20th Century Literature in Romania and in Great Britain – Reflection of Specific Socio-Cultural Contexts

Nicoleta POPESCU
"Valahia" University of Târgovişte

Abstract: The aim of my paper is to explore the changes that occurred in the 20th century Romanian and United Kingdom literature. The presentation draws upon some specific socio-cultural contexts.
Key words: proletarian revolution, theory of imitation, whimful, epistemes of the epoch, aesthetics, historiography metafiction, high morality

About twenty years after gaining independence, modern Romania had begun its integration phase in the international capitalist system. The strong feudal remains, in a time in which over half of the agricultural land was in the hands of great landowners, impeded many politician ideologists from perceiving class conflicts clearly. Among them, is the socialist representative who, by elaborating certain fruitless theories in "Neiobagia", demonstrated the impossibility of a proletarian revolution, thus, the reformist constitutionalism was the way to go.

Caragiale, among others, illustrated Romanian society at the beginning of the 20th century, in his memorable pamphlet "1907", a drama entitled "Napasta" and a sketch "Arendasul roman", similar to a short story "Socoteala" by Al. Vlahuta. Vlahuta also wrote a poem entitled "1907", an effect of the uprisings and was also an editor for "Life" magazine, which had a social and rural orientation.

"Vatra" (1894) by Caragiale, Slavici and Cosbuc, is the most characteristic magazine, a magazine whose goal is to cultivate literature "for the people's tastes" in "its way of feeling and seeing".

The generation of "peasants" in the literary field is not to be neglected, in "Vatra", where Slavici would write about Eminescu's patriotism, he would publish a novel "Mara" and Cosbuc, "We Want Land". After Cosbuc, come St. O. Iosif, Ilarie Chendi, Ion Gorum, Zaharia Barsan, the founders of a few ephemeral magazines: "Povestea vorbirii", "Blue Flower", "Curierul literar" previous to the "Samanatorului" magazine.

The older prestigious publications "Convorbiri literare", "Literatoriu" etc., are not as characteristic of determining currents from new ideas as they once were. The ones after 1900 remain determinant: "Semanatorul"(1901), "Luceafarul" (1902), "Viata noua" (1902), "Viata romaneasca"(1906), "Convorbiri critice" (1907) by M. Dragomirescu.

On December 2nd 1901, the first number of "Samanatorul" magazine goes on sale, with St. O. Iosif, George Cosbuc, Zaharia Barsan, Ion Adam, Ilarie Chendi, Ion Scurtu, Ion Ciocartan, S. Florea Marian, N. Iorga as its collaborators. Its initiative belonged to the Spiru Haret ministry under Vlahuta and Cosbuc.

Amongst the ideas is sympathy for peasantry, seen as conserving traditions, the struggle against alienating culture, past and present life inspiration, all stated in the "Primele vorbe" program.

At the two poets calling (Coşbuc si Vlahuţă) mostly people from Ardeal answered: Şt O Iosif, Ion Gorem, Constanţa Hodoş, M Cunţanu, Ilarie Chendi, V Pop and the critics Gh Bogdan- Duică, Ion Agârbiceanu, Emil Gârleanu etc. Symbolists, like: D Anghel, Elena Farago, I Minulescu, Ştefan Petică, Ovidiu Densuşianu before editing " Romanian Life", Al Brătescu –Voineşti, O Goga , Panait Carmen etcalso responded which demostrated the imposibility of separating those times' cultural movements.

Starting with the second year, 1902, Vlahuţă şi Coşbuc stepped out from running the magazine and, instead of them, a committee was put in charge; this committee was run by N Iorga,

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an impulsive person with strong opinions regarding art's and culture's nationalism, a forceful opponent of the idea of copying the West. He was a follower of the poetry that could be understood by everybody and a supporter of the princely past.

In 1905 N Iorga became the official director of the magazine. In his "History of contemporary Romanian literature" he saw himself as an adept of the "Semănătorii" movement (Romanian cultural movement that emphasized the problems of Peasantry). In N Iorga's series of articles publicized between 1899 and 1904 he had preached against the foreign influences in literature and culture standing for national feelings and encouraging the promotion of Peasantry. Iorga emphasized utopically the national cultural factor and supported a the social progress that could happen only after a brotherhood was made between all Romanians regarding of their social status.

As a starting point, the "Semănatori" movement fought against some exaggerated cosmopolitan trends; they also draw attention upon the importance of national values when creating a culture. The magazine succeeded in gathering around it a lot of people from Ardeal; when doing this it also helped them become closer to the cultural movement from the other side of the mountains and make a brotherhood between the intellectuals who had fought for re-uniting Transilvania with the rest of Romania that was to happen immediately after war.

In the years that followed the First World War, Romania's social and economical life suffered multiple changes that were determined by the numerous factories which stopped their activity. This was caused by the lack in labor force especially in agriculture. All these contributed to a decrease in production and trade was also badly affected.

The internal policy could be described as an important contradiction between working class and aristocracy, between Peasantry and landowners.

A feeling of changing the era's climate appeared as a consequence of these transformations the occurred among different levels of the social organization. Thus, the two World Wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) marked some serious social crises that took place in the first half of the 20th century. The Great Union from 1918 was something that was bound to happen as it was one of the greatest hopes of the Romanian people that sacrificed a lot in war.

The Agricultural Reform (1921) had a great influence because the soldiers from Mărăşeşti, their widows and children were given land and Romania became a country of contrasts: Western luxury of the domineering classes next to the poverty of the many of the working class and the Peasantry, the superficial and rapid modernasation of the capital city and the retrogression of villages. (Romania's History).

Due to these circumstances the literary activity of that times was divers and contradictory.

World War First interrupted the writing activity for some years, books were no longer published, magazines stopped appearing: "Semanatorul" died out, the building which housed " The Romanian Life" was burnt down in 1916, the literary meetings ceased.

These are years when writers who had main roles in the prewar literary movement died:

Şt. O. Iosif in 1913, Coşbuc in 1918, Vlahuţă in 1920.

However, the interbelic age of Romanian literature is "an age full of so much creative tumult" (Ion Rotaru. "A history of Romanian literature" vol. II) extending connections with other literatures., trying to rise above the somewhat provincial spirit, heading for universal plans of affirmation. The main pursuit of "europeanism " and at the same time of th revaluation of the national originality results from this tendency, and it stamps to the interbelic spiritual life (O.Crohmălniceanu, "Romanian literature between the two World Wars").

The diversity of roles and literary trend is also impressive. "The Romanian Life" trend promotes a realistic literature, developing the great clasics' literature, encouraging democracy and the national characteristics.. E.Lovinescu's literary ideology, who founded "The Demon Lover" in 1919, is called modernism and has as a standpoint the simple theory of imitation, taken from the French psychologist Gabriel Tarde according to whom, as a child immitates a grown up, the peasant immitates the merchant, the primitive man immitates the civilized one, in the same way the uncivilized people imitate the advanced ones. " The Demon Lover " represents for Romanian

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literature a large and rapid adoption of the latest artistical means from West, that is its connection with the "age spirit ", struggling against Titu Maiorescu's art for art's sake.

"The Demon Lover" is the rocket launcher of some personalities who will have and impact on literature. Never before had Romanian literature had so many famous representatives (Sadoveanu, Arghezi, Blaga, Ion Barbu, E.Lovinescu, H. Papadat-Bengescu, Mateiu Caragiale, Tudor Vianu,G. Cãlinescu, Camil Petrescu, Ion Pillat), never before had it gone through a lovlier inclination to argue about the values. The panorama of the writers' activity represents, therefore, an ample variety and complexity, supplementing from a compact texture of lights and intense shadow.

In this context Romanian fiction is ever heading for solid epic constructions, and the novel is the one to reach its greateste fullfilments. Although Romanian literature confined the appearance of the first proper novel in the publication of N. Filimon "Ciocoii vechi şi noi" in 1863, 1920 is also an important moment in Romanian novel's modernization. After a long period of elaboration, Liviu

Rebreanu's novel "Ion" comes out and is enthusiastically welcomed by E. Lovinescu: "the work solves a problem and puts an end to controversy", the first objective novel which sends Romanian literature to the European value.

The urban theme proposed by Lovinescu in his program has not been dealt with yet. In this novel, Rebreanu conjures up the rural society from Ardeal, at the beginning of the 20th century, although he doesn't present the peasant who had stepped back from the civilization, like Sadoveanu, but his desire of enrichment, the land being the nucleus of all destinies.

In this society, where social position and respect are measured in the plot of land you own, the woman is nothing but a bearer of fortune.

Ion, the main character, is the son of a peasant who was not able to keep the fortune, and tries to buy back the plots of land that his father had sold. The only option is the marriage with a rich girl. Therefore, Ana, daughter of Vasile Baciu, the ugly, but rich girl, becomes a way to put an end to poverty for him. "Silent and mistreated nature, destined to suffering", Ana didn't have her mother, and the love of her father was "whimful". Lonely, shy, "her soul is longing for a coy, deep love" (Ion, Liviu Rebreanu).

About the social condition of women in the village, G. Calinescu says: "In the rural society, the woman represents two working hands, a fortune and a child breeder. The erotic crisis being surpassed, she ceases to signify something by her femininity. Ana's fate is even worse, but much more different from the fate of any other country woman" (The History of the Romanian Literature from the origins up to the present, G. Calinescu).

The Romanian novel starts using the city as its proper setting and its initiator is Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, "the one who uses psycho-analytical literature" (O. Crohmalniceanu).

"The high society" of the capital, made up of snobs and less genuine aristocrats, whose features are exaggeratedly stressed, is presented in "The Cycle of Hallips", from which the novel "Bach Music Concert", the second cycle, is thought to be the best. If with Rebreanu, the woman is nothing but "a bearer of fortune", with Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, the woman is concerned with social relations, with what "the world would say". "A characteristic aspect of this world is that people are preoccupied with money only at the beginning, when joining the upper class. All of them are more or less rich, but with no financial concern. Fortune is the only environment in which these translucent beings can walk (…). They are not politically ambitious; it is not about fortune, nor about speculators, but about persons preoccupied with what <<everybody says>>, being keen on throwing dancing parties, on being received to certain receptions, on reacting in every moment of their lives, even in the most serious, or in the most distinguished" (G. Calinescu).

Elena and engineer Drăgănescu represent one of the couples whose destinies are built within the novel. Elena Drăgănescu is the first daughter of Leonora and Doru Drăgănescu and she is made of two psychological areas: Elena is in love with Maxenţiu, whom she gets engaged with, but her step sister, Mika- Lé, master in the art of doing harm, brutally interferes within the two lovers. Elena brakes her engagement, "with cold blood as stubborn as immovable had been her wish to marry him"(H. P. Bengescu, "Bach music concert"). The other area contures up her exceptional capacity of getting involved in the organization of receiving guests at different social events, which

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she used to initiate in her budoires. “Elena, used from a very young age to be a hostess in her parental house, had easily built her social relationships. Her snobbery made har choose what was best and she received everybody with the same natural reserve. As they had for her only the quality of guests, she would treat them equally and would dominate without any effort (…). However, at her receptions one didn`t talk either politics or business” (ibidem).

The analytic novel is also tackled by Camil Petrescu, a writer with a taste for philosophy, a nature of lucid artist, inclined to theorize his beliefs.

Published three years after the novel “Bach music concert”, in 1930, the subjective novel “The last night of love, the first night of war” catches the drama of the lucid intelectual, in want of the ultimate love feeling, dominated by uncertainties, who saves himself through the understanding of a more powerful drama, that of the humanity that lives the tragism of an absolute war, seen as an imminence of death.

In Great Britain, during the Victorian Age, troubled by profound social restlessness, a wave which kept the people from seeing the realities of life, spread. The only man of culture who succeeded in tearing apart this wave was Thomas Hardy. Owing to this thing he was always treated badly and criticized by his contemporaries, who could not understand and accept this writer`s characters who represented a defying of all the values which used to circulate in that epoch. A hundred years later another writer asserted himself, writer who profoundly admired this period and openly declared his curtsey towards the Victorian “outcast” in an honest attempt to define his own manner of writing. Fowel`s attitude.

Since it is about this writer, compared to Hardy and to the world in which he lived, it was declared by the writer in many of the interviews he gave, interviews which even contained revealing about the way he began to write his famous novel after he contemplated for hours on stretch the image of a mysterious woman who was sitting on a lonely cliff and was staring at the seascape. He declared:

“The woman’s figure couldn’t be seen and she didn’t show any grain of sexuality. But she was a Victorian; because I always saw her in the same still posture with her back at the world and her face towards the whirling sea, it seemed to represent some kind of mute reproach addressed to the Victorian epoch. She seemed doomed. I didn’t know what crime she had committed but I wanted to protect her. Thus I fell in love with her or with her way of sitting for hours on stretch looking at a steady spot towards the sea. I didn’t know what the truth was” (John Fowles “Notes on an unfinished novel”)

This testimony is relevant because it clearly illustrates Fowles’s paradoxical attitude: the sentimental attachment towards the values of an age and towards the modernist and post-modernist rebellion against of old values of the same time, this paradox of Fowles’ was the main target and source of many debates both literary and nonliterary.

