

EXTRADIEGETIC NARRATION OF THE SERPENT MYTH *SAGA E GJARPRIT, VIOLA ISUFAJ*

MARISA KERBIZI

Aleksandër Moisiu Universiteti, Durrës, Albania4
Email: mkerbizi@yahoo.com

Saga e Gjarprit is a modern novel, set on an intricate narrative system. "Figure on the carpet" (James, Henry 1896) is not easy to discover, making it one of its special characteristics. It is established on a cyclical pattern, with its beginning and end being almost identical. The book starts with the narrator, sitting at the office of the psychoanalyst for the interpretation of a dream, which hides more than the secrets of a soul disturbed by love. Using analepses, we slowly descent into the traumatic events, which have been suppressed in the subconscious. Such events, sometimes are personally experienced, and other times they are carried by the individual as part of the collective memory, which has remained unredeemed in the mind of an ethnic group or the whole humanity. The narrative discourse starts in media res, and goes back to historical time and sometimes to mythical one. *Saga e Gjarprit* starts as a love story. The narrator, Izolta experiences the pain of an unrealized love. The strong feeling she tries to suppress, erupts on the surface with a multiplied intensity. *The dream*, as stated by the narrator, *brought to me what my mind did not call any more, but just called it while being deceived by the lethargy of my sensations*. According to Freud, *the essence of all psychic activity is led by the sexual desire in the boiling pot of the unconscious* (Freud, 1997: 10).

The dream serves as a starting point in order to unveil the whole hidden passionate universe. The suppressed erotic desires which have been consciously censured are displayed through it. The dream takes the narrator **below mountain K**.

The news broadcast by all television channels ... individuals were sought... to stay for some time in a kind of prison ... like underground. Location of the prison: below mountain K (Saga e Gjarpit).

This symbolic-allegorical journey can be explained in several ways.

Firstly, it is the attempt to descend to the depth of the unconscious. Mountain K. is the outward appearance, healthy ego, false glory, but actually the surprise, the experiment takes place underneath it, the place where the imprisoned id seeks freedom. This is admitted by one of the 'characters', when stating that:

There are many varieties of banishments, there are deportations to any dark spot of the brains ... (idem)

Secondly, the underground is connected with death, with the desire of the narrator to escape from the mediocre life which throws him to the hands of somebody he does not love. Needless to remind that the dream comes as a response to the unwanted formalization of a "love" relationship.

A day before there were talks about a marriage, to which I could not find any welcoming place to hide from.

The narrator finds his refuge deep into his unconscious, where the real great love had found shelter for a long time. They meet underground because *man always dies for somebody or something, as death is the only one to fulfill the conditions of love* (Plasari, 2005: 57).

The designation of the narrator is not accidental. According to Woren and Wellek, *the individualism of the character starts with his denomination* (Woren & Wellek, 1993: 208). But in this case it is not completely like this. The designation of the narrator is archetypal, as it is connected with a literary ancestor. As a result, the characterization through such labelling is not "ex nihilo nihil", but carries the semantic meaning related to it. Izolta narrator suffers under the burden of an impossible love the same way as her namesake in *Tristan and Izolta*.

Izolta of the Saga is a two-dimensional character, almost nothing is known about her; only the great feeling of love is described in details. The flat or two-dimensional character is a non-traditional character which is widely used in modern literature. It is characterized by undetailed descriptions of personality (Bennett Encyclopedia, 1996: 203). According to Funk, this character has distinctive features like: a) it has no past, b) it is often unsociable c) it is described through a few physical and emotional characteristics d) it can be an archetype (Funk, 2005: 86).

Actually, pieces of memories of Izolta's past are found throughout the narration. Their function is not to equip the character with personality, via the biographical-chronological presentation of the past, but these memories explain the genesis of the patient's neurosis. An unlucky love story is her disease, whose roots go far back in time, from the early childhood. A distant, blurry memory, a children's grief, has left deep traces in the unconscious.

Unfulfilled libido brings anxiety, serving as a cause for the troubled dream. Symbols such as mountain K, the underground, duration of the stay - nine months and the greatest reward when everything is over, are details fit for an erotic dream. According to Freud *day dreams and fantasies represent a symbolic satisfaction of suppressed sexual desires* (Freud, 1997: 12). Through it, the narrator reveals that part of the soul which has remained for a long time in the dark, finally appears. The great desire towards the love object presents itself in full form.

The usage of verbs in admiring form (*të paskam ndjekur, paskam kaluar*), show that the character-narrator himself has not been able to recognize the deep dimension of his feeling. All the undiscovered depth of the soul is displayed through the dream.

