DEICTIC CENTER SHIFTS IN THE POETRY OF NICHITA STĂNESCU

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Abstract

Removing himself from the world and even his life, the contemplative subject attributes unto himself the eerie destiny of an impersonal entity, able to cancel out his allegiance to any species so that he may be able to thrust himself within an endless sense of becoming. The change in perspective is no longer fulfilled this time around, as a consequence of a shift in the deictic center, becoming purely imaginative. Sudden changes in perceptive angles create the impression of referential uncertainty, just like in the following excerpt, where the sliding game of gazes no longer pinpoints established contours, bringing forth ambiguity related to the subject and object of analytical focus.

Key words: *etymological meaning, deictic center, modal insertion, subjective person, illocutionary force*

Résumé

Le sujet contemplateur, mû par sa volonté de réussir à s'abstraire du monde et même de sa vie terrestre, assume, de son propre chef, l'étrange destinée d'être une entité impersonnelle, en y gagnant la possibilité de renoncer à toute appartenance à une quelconque espèce vivante pour qu'il puisse être à même de se vouer à une infinie expérience du devenir. Dès lors, tout changement survenu dans sa perspective n'est plus accompli par une quelconque référence à la réalité qui l'environne, mais devient un pur exercice de son imagination. Aux yeux du lecteur, le moyen perceptible par où est réalisée ladite essentielle mutation est le mouvement du centre déictique lui-même; les subites modifications de l'angle du regard sensible créent une situation de flou référentiel où le jeu des glissements du regard ne désigne plus des contours précis que l'on puisse fixer, de par cela faisant croître l'ambiguïté entretenue qui porte simultanément sur le sujet et l'objet de l'observation analytique. Tel est justement le cas de l'exemple qui suit.

Mots-clés: *signification étymologique, centre déictique, insertion modale, subjectivité de la personne, force illocutionnaire*

Observations based on justified insight do not clarify to what extent the perspective and point of view elicit a particularly imaginative projection of the poet (in the fictional world of the text) and especially how such coordinates correlate with a particular type of rhetoric and organizational discourse.

The following study attempts to sketch several particular traits considered innovations of perspective in Stănescian poetry.

A self-centered perspective (in the etymological meaning – the Latin term perspicere = to look through... at yourself) is constitutive of the lyrical act. In Nichita

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Stănescu's poetry we often detect a special focus upon the imaginary hypostasis of the lyrical self, a hypostasis highlighted through the modulation of the discourse, by allowing the lyrical subject to directly express a certain attitude towards the facts contained in the representation.

Thus, the poet's famous presence (persona) in the fellowship of a "translucent pride of lions" is described in a discourse containing numerous modal inserts, whose illocutionary force lies within the augmentation of the reader's trust in the authenticity of the fictional situation in comparison with the escalation of the autoscopic effect:

What was it like, my translucent prides of lions?*/ As so*: *like jade,/ a white cloud, soft glass*. (…) *They were as big as buffalo. Surely as big as buffalo/ since their manes brushed my hips./ They were animals, but you could wear them like guns./ Just how could you wear them like guns*?*/ Here's how*: *one of them put its translucent paws on the left side/ and on the right side of my chest,/ with its translucent tongue it licked my sternum./ My own mother can attest to this*. (Prides of Lions).

Such discursive situations are relatively frequent in Stănescian poetry. As the subjective person places itself as a "lyrical self" in the representation (enunciation), he builds a certain imaginary perspective, autoscopic, the subject of the enunciation (the lyrical voice) supports the fictional construct, developing a consistent attitude towards the predicated information, like in the example: *I must surely be a god./ I have tossed my teeth from my gums/ and torn off the sword from my hip./ My heart must surely be alive/though I am dead* (From Too Much Air).

Another method of drawing attention towards the self in the presentation, which returns with an almost symptomatic frequency in the poet's work, is closely connected to what Ion Pop called the poetics of the instantaneous[1]. By utilising interjections and adverbs fostering illocutionary force, the poet's voice supports the illusion of sudden presentations or imaginative metamorphoses, emphasising the ever unexpected image of the lyrical self: *And here I am, without sleep,/I barely see the ivory gods* (The Golden Age of Love); *Suddenly my thought changed beyond sight/ and she started to hurt/like an awakening*. (The Gentle and Ferocious Activities of the Animate and the Inanimate); *Without boundaries and clear/ the two of us were/ when suddenly/ there was no more room for the two of us/ like air burdened by air/ under the wing of the flying bird*. (From Too Much Air)

The phenomenon can be described as a shift in deictic center inside the textual space of a poem and it is a characteristic of modern and postmodern poetry in general.

Alexandru Ştefănescu[2], a critic focused mostly on formal aspects of Nichita Stănescu's poetry, detects this perspective, which he perceives as an anti-rhetorical tendency of the discourse: "Many times, even inside the same poem, the perspective changes rapidly and decisively, as if a nervous hand were maneuvering the camera (…)"

The kaleidoscopic change in perspective represents one of the most efficient means of hindering the rhetorical act. For example, the following poem is constructed through the perfectly symmetric alternation of the deixis of both the subjective and non-subjective persona (I/you): *Sleep just like the face of the queen/ on the front of the coin./ I shall sleep as the eagle does/ on the back of the coin./ Just like that*!*/ Wake up*

[1] Pop, 1980, p. 60.
2 Ştefănescu, 1977, p. 70

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as green does/ in the flesh of the leaf./ They shall move me slowly just like sap/ through the veins of the leaf./ Just like that!/ *Be cold as the sky in an autumn blizzard,/ I shall be cold as the snow in a blizzard/ of winter/ Just like that*! (Lullaby)

The poetry presents itself as an alternation of voices, as a fictional dialogue between two people or as a dialogue of the interior voices of lyrical subjectivity.

