CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATION IN MATEIU CARAGIALE'S PROSE[1]

Abstract: *The present paper is meant as an analysis of the characteristics of the narration typical of Mateiu I. Caragiale's prose. It is predominantly of the homodiegetic type, the narrator functioning as a protagonist in the plot or just as a witness of the adventures in which the other characters are involved. Both in Remember and in Craii de Curtea-Veche, the auctorial narrative type is preferred by the author. Yet, one cannot overlook those fragments in which the actorial narrative type intervenes. The heterodiegetic type of narration is present in Craii de Curtea-Veche, being limited to the main characters' journeys into their past.*

Key words*: narration, homodiegetic, heterodiegetic*

When analysing the types of narration, Gerard Genette (Genette, 1972: 252) draws a clear distinction between heterodiegetic narration and homodiegetic narration. In the former type of narrative, the narrator is absent from the narrated story whereas in the latter, the narrator, besides narrating the story, also plays a part in the narrated actions.

1. Homodiegetic narration

As Jaap Lintvelt states, 1st person narrative coincides with the homodiegetic narration under its commonest grammatical form (Lintvelt, 1994: 94). The functions of narrator and actor are performed by one and the same character who acts in turns as "je narrant" and "je-narré". "Le je narrant" can function as a protagonist of the plot or just as a witness of the adventures and the chain of actions in which the other characters are involved.

In Mateiu Caragiale's *Remember* as well as in his two novels, *Craii de Curtea Veche* and *Sub pecetea tainei*, the narrator has an intermediate position between those described above. On the one hand, the narrator is a protagonist in the narrated story, yet he is far from enjoying the prominence of the other characters. On the other hand, the narrator acts on several occasions as the unique witness of the confessions of two of the main characters; yet he not only listens to their stories, but he also intervenes with personal opinions and advice whenever he considers it appropriate and necessary.

1.1. The perceptual-psychic level

The auctorial homodiegetic narration is written from the narrator character's perspective. In the actorial homodiegetic narration, the perspective is that of the actor character. The reader gets access to the world depicted from the actor character's perspective.

When analysing Mateiu Caragiale's prose, one can easily notice the preponderance of the auctorial homodiegetic narration over the actorial homodiegetic narration. In the story *Remember*, the author relives a chain of mysterious events that took place seven years before he recollects them with great art. Everything is seen from the perspective of the person who went through these experiences which he perceives at present in conformity with the life experience gained throughout this period.

The narrator character, when telling his story, can be different from the narrator actor, who is seven years younger than the former. On the other hand, the narrator

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character does not have an unlimited internal perception of the inner life of the main actor. Aubrey de Vere is an enigmatic young man who will continue to be so until the tragic event that leads to his death. Despite their frequent outings together, Aubrey de Vere decides not to share his present or his past life with his companion. His thoughts as well as his feelings represent an area inaccessible to the narrator: "Cu ce prilej, în ce împrejurări făcuse aşa de timpuriu călătorii atât de minunate nu spunea, precum nici cine era, ce şi de unde, dacă avea părinţi, rude sau prieteni, unde sta cu casa măcar - nimic, cu desăvârşire. ... Dacă el nu destăinuia nimic, apoi eu îl întrebam şi mai puţin şi presupun că tocmai asta a fost pricina că am legat prieteşug" (35) (He would not say on what occasion, under what circumstances he had undertaken so wonderful journeys at such an early time, just like he would not say who he was, where he came from, whether he had any parents, relatives or friends, or at least where he lived - he would not say anything whatsoever. .... If he did not reveal anything, then I asked him even fewer questions and I suppose this was the very reason why we became friends).

As a consequence, the narrator's knowledge about the character is restricted to what the latter is willing to say or show. Moreover, the narrator finds it completely inappropriate to break into Aubrey's short past so masterfully shrouded in mystery.

The same type of narration is characteristic of the novel *Craii de Curtea Veche*. Between the moment of narrating these experiences and the actual moment of undergoing them, a span of several years is interposed, a span which inevitably brings a set of changes in the psychological and mental life of the narrator character. Hence, the reader sees things not from the perspective of the narrator actor who undergoes these experiences, but from the perspective of the narrator character who once lived these experiences that he recollects at present.

