not the omnipotent father who rarely looks at his creation, watches from her supreme cloud, sad and content in her modesty, this live world, this panorama of destinies tossed about in history, in their own emotions and follies, in empty ambitions and uncontrollable weaknesses."* (DUMITRIU, 1984: 43).

When speaking of archetypes in the novel, dream is of great importance. In a dream, the living meet their dead ancestors who want to deliver an important message; in his dream, a young artist talks to Francis Joseph about modern fine arts; in her dream, mother Sofia communicates with her son who is very far from her. It is through a dream that the archetype manifests itself as the voice of the

unconscious. The very first dream in the novel *Woman, Look, Your Son* foreshadows the deadly danger Sofia's son has found himself in. It is an image of a deserted empty house with windows and doors ajar. The same image reappears later in the story of the second Marcu who meets Vasco's father. The old man whose life is slowly getting near his death, gradually loses his memory and thus his own identity. Marcu the painter compares his soul to a room with windows and doors ajar and wind blowing through them. The identical image thus spontaneously emerges from the unconscious of two different people - once through a dream, another time as a painting.

SOFIA

Many philosophers, among them Jung, identify Wisdom, i.e. Sofia, with the Holy Spirit. However, the Romanian author Elisabeta Roșca² perceives Sofia through esoteric teaching and compares her to a woman portrayed in a tarot card which symbolizes the supremacy of the world and man and represents the initiation pilgrimage to spiritual knowledge. In this sense it can be stated that the character of Sofia in the novel *Woman, Look, Your Son* represents the Lady of the World as her life is divided into four temporal and spatial quarters; it moves through four ages. The early age introduces Sofia as a very young mother, almost a child, who still plays with dolls as well as with her sons. It is the age of childhood, beginnings, vigour. The second age is connected with summer solstice and is full of femininity. Sofia discovers two loves: physical love for her husband and maternal love for her fourth son, Marcu. The third age represents maturity associated with worries when the fate of her son is being jeopardized and is defined by evening and autumn equinox. The fourth age is the old age, the time of loneliness and seclusion, associated with winter and the proximity of death.

In each of the above mentioned ages Sofia is aware of herself and never loses her inner balance. Thanks to it she manages to overcome all the adversities of her fate. For Sofia, the world has not

² Cf. ROȘCA (2000).

turned into a valley of sorrows even though her feeling of guilt prevented her from enjoying its beauties. However, various outer stimuli (scents, sounds) evoke the memories of past happiness and they often do so through liberating weeping. If we agree with E. Roșca, then the girl in the tarot card, though shown without a halo, is wrapped in a garland representing the connection of heaven and earth. Similar details are identifiable in Christian iconography or in religious paintings: Mary with the baby in her arms is portrayed in an oval and the details of her clothing and posture (a wavy veil, balance kept as if on one leg) symbolize the reviving movement of all things, the world as a whirl, an eternal dance in which nothing ever stops. Sofia's immense love of the wealth and beauties of the world does not suggest vanity. Quite the contrary, it reflects human perfection. Sofia embodies Wisdom which is contained in her name.

Through her complexity, the character of Sofia as the top stage of Anima represents the top stage of female principle. In Sofia meet nearly all women heroines created by Titel in his tetralogy. Sofia as a young mother of three sons reminds us of playful Dorca from the *Distant Land*. Sofia, as a happy, loving wife, unites in herself Adele from *Distant Land* and Maria from the novel *Bird and Shadow*. Sofia is unable to protect Marcu from his elder brothers' hatred as the twins' Dieter and Tuti's mother Valerie's heart is so hardened by their death (the novel *Fast Moment*) that she begins to hate the baby she is just carrying. So, in Sofia are hidden a child, a happy woman, a blessed mother and a wise old woman, all at once. As Sofia is the archetype of the last stage of Anima, she is intentionally a doubled mother of the second Marcu – the painter. Both sons were born prematurely, both mothers are anxiously looking after the babies and going through all their childhood troubles; later they fear for them and identify with their unhappiness and inability to live and be happy and in the end they both go a long way to save their sons when they are in deadly danger.

GREAT MOTHER – MATER MUNDI

According to Jung, the Great Mother represents the archetypal fullness as well as the positive – negative, secular - spiritual polarity.

There is a good mother with such properties as motherly love, magic authority, wisdom and intellectual enthusiasm that transcends reason, a mother with useful inclinations who looks after everything that allows growth and fertility. Bad mother evokes what is mysterious, hidden and dark; the abyss and the world of death, everything that tempts, destroys, that is merciless and horrible. Sofia is portrayed as a good mother, she has no negative properties to speak of. However, there is a character of Frau Grete, who embodies ambivalence of the Great Mother. She is the real mistress in the house of aunt Rosa. She lives in the very centre of the house, in the kitchen, in the heart, close to the furnace with crackling fire and hot hob on which various delicacies are cooked. The kitchen is her bloody kingdom. There are slaughtered geese, piles of bloody meat, live trout and red lobsters in boiling water, real carnage that, however, resembles abundance, well-being. The author indicates Frau Grete as Mater Mundi because her hands produce a miracle: meat and blood turn into food which is a process that is part of the essential order. Frau Grete has two faces of Mater Mundi: one is connected with blood, sacrifice and death, the other one relates to warmth, food, life. Her portrait combines several features of archaic goddesses who are in accord with earthly rhythm because their task is to secure fertility of the earth and keep the seeds. Into this typology fall both the goddess Demeter and the Romanian Muma: *"A voluminous blond cook with braids wrapped around her head as snakes, surrounded by kitchen fumes, smells of thyme and parsley, penetrating fumes from number of spices (...) gains in my mind a form of a real mater mundi, our mother, mother of all whom she feeds.* (TITEL, 1983: 280)

