



ECONOMY AND LITERATURE: THE CASE OF TUDOR ARGHEZI

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Abstract Tudor Arghezi is one of the Romanian writers who had a special inclination toward different literary projects which could give him a good profit. He was not satisfied with his condition and made everything he could in order to accomplish his plans. Arghezi was a close friend of the industrialist Nicolae Malaxa, who financed many of his projects. The Romanian poet was also a delegate of his neighbourhood, trying to solve many of the problems they had.

Key words:

Tudor Arghezi, business, money, Romanian literature

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1. Introduction

Tudor Arghezi is well-known in the Romanian literature for his preference for the material side of life. He had many projects, among which there are some in which the industrialist Nicolae Malaxa was implied. The poet intended to establish a business with a printing house he had next to his house in the slum of Mărtișor, Bucharest. His opponents often underlined this aspect of his life, but beyond the desire of a bourgeois life, the poet had such an inclination because of his tumultuous childhood.

2. A poet close to materialism

In the summer of 1926 the construction of his house in the slum Mărtișor is far from over and Arghezi is pressed by financial difficulties. He wants to build here even a farm in order to make dairy products that could be sold in Bucharest. Being well-known for his practical spirit, Arghezi has some weird ideas. Knowing from a few specialists that his land hides large quantities of sand and gravel, he also has the idea of an exploitation of this resource. But he doesn't have the financial part. There have always been rumors about the privileged relationship between the poet and the great industrialist Nicolae Malaxa. Arghezi's relationship with him is little known in Romanian literature. Moreover, in his articles, the poet hardly mentions his name. He writes one article dedicated to Malaxa, the writing being a sign of the friendship that existed between them: *The Malaxa Train* (Arghezi: 2005). In this article, the writer praises his friend calling him "The Marshal of iron and steel", a man with "a mood of adolescent" (Arghezi: 2005).

For Arghezi, Nicolae Malaxa was a protector and even a confidant. He was the most important financial support of the poet, which, along with the Romanian King, but contributing more consistently, supported him for a long time. Arghezi reveals his plans, projects, hopes and his disappointments in the letters he sends to Malaxa. He even consults the engineer about the direction of the magazine *The Parrot's Tickets*, which was written almost entirely by him. The poet made him even the confession that only he could control the direction of his articles.

Arghezi wanted him even as a business partner. He even asks for support to open a small store. He intended to start a business to distribute printed materials, a project that has never been materialized. Without the industrialist's financial help, the poet would not have managed to write. Thus, in 1926, he obtained from Malaxa the promise of a loan. His goal is to buy a printing house. He even asked Malaxa if he was interested in a business with the exploitation of sand in Arghezi's own backyard. Here's what he wrote in 1926: "I forgot to say, when you visited my land, about its resources, which, according to some neighbors and well constructors, has around 3 to 5 meters of gravel and also sand. Would you be interested to talk to a constructor about this, who can give me some building materials as a payment for these resources? (...) The gravel is brought to Bucharest from far away. An engineer I talked to told me that the value of the gravel is enormous: I don't even dare to think about it" (CNSAS: 1926).

In order to purchase the desired printing house, Malaxa promises him a loan of 100.000 lei. This is mentioned in a letter addressed to him by the poet: "When I saw you

at your house and I told you about the purchase of the respective tools, you approved the project I had told you about it" (CNSAS: 1926).

Shortly after this promise, Malaxa is probably suspicious and decides to give him the money in two parts, causing the poet's dissatisfaction. In response, Arghezi sends him a letter of explanation: "Dear Sir, one thing is clear. If I am unable to manage the amount of 100.000 lei as a whole, I could not be able to administer two fractions of this money" (CNSAS: 1926). The pamphleteer Pamfil Șeicaru remembers that Arghezi went every day to maintain fully equipped printing equipment that he kept closed. Purchased at auction, but still not fitted, it could't still is used but the poet had big plans (Șeicaru: 2002).