In the novel *Craii de Curtea Veche*, the reader deals with a narrator whose external perception of the characters is unlimited, but with a limited perception of the inner world of the characters. Paşadia, a character that the narrator wholeheartedly admires, and the narrator become inseparable friends shortly after they meet. Yet, the narrator continues to have access to his dear friend's life only through the latter's reactions and attitudes. His inner feelings are revealed to the narrator only through the mark they leave on his face: "Auzisem că aceasta şi-o datora în parte înfăţişării. Ce frumos cap avea totuşi! Într-însul aţipea ceva neliniştitor, atâta patimă înfrânată, atâta trufie aprigă şi haină învrăjbire se destăinuiau în trăsăturile feţei sale veştede, în puterea nărilor, în acea privire tulbure între pleoapele grele" (53) (I had heard that he partly owed this to his appearance. What a beautiful head he had though! Something worrisome drowsed in it, so much restrained passion, so much ardent haughtiness and wicked feud were revealed in the traits of his withered face, in the power of his nostrils, in that dim look between the heavy eyelids).

The narrator supports Paşadia's entire description on what the latter is willing to say and show: "Presupuneam că la baza acestei hotărâri ciudate a fost întrucâtva şi teama de sine însuşi, fiindcă, sub învelişul de gheaţă din afară, Paşadia ascundea o fire pătimaşă, întortocheată, tenebroasă care, cu toată stăpânirea, se trăda adesea în scăpărări de cinism" (54) (I reckoned that this strange decision was somehow based on his fear of himself because, under his icy exterior, Paşadia hid a passionate, intricate, dark nature that, despite all his self-control, often gave itself away in outbursts of cynism). In other words, the narrator knows nothing about the inner life of the charmful character; consequently, he can only make assumptions and inferences on the basis of what he sees.

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The narrator resorts more often than not to visual and auditive means in order to get to know the other main character, Pantazi. Even after the passage of several years, the narrator still remembers the unparalleled charm of his warm voice. Just like in Paşadia's case, the narrator becomes familiar with the character's inner feelings as well as his great past thanks to the characters' repeated confessions.

There are passages in *Craii de Curtea Veche* in which the reader deals with the actorial narration. When the narrator author comments upon Pirgu's retort, the narrator actor's adverse feelings towards Pirgu are transparent, feelings which already have a definite shape at the moment of telling the story: "Scăpa de data asta Pirgu şi-mi era necaz deoarece n-aveam ochi să-l văd" (53) (This time Pirgu got away with it and I felt sorry about it because I couldn't see the sight of him). The narrator actor's commentary is closely connected with "an obscure spontaneity" (Lintvelt, 1994: 104), and not with a spactator's reflection, as it is the case of the following commentaries: "Sub înalţii copaci, în amurg, necunoscutul îşi plimba melancolia. El păşea grav, sprijinindu-se în bățul său de cireş, străbătea aleiele, oprindu-se uneori dus pe gânduri. Dar cari puteau fi ele ca, năpădindu-l, să-l mişte până la lacrimi?" (63) (Under the tall trees, in the dusk, the stranger walked his melancholy. Walking with his cherry stick, he trodded along the paths, stopping at times absorbed in thoughts. But what could these thoughts be that, invading him, could move him to tears?). All these memories and thoughts are the result of some reflections that the narrator character has about his good friend, Paşadia.

This combination of auctorial narration and actorial narration can also be noticed in other fragments of Mateiu Caragiale's prose, without dealing with "divergent positions of interpretation" (Lintvelt, 1994:104), seen by Jaap Lintvelt in the novel *La Vie de Marianne* by Marivaux, a novel based on a disparity of the time of experiencing and the time of narration. Between Marianne - the fifty year old narrator and Marianne - the fifteen year old actress there are striking differences in the perception of reality in general and the perception of Monsieur de Climal in particular. A gesture interpreted as a mere sign of childishness by the actress is at present seen by the narrator as a genuine token of passion.

When analysing the novel *Craii de Curtea Veche*, one can hardly notice such striking contradictions between the narrator character and the narrator actor even if, in this case, too, a significant period of time has elapsed between the moment of narrating and that of experiencing the chain of events.