OLD WOMAN

She is based on the archetype of Great Mother and in the novel she is identical with the wise old woman who has rich experience of the old age; she is a sort of a depository of wisdom. Contrary to the first three novels where they appear in pairs, here the old women appear in a trinity as Sofia's three mothers-in-law: her husband's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. They make it possible

for her to remain a playful mother. Her task is to conceive and bear a baby, everything else will be looked to by the old women. The relationship between Sofia and her mothers-in-law is complementary: the mothers-in-law represent a darker side of the Great Mother, they are associated with sickness and pain, with conjuring and other medical practices, with night and darkness. Sofia, as a young woman reflects the bright side of the Great Mother: she gives life, she feeds and is associated with beneficial forces of life. Apart from looking after the children ("*...They were three scared mums, because if the boys fell ill – once with smallpox, then with measles (...) they whirled at their bed or cradle, worried (...) no decisions were made by Sofia; on the contrary, they took care of everything, her task was just to breastfeed which was not difficult at all, because her breasts burst with milk.*") (TITEL, 1983: 21). they issued a variety of orders which, however, acquired the value of priceless lessons as they were to prepare her for the role of a wise old woman later on. Therefore the feverish rush with which they wanted to deliver to their daughter-in-law maximum knowledge stands as a counterpart to Sofia's calm. She tries to obey all the three of them, carry out their orders so that she would learn something from each of them – not only to master the basic points of her activities (the house, the garden, the summer kitchen) but also to acquire the ability to be ubiquitous and act as a lady who ensures fertility. Gradually, Sofia also learns how to recognize the signs of death when her oldest mother-in-law dies. Then the third important role of an old woman comes to the fore: to have patronage not just over the birth of a baby and sustaining of life but be present even at its extinction. Sofia's three mothers-in-law thus act as three Fates who in accord with the Romanian mythology represent three faeries: one spins life, the other one fulfils life, gives it sense and keeps the order, and then the third one decides about death. All the three of them are equally important and they need each other because they can represent destiny of man only when they are together.

Whether it is Sofia, the Great Mother or the Old Woman, Titel's novel celebrates femininity, the archetypal mother, the protector of life. In the fourth chapter we encounter one of many portrayals of motherly care that wins the battle with Sartre's philosophical and abstract care for humankind. "*I think that even if Sartre had been willing to suffer for any type of injustice committed thousands of*

kilometres away from cafes at Saint-Germain de Pres, he would not have understood mother. She worried much more about her son's tonsils than about the government crisis in Indochina. (...) So, when a great philosopher lays the cards on the table and relies on terse and well-founded quotes from his books, on his entire philosophical system – 'So that you know', he tells his mother, 'how much I do care about the fate of the mankind' – she starts quite confusedly and not in a very literary language to speak about her son who got scarlet fever just last week! 'I am worried about its developing into some kind of complication', the mother says and Sartre smiles because his care is much greater and more general: he is interested in, that is, worried about the fate of the entire world! 'The entire mankind is sick', the philosopher says. 'Do you really suffer?' The great philosopher's mother asks wonderingly. 'And what actually does it mean to suffer in general', she asks him and (...) on the one weighing pan she lays her love for her son who had caught scarlet fever and on the other one she lays Sartre's love for the entire globe. And, surprise, the scales have tilted to mum's side. I knew it would be like that, says mum and gives Sartre a triumphant look. On the scale it even weighs more', she says and tries to persuade the philosopher that there was no subterfuge." (TITEL, 1983: 122).

Thus Titel's novel acquires a metaphysical dimension which had been his intention from the beginning and which allows him to move forwards and backwards within a fifty-year interval – from World War I to the 1970s and back. The great performance of life is being interrupted by accidents, individual deaths, personal sufferings and pains predominantly of both Marcus that are, however, part of the passing time. This is what this tangle of events, different historical periods and geographical locations, tragedies, happiness and misfortunes wants to convey. "A chance is more powerful than fantasy of any author." (TITEL, 1983: 335). And so Titel lets life flow calmly and he only gets interested in its real sense at the end. He does not theorize, from time to time he just asks questions and looks for answers. However, his is not an investigative prose, nor is he obsessed with looking for the truth. Titel's writing about common social dramas that take place in the country is melancholic and gives them the dimension of events of universal relevance. We find ourselves in a kind of nostalgic reality, in a fairy-story life, in time that absorbs

everything. The novel opens with mother's prophetic dream about her son and closes with a similar dream. And everything that happens in between happens as if in a dream about possible reality.

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Jana Páleníková

Katedra romanistiky

Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave

Filozofická fakulta

Gondova 2, 811 02 Bratislava 1, Slovensko

jana.palenikova@uniba.sk