

The Uprising

Răscoala

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Liviu Rebreanu's novel "The Uprising" was published in 1932 and delves into the political ideologies not only within Romanian society but also within the broader European context during the time of the last peasant uprising in Europe. Situated amidst the social tensions of the era, the novel is intertwined with the intricate political fabric of Romanian society, offering a nuanced portrayal of domestic and international political life, from parliamentary debates to speculations on the suppression of the rebellion. The narrative is rich in diverse characters and narrative innovations, making use of documentary integration and realism to enhance its depth.

The narrative structure of the novel sets up a clash between two distinct social classes: the landowners and leaseholders on one side and the peasants on the other, each entrenched in irreconcilable positions. This conflict escalates to a broader confrontation between the citizen and the state as a coercive authority. Throughout the novel, there is a persistent exploration of the ongoing social crisis and the quest for political solutions, portrayed through characters aligned with various political factions.

The novel is divided into two narrative sections: the first titled "The country is rising up!" and the second "The Fires!", consisting of a symmetrical twelve-chapter structure that chronicles the eruption, progression, and brutal suppression of the peasant uprising that served as a primary source of documentation for Rebreanu. There are indications that the author extensively researched gendarmerie documents pertaining to troop movements and events in 1907 to provide an authentic portrayal of the social, economic, and political milieu of the time.

The epic narrative revolves around the interplay between two opposing political factions - those in government accused of inaction and those in opposition. Additionally, the novel subtly highlights the rural-urban duality, showcasing the conflicts between the urban elite and the landowning nobility who feel threatened by peasant uprisings. The contrasting atmospheres are vividly depicted, with urban settings evoking "luxury and revelry" contrasted with rural scenes characterized by "fears" and "turmoil."

At the heart of the political discourse lies the so-called "peasant issue," reflecting the predominantly agrarian landscape of Romania at that time, where peasants often owned minimal land, sometimes barely enough for sustenance. The novel's key character, Miron Iuga, the elderly landowner, emphasizes the significance of addressing this issue as the future course of the country largely hinges upon it.

Historically speaking, the main Romanian political parties during that period were the Conservative and the National Liberal parties. The Conservative doctrine advocated for Romania to remain an

agrarian economy, while the National-Liberal faction supported a credit system for peasants to acquire land from landlords. Rebreanu perceives the spark of the rebellion as fundamentally rooted in the desire for landownership, with misunderstandings with landowners becoming a prejudice associated with the broader injustice experienced by an entire social category. Peasants set crops on fire, ignite manors, and furiously burn everything representing established power structures.

The political life described by Rebreanu is volatile, with political actors frequently changing their opinions and stances on the peasant issue based on their interests. Parties confront each other, trading accusations, with the ruling government being criticized for utilizing instruments to exterminate peasants. However, when a political shift occurs and those who were previously condemned ascend to power, the author observes the circumstantial relationships in Romanian political life through the depiction of a government change session. The moment of the uprising, preceding the First World War, serves an anticipatory function, including the scenarios envisaged for its suppression: the call for foreign armies or mass repression of peasants.

Rebreanu envisions an indiscriminate application of force, a brute force intended to crush any will, disregarding the presence of women and children. The punishments escalate progressively from beatings to threats with weapons and even the use of cannons, which equated to a pogrom. Accusing the government of inaction in quelling the uprising, Grigore Iuga identifies a "cheap Byzantinism," with the use of force being accepted, including the killing of peasants, as force is seen as the only solution, with no alternative for resolution "without shedding blood." The application of brute force gives rise to monstrous situations, and Rebreanu sharply and ironically portrays, through the character Titu Herdelea, an abnormal situation where the "interests of the country," meaning those of the political elites, "demand that millions of peasants work hungry and naked to procure wealth for a few thousand idlers, to squander in luxury." The novel's conclusion offers no resolution, with the uprising seen as an event signaling a state of crisis. The political factor continues the same attitude as part of an adapted discourse to the times.

In Romanian Literature, the event of the uprising from 1907 has been reflected in several works such as N. Rădulescu-Niger's "Orphans of the Nation" (1913), N. D. Cocea's "Servant's Son" (1932), Cezar Petrescu's "1907" (1937-1943), Zaharia Stancu's "Barefoot" (1948), Petru Dumitriu's "Family Jewels" (1949), V. Em. Galan's "Dawn of the Serfs" (1950), and others.

The novel was adapted into a film, with the premiere of "The Uprising" taking place on March 14, 1966. The cinematic production was well-received, with some violent or nudity-themed scenes surpassing communist censorship. Director Mircea Mureșan won the *Opera Prima* award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1966 for this film.

References:

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LANGUAGE: Romanian/Română

CENSORSHIP STATUS: