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# THE RELATIONSHIP AUTHOR-READER AND SUBVERSIVE NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE ROMANIAN PROSE FICTION OF THE 1960'S

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***Abstract:*** *The present paper aims at offering an overview on the dialectic relationship author-reader in the 7th decade of the last century, a period in which the Romanian literature began to outwit the compulsions of socialist-realism, as a new literary paradigm was progressively gaining ground, i.e. the neo-modernism. Drawing on bibliographical sources belonging to established narratologists, but also to outstanding Romanian literary critics and historians, we intend to synthesise the main features underlying four important elements of any prose fiction, i.e. the concrete author, the abstract author, the concrete reader and the abstract reader, as well as their relationship with the main subversive strategies prose writers resorted to during the aforementioned period.*

***Key words:*** *author, reader, official ideology, subversive strategies.*

## 1. Introduction

Starting from the well-known scheme which Roman Jakobson exposed in *Linguistics and Poetics* as regards the constituent factors of any act of communication, researchers in narrative discourse such as Booth, Lintvelt, Chatman, Bal emphasised that no analysis of the literary narrative should evade the presence of some elements which it constituently does not comprise: the concrete author, the abstract author, the concrete reader and the abstract reader. Although external to the narrative text proper, these elements prove undoubtedly functional in the analysis of literary works, especially when it comes to ages dominated by totalitarianism, since the study of the historical and cultural context in which the work was written, published and read, as well as of the relationship between the aforementioned elements, on the one hand, and between them and the other components of the narrative (narrator, narratee, characters) on the other hand, essentially contributes to the elucidation of the meaning of the work and to the highlighting of the determinisms which might have conditioned it.

The period we aim to analyse is that of the Romanian 1960's, a time which exhibited new tendencies in the literary field: a (quasi)liberalization of the literary-artistic life, the desire to preserve the artistic individuality, the prominence given to the aesthetic value, the increasingly reluctant acceptance of imposed patterns, the opening towards existential problems.

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In actual fact, the moment is simultaneously claimed by two literary paradigms: socialist-realism, imposed after 1947 and having a long life, until the second half of the 60's, and neo-modernism, which marks the resurrection of the aesthetic element in our literature, the starting point in the process of retrieving the literary modernity of the inter-war period and the synchronization with the modernist literature abroad.

## 2. The Concrete Author

According to J. Lintvelt (25), "the concrete author and the concrete reader are historical and biographical personalities which do not belong to the literary work, being situated in the real world, where they live an autonomous life, independent of the literary text". The Romanian 1960's comprise especially representatives of the 60's Generation, who made their debut around 1960 (F. Neagu, D.R. Popescu, E. Barbu, Al. Ivasiuc, N. Breban, C-tin Ţoiu, A. Buzura, S. Titel, M. Preda), but also older writers, who had been imprisoned and who returned to public life in the middle of the 7$^{th}$ decade, as well as writers with a late debut, who preferred to keep their writings secret before the liberalization period. Due to the fact that the last two categories represent special cases, the present study only focuses on the '60's Generation.

When presenting them as concrete authors, the social and political context is fundamental, being given that no analysis should sidestep the pressure intervening on these writers at that time. The submission to official canons was obligatory, being carefully monitored by the representatives of censorship. In literature, the aim of censorship was to limit the people's access to information, to expurgate texts of words/ ideas impinging on the Marxist-Leninist ideology, but also to select writers and promote the loyal ones, thus creating a strong and trustworthy literary/ ideological front (Ficeac 11-13).

Apart from these constraints, as researchers of the period agree, the authorities, with fine psychological intuition, also made use of all sorts of incentives, meant to enhance the motivation of the intelligentsia to join the official ideology, motivators which actually conditioned their self-actualization: good payment for ideologically convenient writings, "creation" holidays, privileged social position, tours around the country or even abroad, translations of the works, important jobs (Dimisianu 175; Crihană 1). Nevertheless, it would not be fair to conclude that the acceptance of the privileges offered by the Romanian state would trigger an unconditional acceptance of the "alignment".

There could be distinguished, in fact, two categories of writers: representatives of the literature which Negrici characterises as "subservient", and authors of "tolerated" literature. The latter category, comprising supporters of genuine literature, aimed at publishing aesthetically valid works, being at the same time aware they could not exist as writers outside the official establishment. Consequently, more often than not, they had to pay 'tribute': they became members of the communist party, they specified their involvement in the problems of their time, either in their literary works or in the theoretical ones, from time to time they produced works closer to the official requirements in order to consolidate their position and not to arouse suspicions; in other words, they compromised.

This was generally translated in a duplicitous attitude, a form of ketman based on the theory of multiple selves, which, according to M. Călinescu (282), proved to be "an unexpected means of

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defense against the totalitarian mental invasion and the terror underlying that invasion", for him and for his entire generation.

Therefore, the concrete author becomes, just like the critic, a "Janus Bifrons", looking avidly towards artisticity and cautiously towards authorities, "eager to express what he was not allowed to say" (Vianu, viii).

## 3. The Abstract Author

In our opinion, this double-faced game can be pertinently described by means of the relationship concrete author - abstract author.

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (published in 1961 and consequently unlikely to be known to the authors under consideration), Wayne Booth (196) claims that the abstract author's ideology does not necessarily correspond to the one of the concrete writer, his conclusion being that „this implied author is always distinct from the real man – irrespective of the way we regard him – which creates a superior version of himself, an *alter ego*, just like he creates his work".

Bearing different names ("the second self" for Tillotson, "novelistic alter ego" for Prince, "implied author" for Booth, Iser, Genette, "model author" for Eco), this abstract author (Lintvelt, Schmid) is actually "the producer of the fictitious world that he wants to convey to his addressee/ recipient, the abstract reader", representing the "deep meaning, the overall significance of the literary work", as he is neither interior to the narrative, nor directly represented, being unable to express himself "directly or explicitly" (Lintvelt 26-27).

Chatman (148) emphasises that, although the abstract author has no voice or means of communication of his own, he does make his point of view visible, providing readers with suggestive information silently, via the devises he opts for. This is what made M. Bottez (61) characterize this element not as "voiceless", but as "multiple-voiced".

In his *Nouveau discours du recit,* being reserved as to the "infidelity of the image the text proposes for the author" and to the use of introducing the notion of implied author into discourse analysis, Genette (101-103) considers that the "ideological dualism" between the real and the implied author could be explainable in two cases: the unintentional revelation of an unconscious personality and the intentional simulation in the work, by the concrete author, of a personality which is different from the real one.

The latter situation is highly meaningful for our literature under communism, as the real author could thus project a "disloyal" personality in the text, which, unlike the genuine one, was in accordance with the official requirements. However, beyond it, the ideal reader was expected to guess the real ideology of the text.

## 4. The Abstract Reader

It has been noted that, in order to have a right decoding of the literary message, it is necessary that the reader should be aware of the "information polyphony" the text offers, should own the implied author's ideological, aesthetical, moral and social code, which is an „image of the addressee supposed and postulated by the literary work, […] image of the ideal recipient, capable to materialize its overall meaning in an active reading" (Lintvelt 27). In other words, the model reader has to be always responsive to the instructions, signals the abstract author sends at every step (Eco 23), to be capable of creating accurate mental representations of the fictional world (Emmott 103), of filling in empty

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spaces, thus meeting the model author's expectations.

From our perspective, during the '60's, the achievement of one of the paramount objectives of the writers (except for "the loyal ones", of course), that of (re)gaining readers through really authentic pieces of literature, was possible due to a daring hypertrophy of the ideal reader's role, through offering an alternative reading frame which did not (and could not) repeal the official one, but only counterbalance it. Thus, readers had to make their own way only as a result of suggestions, had to read between the lines and to reveal hidden connections, by going far beyond the surface structure of the text.

## 5. The Concrete Reader

In the aforementioned climate, it was only natural for concrete readers to attempt at becoming model readers. The readers' attraction towards a careful reading can be simply explained through studying their horizon of expectations: "caught in the bonds of the same violation of existence, [the reader] discovers an affective refuge in literature", which takes him off the brutalizing reality and gives him the illusion of finding a more truthful way (Pistolea 132).

The concrete reader, either the intellectual who "acutely lives the crises of his time" or the ordinary man "deprived of any entertaining means", traumatized by wants and limitations of all kinds, consequently attempts at building compensatory universes, discovering the escapist virtues of literature (Crihana 5).

## 6. Subversive Narrative Strategies

In a recent article from *România Literară,* Ion Simuț insists upon the concerted "stylistic and subtlety efforts" the writers had to make in order not to succumb, to be able to "release the 'captive mind' from the terror of the unique direction, that of unconditional celebration of communism", all this with the cooperation of a reader capable of "understanding delicate by-strokes, deviations and nonconformist traits". Thus, it became obvious that, as J. Culler (49) remarks, literature could be "both a vehicle of the ideology and an instrument for destroying it".

Starting from the primary works themselves, but also using memoirs and interviews which help better depict the atmosphere of the time, in what follows we intend to present some of the subterfuges which helped writers not only overcome socialist-realism, but also undermine the official line imposed by authorities, as a form of protest against the limitations of the freedom of creation. Generally, these techniques comprise a discourse with relatively conformist appearances, but which does not fail to disclose gestures or meanings which prove definitely daring for that period.

### 6.1. The Aesopian Language

In *Literatura română contemporană,* L. Ulici (67) remarks that, in the Romanian literature written after 1960, the realist tradition was contaminated and seriously rivalled by an Aesopian vocation which had been almost absent from the history of our literature. Indeed, writers and critics started resorting to an ingenious subversive strategy, i.e. the doublespeak, which preserved a certain degree of liberty and which, under appearances consistent with the requirements of censorship, made it possible for writers to reveal other, rather critical senses: „to utter forbidden truths as though you utter what is allowed soon becomes the writers' main objective, for whose accomplishment they would use their intelligence, imagination, subtlety and

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expressivity, in other words, their entire literary talent" (Călinescu 68).

In this category of 'dissimulated writing', of text with subtext, we should first of all consider the "romans à clef", based on allegory and parable, which mirrored the real image of the totalitarian world (*Principele, Viaţa şi opiniile lui Zacharias Richter, Echinoxul nebunilor şi alte povestiri etc.*).

Secondly, there is the success of the satirical and humorous prose (Mazilu, Băieşu), which also offered sparkling texts for screen plays. These were writings based on illogical, paradoxical behaviours, but also on allusive language and word games, which succeeded in establishing connections with Dej's or Ceauşescu's time.

Thirdly, reference should be made to one of the paramount themes of the '60's generation: the "obsessing decade". We should mention here the representatives of the political city novel (Buzura, Breban, Ţoiu, Ivasiuc etc.), but also spokespersons of the crises within the rural world (Neagu, D. R. Popescu, Titel), writers who strongly believed that literature should be an expression of the social and political truth and who focused on this period with a view to pointing to uncomfortable aspects of Gheorghiu-Dej's rule. Their works refer to the political determination proper, the direct link between the political system and the individual, but they also have a broader scope: any tendency to dominate, irrespective of the area it comes from.

It has been remarked that the writings dominated by this theme are the result of a conventional recipe: the hero, who generally belongs to the deceived youth, undergoes a serious, traumatizing experience which strongly perturbs his whole existence and brings about his inner struggle. The crisis is triggered most of the times by external aggressions, by limitations which lead to what A. Cosma (70) called „the individual's anonymousness", to "his inclusion in some super-individual structures which diminish his individual freedom and contradict his old ideal about what his fulfilment as an individual should mean". The end is often a happy one, linked to a moment of reconsideration of values and criteria, as a consequence of which the character recovers and starts a new, enlightened life.

It is not difficult to imagine that the disclosure of the unpleasant facets of the social, civic or political truth within an oppressive society indirectly referred to the realities of the 7$^{th}$ decade. In this way, the image of the perfect society which the authorities wanted to convey through the media and the aligned literature, distorting the real truth, was seriously endangered, as it was obvious that "people were not living in the best possible world during the communist regime" (Simuţ).

At this point, a remark needs to me made: in the "mixture of minds represented by the reading process" (Călinescu 212), under the impression of apparently ubiquitous allusions, the reader could quite often become tempted to go beyond the level of the abstract author, in a purely imaginary territory. Thus, by means of a projective reading, readers got to assign subversive characteristics to texts which could simply lack in such intentions, and thus found in the text „both what was hidden there and what they would have liked to be hidden" (Călinescu 499).

### 6.2. Myths and Symbols

Apart from the Aesopian discourse, Pistolea (138) also speaks of an aesteticizing discourse, grounded in myths and symbols. The mythical and folklore vein has been repeatedly underlined especially in the works belonging to F. Neagu, D.R. Popescu, V. Rebreanu, where the dramatic character of experience

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is stressed by the appeal to suggestive symbols, aphorisms from folklore, the transcription of ancient customs and rituals, which transgress ordinary existence and allow access to essences.

Such writers generally focus on the presentation of the twilight of an old age, a meaningful archaic time to which they oppose the reversed and confused world of the present, characterized by disorder and disintegrated old values.

In the second half of the 7th decade, this propensity towards "de-socialization and de-realization" (Negrici 217), the avoidance of the simple socio-historical frame is also present with other writers who are particularly sensitive to man's archaic horizon, such as Şt. Bănulescu, or even with representatives of the political prose, like Ţoiu, Buzura or Al. Ivasiuc.

### 6.3. The "Miraculous" Language

Călinescu (213) and Crohmălniceanu (153) have both remarked that, in the 7th decade, the very quality of the language acquires a subversive character. On the drab background of the rigid linguistic clichés, lacking in nuances, it was quite easy to notice the change which was initiated even before 1960 as regards the use of the language: the rediscovery of its inner vibrations. This opened ways not only towards plastic descriptions and unexpected associations, but also towards old proverbs and saying which added savour to the characters' discourse. The musicality, charm and colour of the language used by F. Neagu, D.R. Popescu and N. Velea are later to be found in works belonging to A.E. Baconsky, O. Paler, S. Titel.