Things are different as far as the story *Remember* is concerned. The character actor perceives Aubrey de Vere differently from the way the character narrator will perceive him in seven years' time. The character actor is simply subdued by Aubrey de Vere and his strange story: "Era de prisos dar orice presupunere despre obârşia tânărului cu pricina, făceam însă tot soiul de reflexii asupra fiinţei lui, unică într-adevăr şi stranie, impunându-se poruncitor luărei aminte. Mă subjugase prestigiul recei trufii a tânărului ce, în deplină frumuseţe, păşea singur în viaţă, nepăsător, cu fruntea sus" (32) (Any assumption about the young man's origin was useless, yet I pondered over and over on his truly unique, strange and imposing nature. I was subdued by the prestige of the cold haughtiness of the young man who, in full beauty, lived his solitary life in a careless, proud manner).

The mere fact of knowing the denouement of the story makes the narrator character perceive him in a completely different way: "Altmintreli, prin ea însăşi, pieirea lui Sir Aubrey n-a depăşit în ochii mei, însemnătatea unui fapt divers. Ce noimă ar fi avut să împing părerea de rău cuvenită până la a plânge în acel străin necunoscut

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pe un Marcellus? Că era tânăr şi frumos? Poate aşa tânăr cum arăta nu era; sunt fiinţe ce înşeală vârsta, iar în ce priveşte frumuseţea nu e de prisos o anume lămurire." (41) (Otherwise, Sir Aubrey's death in itself didn't exceed the significance of an ordinary event. What was the use of pushing regrets so far as to weep for that unknown stranger as if he were a Marcellus? Because he was young and beautiful? Maybe he was not as young as he looked; there are people who look younger than they actually are and, as far as beauty is concerned, some further edification is not useless).

1.2 The temporal and the spatial level

In the auctorial homodiegetic narration, it is the narrator character who is in charge of the temporal and the spatial organisation whereas in the actorial homodiegetic type of narrative it is the character actor who is responsible for them. From the point of view of the sequence of events, what is typical of the auctorial narration is the possibility to make returns back as well as anticipations.

Mateiu Caragiale's prose displays a great number of homodiegetic analepses. The story *Remember* starts with such an analepsis: "Sunt vise ce parcă le-am trăit cândva şi undeva, precum sunt lucruri vieţuite despre care ne întrebăm dacă n-au fost vis. La asta mă gândeam deunăzi seara când răvăşind printre hârtiile mele ca să văd ce se mai poate găsi de ars, am dat peste o scrisoare care mi-a deşteptat amintirea unei întâmplări ciudate" (31) (There are dreams that we seem to have lived somewhere at some point or other, just like there are experiences that we have gone through that we wonder whether they have not been dreams. This is what I was thinking about the other evening when, while rummaging through my papers to see if there was anything else to burn, I came across a letter that reminded me of a strange happening). After this analepsis, he goes back even farther into his past for the short recollection of another event: "Cu doi ani înainte văzusem în sala franţuzească a muzeului o cuconiţă care copia după Mignard pe Maria Mancini şi avea o aşa izbitoare asemănare cu modelul, încât ai fi crezut că, privindu-se în oglindă, îşi zugrăveşte, împodobindu-l, propriul ei chip" (32) (Two years before I had seen a young lady in the French hall of the museum. She was a copy of Mancini's Maria Mignard and there was such a striking resemblance between her and the model that you would have believed that, while looking at herself in the mirror, she is painting her own face by adorning it). This is a case of the so-called analepsis within the analepsis.

By means of the prolepsis, the writer informs the readers of Pasadia's death which will occur before the end of the novel: "Dacă, încercând a reda întrucâtva trăsurile acestui nobil chip, am stăruit atât, e pentru că n-am voit să scap prilejul de a-l face să retrăiască înaintea ochilor mei, amintirea lui fiindu-mi scumpă" (54) (If I have dwelt on the reproduction of this noble face, it is because I didn't want to miss the opportunity to bring him to life, his memory being very dear to me).