Consciously, putting himself, “in the shadow of Thomas Hardy”, as he declared, Fawles outlines the relationship between the fiction of the Victorian author so appreciated and his own. If we think of the fact that the writer belongs to a deeply rebel time, which contested all traditional values, we will see that we cannot expect an attitude entirely humbled towards the fiction of Thomas Hardy and we will also see, that he will not follow dutifully the steps of his great predecessor. However it seems that Thomas Hardy’s shadow hangs over Fowles novels and exerts an important influence not only on the surface but also on their depth; the similarities which exist between these two authors, although they can be considered relative by many people, at the level of some significant images, at the level of certain visions on man and nature, there are some visions which represent dilemmas existentistically placed at the base of human life.

Taking into account the fact that between the two authors lie various differences starting with the temporal and literary ones and finishing with the philosophical ones, yet there can be possible an analysis of the resemblances between the two, similarities which consist in common ideas about the society and the time in which they have in consideration.

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Such an analysis has as starting point the novel "The French Lieutenant's Women", novel which can be considered to be a "Victorian novel within a novel" because it follows the recreation of the atmosphere of the English society at the half of nineteenth century by the ironic view of a writer from the twentieth century.

On the one hand, the novel follows all the Victorian concepts and the love story develops in an ideal Victorian way in the sense that it follows the traditional one, of love, of desire, but mostly the way of duty seen as supreme in those times. Everything must be subordinated to duty. Geta Dimitriu, in her debates on Fowles, gathered in "The path to fulfillment: Daniel Martin", has noticed the same thing, which is the fact that: "the concepts he uses in realizing the Victorian novel are intimately connected to the epistemes of the epoch" (Geta Dimitriu, "The path to fulfillment: Daniel Martin", p.5). The narrative is in the third person, letting the narrator be noticed in everything he narrates and is part of the common illusion that he controls the characters, the action and the atmosphere.

This sudden intrusion in the apparently linear plot of the "spy who is adjusting his telescope", a spy who identifies himself with the contemporary author, seen as an almighty puppeteer, with full rights over his characters, is more than a postmodernist way of stressing the fictional character of the novel. Fowles' art lies in his ability of handling the literary techniques of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also, it lies in the fact that he always reminds the reader that "both the epistemological suppositions and the aesthetic concepts on which the Victorian novel is based are established from the epistemes and the aesthetics of his time "(ibidem, p.6). These contradictory suppositions can not be considered as part of different epochs but, as part of the same epoch: the Victorian one. This mixture of Victorian and postmodernist techniques is found in Fowles' declaration which states that "each Victorian had two identities", and the best guide of the epoch is Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde's story, as one and the same person, but with distinct identities. So, this epoch, in modernist writers' vision, presented a fatal separation which could be found in every human being. On the one hand, there is the respect for social concepts and, on the other hand, intemperate torrents of things like adventure, love, romance and passion, things completely forbidden in the Victorian epoch, with one notable exception: Thomas Hardy's novels.

Even the double end of the novel, although entirely modern in its uncertain hesitation between the two alternatives, is faithful to the Victorians Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, as the author described them in his book. The first ending, represented by Charles and Ernestine's reunion, is strongly connected to the Victorians fear of uncertainty and, at the same time, it seems like a joke made by Fowles, which is related to Victorian endings. For example, the final marriage of Clym's cousin to Venn clearly ends the novel "The return of the Native", an ending full of falsity but, necessary for the society's concepts, a society in which Thomas Hardy lived and wrote, the author of the above mentioned novel. The end is there even though the writer was perfectly conscious that it is just a false denouement of the narrated events.

The second ending looks like a mirror in which is reflected the true image of the protagonists, especially because this ending is less subordinated to negatives, it is more opened and therefore, more modern but, at the same time, it characterizes Fowles and his entire work and, paradoxically, it seems more Victorian because it has deep essential involvements. Each ending of the novel gives the opportunity of a retrospective which despite its clarity, it is not the complete image of the events and their implications. This sense of unclear perspectives explains why Fowles has been so preoccupied with the historic time in the novel. His attitude towards history and, implicit, the reality it is presented under the shape of a conscience which belongs to the present, thus, transforming the novel into a "historiography metafiction" (Linda Hutcheon's conception and terms). This self consciousness might be regarded as the main narrative strategy used by Fowles in the novel, which is a defining characteristic that distinguishes him from his Victorian predecessors.