The love object (Freud, 1997: 9), is sometimes described as a human being and some other times it acquires fantastic features. The person in love is rarely characterized by his designation, Ilir, but he is more often called by his mythical name, Snake. According to Stjepčević (*Simbolet e kultit tek ilirët*) the myth relates that Kadmi married Harmoni and their new born son was named Ilir. Illyrios, was coiled by the snake, giving him the magical power. The Snake (serpent stylized with spiral S) denotes the underground life, because of being a htonic animal.

The connotation acquired by the stylistic element snake in the novel is very broad. First of all, it denotes a love object, with which the narrator is emotionally connected since childhood.

...I would have met Yllirius again... what does this name coiling in the mouth as a snake mean? Exactly, snake,

Sometimes it transforms into a mythical-biblical symbol, where the snake is the Satan (surprisingly, the initial S is again the same) urging the original man towards sin.

Snake, what do you have to tell us ?

You have cheated us once, led us to sin and we still have our punishment to endure.

However it is mostly semantically represented by the evil which puts in jeopardy a nation or an ethnic.

The Snake as a love object comes in different shapes in Izolta's dream. The narrator goes down to the roots of their love (in their childhood) and fulfills *the possible life* of the beloved Snake through fantasy (Because he had left times ago, Izolta knows no details about his real actual life). Sometimes he is a harlequin she meets underground, sometimes a scholar she follows in different countries and other times an important official. Whatever the shapes the love object gains, their relationship is accompanied by anxiety (which is sometimes delineated as anxiety from absence and sometimes from presence). It is this feeling that connects him with the traumatic events deriving from the sphere of the intimate-personal relationships and are related to the life of a nation, an ethnic or the whole world.

The character of Izolta is delineated as an archetype, who feels the huge burden of the collective unconscious. This duality between the erotic experiencing and the recall of painful national or world events can be considered as a tendency to describe '...the unstable, the transitory, the ephemeral, while on the other side the eternal, the aeon, the unchangeable' (Bodler, 1966: 163).

According to Jung, *the person who speaks with archetypes, speaks as with thousands of voices* (Jung, 1950: 90). This is the reason why the voice of the narrator is answered sometimes by the Jews who fear the camp, sometimes the Russian student, sometimes a group of witches who dance embracing each other, sometimes Dr. Freud himself.

The narrated time is millennial: it starts at origines, with Adam and Eve and continues to the present time. This happens, according to Jung, because *in a dream man experiences the ancient world of the archetypes, mixed with the material of present day* (Jung, 1950: 91). That would make the narrator state the following – *I do not speak for this moment. Neither for this face, nor for this view. I speak about other times.*

Narration time lasts only for a few moments (as long as the dream does) and several time periods are

experienced all together as one at one, in a mixture where the present and past merge furiously with each other. The real and the fantastic, myth and legend, truth and lies are merged into one. The fast rhythm and density of events make the narrator suffer from *katachronos*. He experiences the past, the present and predicts the same traumatic events in the future, so he strongly feels the burden of the time.

The analogy between similar events that have occurred in different times and places make Izolta experience the anamnesis of the world very closely. The myth of the dictator accompanies her story from *ab ovo* until present time. The approximate conception of such figures as Adolf Hitler and the communist official unfolds a universal truth: *Dictators change their names, but not the essence of their being*. Their life and death is similar, so the history repeats itself in a cyclical way. Adolf Hitler, *primus inter pares*, the worst of the bad, is constantly reincarnated, sometimes identical, and sometimes as the shadow of himself. He does not perish, just changes faces, but the soul and all of its evil remains the same. The fear of repetition of the evil makes the narrator state as follows:

He *together with his accomplices, he is going to die, more exactly he will think he is going to die, but in fact everything will start from the beginning, endlessly, endlessly...*

The features of Adolf (silent character), generalize the archetypal similarities shared by all dictators of all times. The dream retouches every sinister event that had already happened, in the small passionate reality of the narrator or in the world history. According to Freud this phenomenon called *Death drive* (Freud, 1997: 9) is defined as a return to the traumatic events, in order to change them. Thus, when Hitler is underground, he is just Adolf, paying the price of deeds he has committed:

- *Poor Adolf! They are killing him!*

- *You should not feel bad at all as he has beat, dismembered and tortured millions, do you understand what I am saying...millions...*

The reckoning day has come. It always comes, sooner or later, in the dream or wide awake. This axiom comes as the form of an epigraph, in the introduction of the book :

(...)the reward (judgement for deeds)

Will surely happen

Although well-known historical characters come to the memory of the narrator, what worries him most is the traumatic memory of the past of his country.