1.3. The verbal level

In *Remember* as well as in the author's two novels, the story is told in the first person. In the act of speech, the beginning sentences of the story represent a bridge connecting the real world outside the text and the inner universe of the literary work. From the very first lines, the narrator reveals the identity of the protagonist – the narrator himself recalling a strange event that happened seven years ago. Hence, the writer familiarises the reader with the time and the place of

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the event from the very beginning, transmitting at the same time the idea of reality combined with dreamy atmosphere.

1.3.1. Types of auctorial discourse

a. Communicative discourse

From the point of view of the narrator-narratee relationship, Mateiu Caragiale's prose belongs to the communicative type, the narrator addressing the narratee on several occasions.

b. Metanarrative discourse

When analysing the relationship between the narrator and the story, Jaap Lintvelt mentions "the metanarrative function of the discourse" (Lintvelt, 1994:74) by means of which the narrator expresses his opinion about his story. In *Remember*, the narrator resorts to this type of discourse: "Altmintreli, prin ea însăşi, pieirea lui sir Aubrey n-a depăşit în ochii mei însemnătatea unui fapt divers. Ce noimă ar fi avut să împing părerea de rău cuvenită până la a plânge în acel străin pe un Marcellus?" (41).

c. Explicative discourse

The narrator makes use of the explicative discourse to give explanations which he considers necessary for the reader's optimum understanding of the story: "Ah! zise Pirgu lui Paşadia, făcându-şi privirea galeşă şi glasul dulceag, ah! cu valsul ăsta ţin să te duc la lăcaşul cel din urmă, cât mai curând, cred că n-ai să mă faci să aştept mult încă această sărbătoare a tinereţelor mele" (52) (Oh, Pirgu said, making his look languid and his voice sweet, oh! with this waltz I am going to take you to your last destination as soon as possible and I believe you won't make me wait too long for this feast of my youth).

d. Evaluative discourse

By means of this type of discourse, the reader is given the opportunity to become familiar with the way the narrator himself thinks about the chain of events and the actors involved in them. Through the abundance of epithets and comparisons, Mateiu Caragiale never hesitates to express his opinion about his characters and their actions : "Gore Pirgu era o lichea fără seamăn şi fără pereche" (55) (Gore Pirgu was an unparalleled rascal) , "Paşadia era un luceafăr" (53) (Paşadia was an evening star).

e. Emotive discourse

The emotive discourse offers the narrator the chance to express his attitude full of admiration for the night time, the writer being unanimously seen by the Romanian literary critics as the unparalleled painter of the nocturnal side of nature (Vianu, 1973:182).

f. Modal discourse

By means of the modal discourse, the narrator expresses his certainty or uncertainty about what he is telling: "Presupuneam că la temelia acestei hotărâri ciudate a fost întrucâtva şi teama de sine însuşi" (5).

1.2 The heterodiegetic narration

If in *Remember* the narration is exclusively of the homodiegetic type, in *Craii de Curtea Veche*, the homodiegetic narration mingles harmoniously with the heterodiegetic narration, restricted to the journeys Pantazi and Paşadia undertake into their past.

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The actorial heterodiegetic narration is characterised by the existence of an actor around whom the perceptive-psychic level, the temporal level, the spatial and the verbal level are organised. This actor can be a protagonist of the plot or just a witness of the narrated chain of events. In the actorial heterodiegetic narration, the perception of the world is oriented by the perspective of one of the actors. The narrator adopts the point of view of one of the actors, thus being limited to his/her extrospection of the world. The internal perception of the characters is unlimited. By means of the heterodiegetic narration, Paşadia's and Pantazi's interior lives are directly known by the reader, not only through the mark their feelings leave on their faces, as it happens in the case of the homodiegetic narration. From the temporal and the spatial point of view, one can see that one of the actors serves as point of orientation. Paşadia and Pantazi fulfill, in turns, this role, the narrator respecting their temporal and spatial experience. At the verbal level, one can easily notice that in those fragments characterised by the heterodiegetic narration the story is told in the first person. The reader becomes the witness of the characters' discourse, the narrator reporting their words in their own verbal register.

To conclude with, we can say that the writer's prose owes much of its success to this minutely worked combination of the two types of narration which contributes a lot to its lack of monotony.

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