The engineer's financial support was crucial for him to establish his own printing house and to fulfill the dream of gaining his independence from publishers and their financial claims. Moreover, Malaxa influences the direction of Arghezi's articles. In the letters he sends to "The Patron", the poet admits his "obedience":

"I want to add something about the discipline am I fundamentaly bound to. I accept suggestions, guidelines and orders only from two persons in this universe, from you and From the King, those that I take from you being executed exactly, irrespective of their subject. But it won't be the same worth others" (CNSAS : 1926). Arghezi asks for his permission to publish or even offers explanations to Malaxa about his writings and periodically sends him letters. Learning that his friend is sick, Arghezi shows his concern about his health in a letter. He even dedicates some poems to his protector and intends to write an entire volume of poems to dedicate it to Malaxa, but he disagrees and doesn't want his name mentioned on the first page of the volume *Hore* (1939). Moreover, in this volume, there are facts that show the respect that the poet had for Malaxa. A good example is the poem *Greeting*.

In the letters sent to Malaxa he asks his "Patron" to help him find a job in one of his factories or, at least, ho help him sell his magazines in these factories. However, Malaxa was a discreet friend of Tudor Arghezi. Their friendship was not even mentioned in Romanian Literature over time.

In the late 1930s, Arghezi is in a very difficult financial situation. Debts are high and he cannot carry out his projects. His printing tools are not ready to be used. The help comes from the Romanian King Carol The 2nd, but in a much larger amount from Nicolae Malaxa. Embarrassed and overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness of the one he called "The Patron" the poet sends him a letter to express his gratitude after he manages to pay some debts:

"The question is: Can this situation last for a long time, with me being in the position to receive all the time,

without deserving this? Aren't you tired? But what if you will be? What can I do to deserve the 60.000 lei per month that I receive from your pocket, money that I need another two years from now on?" (CNSAS: 1926). Malaxa loved art and literature, helping many other artists besides Tudor Arghezi. In order to express his gratitude, the writer dedicates a whole novel to the rich industrialist, a work which remained unpublished. In October 2007, Mr. George Pienescu gave us some details about the years he spent in Arghezi's company while they worked together on editing some writings. Arghezi reviewed all his manuscripts and showed him something very interesting. Among the manuscripts he saw one that remained unknown and seemed to be dedicated to the figure of Nicolae Malaxa. The merits of the Romanian engineer are enormous because he helped Arghezi to publish many of his books.

Cupidity is defined as a desire of people to gain money, the desire to accumulate wealth. Arghezi was always concerned about being an independent man on his feet, eager to launch his own small business in order to be protected against problems. At first, he wanted to make a business from selling sausages, making plans while he was in Switzerland, to help his family from Romania to start such a project. When he returned from Switzerland and built his own printing press he intended to start a business to sell books and magazines. He always loved money and material well-being. As an anecdote, the pamphleteer Pamfil Șeicaru said that Arghezi wanted to catch all dogs from Mărțișor neighborhood, where he lived, in order to use their skin for the production of gloves! Arghezi earned his living from writing, transforming literature into a small business.

The poet cannot be easily portrayed. When you think you've found his true nature, Arghezi manages to mislead you. He had a spectacular life, divided between two mothers, one father, his grandparents from Gorj, some dogs and cats, a prison and two wives. His physical appearance was not imposing, the poet being only 1.63 meters tall. He always sought the weakness of those that tried to interact with him, having a propensity to dispute. The Romanian writer (and priest) Gala Galaction (Grigore Pișculescu) was fascinated by him. At first, when the two adolescents met, Galaction was impressed by the attitude of the young poet Ion Theodorescu (Tudor Arghezi), a lonely person who defended the gates of his soul.

In 1918-1919, when he saw Arghezi for the first time, Pamfil Șeicaru was very disappointed. He describes him as "short, fat, with a walk that resembled that of a duck" (Șeicaru: 2002). His impression is that Arghezi looked like an innkeeper that used vulgar words and "spoke as if he wanted to capture people's thoughts" (Șeicaru: 2002).

Șeicaru considers that Arghezi sold his talent for nothing. They first met at the Modern Hotel in Bucharest, where the poet was kept after he was taken into custody by the Romanian police because of accusations of high treason in the process of the "collaborationist journalists". The same pamphleteer writes that Tudor Arghezi had a humble origin, his father being an innkeeper, but Nae Theodorescu, his father was a confectioner and his mother, Rozalia Arghezi, had Hungarian nationality.

