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**FACULTY OF LETTERS**

**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LINGUISTICS AND LITERARY STUDIES**

**Representations of Authors in the Romanian Novel**

**Towards a History of Metafiction**

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**CLUJ-NAPOCA**

**2017**

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**Keywords:** first-person narrative, metafiction, narrative strategies, self-reflective novel, guided, exact, distorted and ludic fictional reflection.

### Summary

Metafiction is a very popular topic among contemporary literature experts. Besides its trendiness, the study of self-reflectiveness in literature can actually serve as an essential component for understanding the peculiarities of every literature. Always focused on constructing a proper identity building discourse, the history of Romanian literature theory is lacking a comprehensive study on the dynamics of metafiction – which might be considered the most accessible form of persuading through fiction.

Metafiction is not a discovery of postmodernist literature; the phenomenon appears much earlier as a result of the writer's desire to personalize the artistic act and it is not only linked to literature. A study of character-driven metafictional prose could offer a completely new perspective on the Romanian novel. This subject has never been extensively researched, despite the fact that self-reflective literature characterizes the work of some of Romania's most important writers. It is therefore relevant for both, understanding the general picture of Romanian prose and interpreting many of the fine details of some of its characteristic novels.

The objective of this work is not only to study texts with a character who simultaneously is a writer, but to point out a phenomenon that organically links reality and fiction. This is evident in the fact that the writer characters and therefore the authors are in a debate with themselves about the process of how to write a novel while actually writing it. This is a process that in other types of fiction is a purely internal one and normally completed before the author even starts with the writing and has nothing to do with the characters. Therefore, the main question of this project is what the factors are that motivate the author to exteriorize this process. Under the presumption that such a writer character in Romanian literary history always mirrored the actual authors' set of beliefs, this thesis claims that the author's decision to create such a character (which can be guided, exact, diffused, distorted, and ludic) is not random and at the same time reflects the features of the aesthetic paradigm that the text and its author are assuming.

Outlining possible justifications for proposing the author's set of reflections as fiction and the consequences of his choice allows the investigation of the modalities in which character-

driven metafiction interferes in Romanian prose with different ideologies and literary paradigms. Aiming at that, this research combines the theoretical approach to the phenomenon with close readings of a corpus of texts, selected according to their historic relevance throughout the history of the Romanian novel, from the beginnings of the genre and until the end of modernism, including the avant-garde.

The first part of the thesis is a theoretical preamble, meant to familiarize the reader with the history of the central concept and its usages, to describe the actual context of researching metafiction in international literature, but emphasizing the situation of the topic within the Romanian boundaries. As mentioned above, metafiction has been a permanent feature of literature since its beginnings. Therefore, it is not only a category of postmodernist literature, and prominent metafiction expert Linda Hutcheon underlines that accepting its existence should be more important than the attempts to establish a definitive terminology. She believes that the roots of metafiction should be searched in the 19<sup>th</sup> and even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in modernism and, respectively, in romanticism. For instance, Robert Alter, one of the first theoreticians who studied metafiction, begins his book, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre*, by stating that in both, European and American literature, the realist convention is doubled by the consciousness that literature cannot belong to reality and thus literary realism is a contradiction in terms. This contradiction is exposed by literature itself. Actually, Linda Hutcheon makes the distinction between “metafiction of product” and “metafiction of process”, using the first expression with regards to the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel and the later for a development in contemporary prose. In her opinion, modern metafiction appears during the period of psychological realism, in the novels of Woolf, Gide, Svevo and Proust and culminates in postmodernist literature.

Romanian literary studies focused only on one of these two dimensions of metafiction. The one identifiable in postmodernist literature is the so called modern metafiction, but it belongs to a longer tradition of more subtle and less evident forms of metafiction, rooted in the first novels ever written. As Alter and Hutcheon prove for the most important literatures of the world, metafiction appeared as a parody of the typical conventions of realism. Examples can be found in *Don Quijote*, by Cervantes, in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne, in Diderot’s novels or in the *Künstlerroman*. Moreover, Linda Hutcheon establishes a dichotomy between narrative self-conscious texts and diegetically self-conscious ones. The

presence of a character who is also a narrator is a form of metafiction belonging to the first category.