The complex feeling love-anxiety accompanying the narrator can be interpreted in a broader sense than the personal-intimate relationship with the soulmate.

The Snake, is identified with the nation itself. Illyrios (according to modern philology is coiled in the mouth as a snake) gave the name to our ancestors. Considering the above, Ilir, Snake, love, anxiety, are understood and interpreted at another level. Izolta feels a slave of her national ancestry. The 'genetic' love for her nation and the accompanying fear too, make her hopelessly wander in memories.

Fierce events, eternally carved in the collective consciousness of a nation, have left marks on the narrator. Despite the fact that he has not experienced them himself, he feels their alienating consequences.

Not the altar, we cannot pull it down. We are afraid. The ram died on the altar. This is a bad omen...Smoke, just smoke...people destroy the houses of God as if drunk...superstition...just that...the lies of the grandparents...there are no supernatural creatures, they are just imagination of ignorants as a result of fear...and spread by the priests in order to extend their power...

The threat of the history repetition continues to echo in the narrator's mind. The mistake flows almost genetically in the veins of Albanians. As Camaj states, *in our history as a nation we feel all the tragic consequence of losing the right path* (Berisha, A. N., 1990).

The past, the present, the future do not exist separately in his mind. The past is so close, you touch it as you lay the hand. Time does not flow linear, one event following another. The narrator experiences the relativity of time; the present is confused with the past, both of them foresee the future. The whole novel is based on *Proairetic Code* (Barthes, 1963: 77), which according to Barthes, is related to prediction of the end of events. The greatest fear of the narrator, is that he and the ethnic group he belongs to, are doomed to experience the same events which are repeated endlessly. He is afraid that the future may be a cloning of the present.

«What is going to happen to our children? Will they also be punished by the scorching fire?»

Such syntagms as ***The school of united devils, comrade Danilov, file, secrets, orders*** certify that the dictator herein, is the cruelest of his kind, the communist dictator. He has no name because the message conveyed is more important.

The whole psychosis of suffering and fear is clearly delineated, by mentioning the topic word **File (Dosje)**.

File! *The sick sun can be neutralized, but never can it.. the guiltless guilty, tragic victim of veins and DNA.*

Nominal clauses are used because the word itself is sufficient to describe in details the operating way of the dictatorial communist system. If the reader is not

part of the *creation of meaning* scheme (of Stanley Straw) he can hardly get the meaning of the novel while reading it.

The focalization of events through the perspective of Izolta (first person narration), increases the subjectivity and stresses the emotional experience. There is an absence of events that could connect the narrator directly with the narration time because this is a novel of feelings and not of actions.

Although we have to deal with a real time narration, it can be considered as 'recit fantastique', because the reader is characterized by a *process of 'hesitation'* (Todorov, 1970: 94) in accepting characters and events. Adolf, the Frightening Taulant, the snake which is constantly changing identity are not easily accepted, because they are unusual 'characters' in the traditional fiction. The extradiegetic narration increases the role of fantasy and the fantastic, because history is told by one character- narrator who is dreaming. The place where characters meet is that special too. It is like a symbolic hell, underground, where living and dead people are part of an experiment.

The end of the saga is similar to its beginning. The novel opens with the character-narrator telling a dream that has worried him and ends with the psychoanalyst interpreting it. Izolta experiences a grave psychological state, and she is not sure anymore about her mental health. Her past, and that of the nation she belongs to, have created a complex dream taking her to the brink of madness. She lives in the space *between the two deaths* (Lacan, 1978: 53), the symbolic (sleep) and the real one (alienation from the pressure of reality), not being able to 'wake up'. The alienating pressure put by the outside world, makes her feel worried even when she is sleeping. But the narration about the traumatic events she has seen in dreams makes her surpass the dividing line from madness. As Freud states that dream and the day dream save us from the danger of madness.

Finally we come to the conclusion that by poetic language (which is characterised by the lyrical and affective expression of reality) *is enlightened the inner world of the individual* (Hamiti, 1974: 152), who is worried about the destiny of the ethnic group he belongs to. This message comes through flat characters, sometimes two dimensional, sometimes silent (similar in form to the characters of Pashku, Joyce, Becket etc.). The abundance in figures of speech, rhythm, symbols and symbolic systems certify that the modern fiction avoids characterization of such types as Fiction = Poetry – a – b – c (Barthes, 1963: 75). The narration is characterized by a descending scaling (dream, film, memories), which makes the meaning more difficult to obtain; the profoundness of thought is always dark.

As a conclusion we can state that the Saga constitutes a rather elegant model of the contemporary novel. It is a literary work, in the reserve of our literature, which makes you proud of being written in Albanian language.

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