Arghezi has two different portraits: the young and the mature one. The first shows a young man who suffers in love; hypochondriac, convinced that he would die young (see correspondence with Aretia Panaitescu). He always complained of nervous disorders and neurasthenia. Arghezi was also frightened by the specter of death, which he considered inevitable, confessing in a letter sent to the young teacher Aretia Panaitescu that in one night he was even close to death (Cioculescu: 1982). Therefore, he describes himself as a fragile nature, "swinging on a spider's web, over nothingness." (Cioculescu: 1982).

The second portrait shows a mature man, with a different life, a "bourgeois" type of living in a big house, with two kids and a devoted life. Arghezi entered the monastic life when he was only 20 years old. He was torn between the love of two young women, Constanța Zissu and Aretia Panaitescu, the first becoming his wife for a while. The mature man did not like the intellectual woman Constanța Zissu, and only wanted a wife who knew "how to cook, sew buttons and clean the house" (Cioculescu: 1982). He will later find that perfect embodiment, the perfect wife, in Paraschiva Burdea.

Let's imagine that we have never seen Tudor Arghezi in any picture. Anyone would think that the energy of the pamphleteer's writing will make us believe that he was a tall man, with a serious voice and impetuous movements. But he was not such a man. He was rather short (Beldie: 2005) with a high-pitched voice. He used vulgar words in the conversations he had with his friends, always wearing a cap on his head and smoking all the time. Arghezi was a fascinating man and writer, sparking both the outrage and admiration of those that had the chance to meet him.

There are many anecdotes about Tudor Arghezi. Here's what Constantin Beldie, a friend and neighbour of the poet, wrote about him: "He must have some big remorse because every time we meet and we walk together on his garden's paths, he feels the need to curse as if he wants to free himself from this pressure. Despite the rectitude he displays around his family and the whole world, the poet is tempted to take the awry path. Under his natural timidity and unctuousness borrowed from the monastic practice, one can discover his obsession for forbidden things and sexual repression.

When he curses he names the sexual organs with a desire that makes me feel intimidated." (Beldie: 2005).

Arghezi was a man who had the ambition to succeed in life, an attitude of landlord that started from the hidden feelings of his childhood. He was a cryptic, duplicitous person who wore different masks depending on the context, a good merchant, with certain economic skills and human relations. Arghezi himself said in an interview given to Vasile Netea how, in 1927, finding, by a happy conjuncture, that the government would fall the next day, he rushed to get from Octavian Goga, the Ministry of the Internal Affairs (who knew the political situation of those days) a 200.000 lei loan. He admitted that he never returned the money to the Romanian state. Tudor Arghezi was even a representative of his neighbors, taking the responsibility to solve the problems they all had in relation to the city hall.

The poet lived a secluded life in Mărțișor with his family. He had only a few friends. Among those who were close to him was Șerban Cioculescu, who made an interesting portrait of Tudor Arghezi:

"He was a sturdy but short man with a head voice and an exaggerated politeness" (Cioculescu: 1974).

He did not like to talk about his work, about what he was writing, and detested to be called "Master" by his admirers. He wrote in silence and kept every manuscript, being very exigent with his own poetry.

The poet even opened a case against doctors from the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest and obtained an 18-month suspension of Dumitru Bagdasar because he failed to diagnose accurately the disease which almost killed the poet in 1939. Tudor Arghezi even asked for compensation for the 18 months of inactivity during which he could not honor contracts with some publishers. Later, the doctors discovered that the treatment applied by Dr. Dumitru Bagdasar was actually the remedy of Arghezi's disease.

Far from the portrait of a writer endowed with a great talent, Tudor Arghezi is the type of a poet craftsman who "fogged" the words of his poems. Rigorous and perfectionist, didn't publish anything until he reviewed it thoroughly. Everything was read by his wife, Paraschiva, who "approved" the writings which could be published.

3. Conclusions

The biography of Tudor Arghezi was a mixture of opportunities he has received both in literature and life. His friendship with Nicolae Malaxa was crucial, the engineer agreeing to finance his projects. Whether it was about some printing tools, the construction of his house or the magazines the poet wrote, he has always been a reliable support for him. Arghezi's case is one of the few in which a Romanian writer is inclined to different types of small business.

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