The novel is set in certain time and real place, England in March 1867, eight years after Charles Darwin's "The origin of species" was published and six months before Karl Marx intended to publish his first volume of "Das Kapital". Fowles does not show a stable Victorian society, but one that looks that way because the society, apparently, had long-used values and ways of action,

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but it was actually consumed by a lot of inner contradictions which he hadn't the courage to express directly because of fear of being isolated from the rest of the society. The same Hardy felt this inner corrosiveness that makes members of his society restless, so the same Fowles knew to perceive this energy materialized under the shape of some ideas and feelings that were going to destroy it. The same way the sea erodates Lyme Bay's shore, central setting of the novel, in the same way the Victorian world is eaten inside. If at Hardy this thing was pure genial intuition, at Fowles the way and the force with which the past and the future mingle with the present are part of some modern consciousness which triggers individual and makes one feel powerless when confronting with time. Hence, basic concept of modernists is allowing human personality to express itself as the way it is, the only one which can save the human being when confronting with transient human condition.

Fowles knows that an epoch is not monolithic, but contains discontinuous forces which are permanent struggle, forces which come both from the past and are not perfectly integrated in present, but also from the future which will earlier explode and will make the present become future.

The main character in Sarah Woodruff, The woman in the title, named "The Tragedy" or other names such as "the French Lieutenant's Whore", a name which , in the vision of the "pure fellows" who surround her, is appropriate and won't have to much to do with her. She lives in the Lyme Regis town being known as a dishonored woman because of the fact that she was seduced and abandoned by a certain French sailor who would have returned to France and married another woman.

Sarah, who represents the extra-narrative reality and the attempt at not being categorized, is always present on the mysterious ways of the town avoiding the company of the others who constantly give her the same guidelines they follow and always remind her not to take the path of perdition. She is also the one who leads Charles through these unofficial ways, but he fears of disobeying the laws which could bring alienation to his fellows, even though this is represented by physical isolation. He can't seem to divide the true values of the human soul and to distinguish the strict and absurd rules.

John Fowles perception about the Victorians was actually explained by himself: " Until 1860 the great steel structures of their philosophies, their religious and social stratifications began to look dangerously loose". But all didn't mean that society would noticeably begin to fall. On the contrary Fowles himself reassures: " In 1867 the epoch seems monolithic in its smallest details: snobbery is in the period of maximum prosperity, the wealthy philistines are more decided than ever to keep the working class to her place and the morality was extremely rigorous" (John Fowles, "Notes on an unfinished novel")

Like the majority of people belonging to the 20th century, Fowles often laughs at the hypocrisy of this "high morality" and the satire of the 19th century is to be even more profound and namely, the presumptions that the epoch makes without any clear proof. But above all this, the author is capable of admiring the Victorian culture in moral terms. He appreciates his strong sense of human finality, its determination of making life purposeful, because he is profoundly conscious that his elements are missing from his epoch.

Working in the same tradition as Swift, Sterne, Nabokov, Robbe-Grillet, Fowles discovered that his way of tackling is that of a meta-novel. His ironic digressions which make the reader get trust in himself, the image that he creates about the author seen as a manipulator of his fictitious characters, the conscious rendition of the pain he has been through, then, when he wrote his book, keeps him away so much from Hardy and his style of writing. However, as we could see, the similarities between two authors are somewhere in the depth of those "sacred truths of the human soul") that both try to reflect in their works.

The "French writer" from Fowles narrative suggests the source of ideas and experiment from " The French Lieutenant's Woman" and from other recent English novels. From Proust and Gride, the "lessons of the existential philosophy" mentioned by Fowles, from the atmosphere of the "epoch of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Ronald Barthes", the author confesses his source of his prose. In the light of these things, the title chosen by the author is not at all accidental. Naturally,

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the lover can be only of a French, taking into consideration the writer's preference for French literature.

However, irrespective of the influences the novelist got, irrespective of the way he adhered to the theoretical suggestions of postmodern epoch and of what he rejected from these, Fowles wrote a novel full of brilliance with a historical background drawn with minuteness and on which mysterious, strange characters are projected. A potential love story, an epic construction of a charming lyrical quality.

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