The alternation becomes contrapuntal to the extent that every voice expresses an option towards the real, articulating a perspective.

The enunciations marked formally by a self of the enunciation ("I shall sleep", "I shall move", "I shall be cold"…) are, in addition, modulated to express the attitude of the subjective persona towards the enunciated facts, demonstrating effect in consolidating the imaginary hypothesis. In such a poem, it is evident that the monolithic representation of lyrical subjectivity has ceased. The text lives only through a certain rhythm, through an internal balance, as suggested by the title (Lullaby), which might, otherwise, seem unjustified.

A similar exercise of experimental perspective is depicted in one of Nichita Stănescu's early poems – (Eurydice), built by shifting person deictics from the subjective/non-subjective to the third person. The first three stanzas, centered around the indicators you/I, build a broken perspective into the past, diffusely autoscopic (as the text shows, especially the *you* of the loved one), which is emotionally infused.

The voice of the lyrical subject (distanced by utilizing the past tense continuous from the hypostasis of the lyrical self) contains this perspective of affective memory: *"Torchlights and torches and flames and fires/ were lighting up inside your eyes, demanding they be extinguished/ by the cloud that is my face, grey and heavy/ passing by over your face, like snow covered peaks./ I was still holding your arm/ your life to my life tethered./ the waste of love never wasted,/ the second tied in a moment."* (Eurydice)

The perspective strays through the use of the third person: *Steps, laughter, syllabic stories, histories,/ confessions, hopes/ you were indeed truthful/ surrounding the two in the winter when/ an air flickering, around you/ will have been passed. Will have passed*… (Eurydice)

The unexpected return of the second person at the end of the text ("around you") is utilised ambiguously, the interpretation oscillating between a *you* of self-addressing or a specific marker of the non-subjective person.

The lack of deictic (and referential) determination, specific to the modern poetic speech, is also supported by the forms of the presumptive ("will have been passed", "will have passed"), as well as the suspension points so that the entire "perspective" opened by the bracket of affective memory appears uncertain, almost voicing itself.

The transitions from *I* (singular you) to *they* are used in various other poems with deliberate intentionality to distance the "perspective" in the description of the poetic object.

Therefore, the famous *Flying Lesson* starts with an autoscopic focalisation from afar, which relies on the stylistic option for a *you* belonging to a "mirror monologue": *you gather your rivers/ as you shrug your shoulders/ you climb on the bleat of goats*/ *and say*:… (Nevermore).

The perspective chosen for the description of the "lyrical self" is suddenly broken through the introduction of a syllogism in representation through which a simultaneous internal-external focalisation is proposed: *And then:/ whoosh/ you fly with the wings of someone else*.

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The progressing distancing of the individual from his own body through the flight from life to death is presented in the text through the pronominal metamorphosis you/I, he/ someone else: "*And then/ you are him./ and he is forever someone else*."

The shifting of the deictic center proves to be, in this case, the main textual operator of distancing lyrical perspective and the articulation of the poetic vision of death as progressive depersonalisation, as a dissolution of individual identity.

The poem *Sight* follows the same pattern, in which the deictic variation is merged with a game of gazes, marked in the text through a succession of verbs of "perspective" ("saw", "gazed", "gazed beyond"): *Like any transparent being,/ I get dirty by all that is unseen,/ I had closed the open door to heaven/ with a glass horse./ through which I saw a rabbit,/ through which I gazed at an eagle/ through which I gazed beyond at a fox,/ through which I saw the unborn me/ lying on the bronze sweetness of the bullet,/ crowned with vegetables,/ cooked,/ and boiled/ and edible*. (Sight).

The gradual distancing of "perspective" regarding the enunciation of the self, concerning the autoscopic hypostasis (the self-image as "unborn", "lying", "crowned", "cooked", "boiled", "edible") is mainly supported by the semantic charge of "sight" verbs, which are in fact gradual synonyms ("saw", "gazed", "gazed beyond"), but, in a more violent way, by the referential derailment: him … me, because the word (him) formally (but not poetically) breaches the rule of transference.

The "sight" (vision, perspective) belongs to a singular I ("saw") which no longer recognizes itself, paradoxically placing itself inside and outside the self.

In many of his poems, Nichita Stănescu contemplates on these games of perspective and voice from a meta-poetic angle, constitutive of the act of poetic reflection, explaining: *I am not as I am/ but you are as I am/ a kind of you I am/ which I've no longer allowed to be myself* (Wedding Speech).

Such pronominal metamorphoses, which we consider as belonging to the poetic meta-text, should also be regarded as declarative acts of a lyrical subject eager for imaginative projection and metamorphosis: *But I am you/ the one from yesterday/ the one from the day before/ the nevermore* (Exhortation Song for the God Andia); *And I am you/ Nothing is nothing else* (Nothing is Nothing Else); *I want to be with him* (…) *I want to be grass"*. (Ars amandi); *I, you, they/ we shall be all three of them at once// More you/ than the one/ More I,-/ than the stone/ More I,/ than loneliness* (Relative and Stranger to the Song).

Effects of the distancing in lyrical perspective were also encountered in the already discussed poems, but they, as always, appeared as a consequence of a contrast or a deictic "slide".

The poet's obsession with contemplating himself from the outside pushes him towards another set of options of *mise-en-scène* of the lyrical act, as it is rightly observed, allowing the reader, beyond the indication in the title, to identify this textual I with the subjective persona of the poet.

The reading of the text is mainly directed by the fundamental pragmatic convention which basically governs the interpretation of any lyrical agent as a hypostasis of the poetic self. Secondly, the assembly of images associated with this *he* explicitly or implicitly directs the readership towards the condition of the poet via an inter-textual reading of the text.

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