### 6.4. Narrative Techniques

M. Călinescu (304) claims that narrative techniques represented one of the most efficient methods to polemize with the style of socialist realism. Especially after 1964, aiming both at rejoining the connection with the inter-war Romanian literature and at the synchronization with the European and American modernism, Romanian writers tried to launch so new and various formulas, that the qualitative progress at the level of narrative techniques was utterly striking. The cases of pure omniscience (the heterodiegetic-authorial narrative), dominated by a supra-textual voice which intervened all the time, were rare, as the character progressively becomes the element which guides the reader, the actions being filtered through his mind. Consequently, there was a switch to internal focalizations, to more limited points of view, characteristic to the actorial or neutral heterodiegetic narration.

At the same time, an increasingly important part was played by actorial homodiegetic narratives (Ivasiuc, Buzura, Preda, Breban etc.), which limited the reader to the external presentation of the other characters and of the environment (character-narrator's extrospection and to the presentation of the character-narrator's inner perceptions (introspection).

Moreover, there were many cases in which the narrative perspective became variable, either monoscopic or polyscopic, in which readers could go back and forth in time with the characters (analepsis and prolepsis), which brought about the permanent undermining of the chronological order of the presentation, a confusing narrative, with several epic nuclei, and, at the level of the content, about the impression of general confusion (suggestive examples can be found in the writings of D. R. Popescu, Bănulescu, S. Titel).

The updating of the narrative techniques (under the influence of the Romanian inter-war period, but also that of the Nouveau Roman, Faulkner, Joyce and Latin American writers) should be

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associated with the writers' aspiration towards authenticity, a harmonization of form and content, as well as to their desire to render the characters' consciousness. In fact, characters became interrogative, with an increasingly refined inner structure, preoccupied by self-analysis and no longer submitted to commandments, but having a free thinking.

### 6.5. The Presentation of Inner Life

Analyzing Ivasiuc's novels, R.G. Țeposu (134) insists on the shifting that took place at the level of the character: the active character was replaced by the passive one, action by meditation, reflection by reflectiveness. The statement is also valid for the other prose writers of the period, because they were no longer preoccupied with the mere representation of reality, but rather with the opening towards the existential. Thus, the reality of the moment remained just a background for the insight into the way the human soul worked, writers were more and more interested in the way social changes triggered transformations in individuals, highlighting ambiguities, doubts, interrogations, or, in I. B. Lefter's terms, "the centripetal attraction of interiority".

Basically, these writings belong to Ionic literature, based on analysis, confession, reflectors, novels in which writers no longer want to "create a coherent, autonomous universe", but to suggest the "the incoherence of the characters' intimacy" (N. Manolescu 17).This formula was used by numerous writers of the time, in personal variants, combining the investigation on the individual self with the essayistic way of writing (Ivasiuc), deepening the analysis by means of studying abyssal psychologies (Breban) or exploring the condition of modern subjectivity in its relation with social and political elements (Buzura, Ivasiuc, Preda).

As part of the subversive strategies, reference should be also made to other methods, such as: the use of diaries and letters as a narrative artifice which was incompatible with the hostility of the communist regime towards the people's personal secrets (Călinescu 286), the structuring of the narrative on several interweaving levels which shed different lights over identical episodes and cast a shadow over the theory of the unique truth, the relativization of the simplistic dichotomy positive-negative by introducing complicated typologies, the introduction of the fantastic element etc.

The present inventory is by no means comprehensive, as its complexity would require further extensive research.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can state that, for model readers, all these elements used to represent sort of puzzle pieces meant to communicate a subversive message which needed to be decoded and which was linked to the deep significance of the writings. However, this message, the allusions and nuances which should be revealed during the reading process, are most likely to remain incomplete for the present time reader, as they are encompassed by a complicated time and space, whose coordinates and peculiarities are not easily comprehensible, partly because of the reader's mediated access to them (confessions, interviews, memoirs etc.). It is consequently a drawback brought about by what Culler (79) calls "the reader's experience", which, together with "the properties of the text" conveys the meaning of the work.

The ultimate importance of these oblique and dissenting techniques, of the complex and hazardous games with the censorship must not be underrated by any means, since, as I. Simuț insists with hindsight, the

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strategies themselves were no tiny feat, but attributes of a "small step quarter-dissidence" achieved with the critics' and readers' support, two categories which, together with the writers, regarded genuine literature as a convenient retreat in front of political aggressions.

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