The second part of this thesis aims to identify and analyse the occurrences of characters who are writers within a series of Romanian novels considered exemplary for the topic. The third chapter, entitled *Romanticism and the Guided Authorial Reflection*, focuses on the beginnings of the Romanian novel and analyses the relationship between the author and the central character. Due to the fact that he has literary preoccupations and usually shares some of the author's features, we believe he is a guided reflection of the author and, therefore, an unelaborated form of the modern metafiction. Firstly, we used Paul Cornea's and other literary historians' ideas to draw the cultural context in which the Romanian novel was born. What is particular about the Romanian literature is that the beginnings of the novel take place only slightly more than a decade after Mihail Kogalniceanu's recommendation to create a national literature, in 1840.

We observed that although this type of early and metafiction is not very common in the beginnings of the Romanian novel, it can be identified in at least two cases: *Manoil*, by Dimitrie Bolintineanu and *Un boem român*, by Pantazi Ghica. A part of the features that the close reading revealed were already known, that is that Romanian prose from this period has a fragile substance with classic, romantic and realist influences.

As Paul Cornea demonstrates, the attempt to legitimate literature within literature is as important to the writers as their endeavour to create a national literature. Being a writer is not regarded as a serious profession at the time but it slowly but surely becomes the centre of attention of a growing group of readers and it develops into a subject of the most popular genre of that time: the novel. The writers find a creative way to contribute to social life. Their voice starts to count and through their prose they point out a critique of the society in which they live. Because literature theory is not accessible to the (larger) Romanian public – which often had no proper education and little interest in culture – the writers add it as a topic in their fictional works, making their art both useful and pleasant and considering it at the same time a path and an aim, as Paul Cornea states. Although our writers are not completely original, borrowing and adopting foreign models shows their capacity to find directions and move in the mist of 19<sup>th</sup> century prose. On the other hand, it is not only fulfilling a duty that counts (that of writing original novels), but the novel offers a series of narrative possibilities that other genres do not.

*Manoil* and *Un boem român* are the most representative works that demonstrate our hypothesis that the metafictional discourse infiltrates the early Romanian prose (the two main characters are writers: Manoil writes poems, Paul writes prose) in an attempt to give literature an identity within itself, literature being among the most prominent themes in both works. On the other hand, as Linda Hutcheon points out, self-reflexivity appears first in paratexts and then, step by step it enters the structure of the novel itself. Both characters are contaminated with the ideas, life experiences and cultural backgrounds of the authors, so that we consider them guided reflections of their creators. The lack of experience of the two writers with regards to writing a novel can be observed in their struggle to make their main characters credible and to erase the similarities of Manoil and Paul with Bolintineanu and Ghica. In spite of this, the chosen formulas will be developed more successfully in modernism in two directions: the subjective prose (*Manoil*) in the interwar period, and the objective prose (*Un boem român*) in the postwar period and in postmodernism.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to *The Exact Metafictional Reflection in Late Modernism*. One can observe an evolution of aesthetic value from the novels of the beginning of the genre in Romania to those of the interwar period, also considered the period of maximal development of the novel in the country. According to Nicolae Manolescu, the type of narcissism we focus on can be found in the *Ionic Age* of the novel and according to Liviu Petrescu this is the age of *Late Modernism*. We refer to the novels which abandon the principle of creating a social fresco, aiming to investigate the depths of the human individual. In order to do that, they shift from an objective, impersonal narrator, to a subjective narrator, an exact reflection of the author. The self-reflective perspective sometimes represents an experiment which the writers dedicate themselves for the remainder of the novel (Camil Petrescu, in *Patul lui Procust* and Mircea Eliade in *Romanul adolescentului miop*, *Șantier* and *Nuntă în cer*, but in different ways), other times it occurs only infrequently throughout the text (Anton Holban, in *O moarte care nu dovedește nimic*, *Ioana* and *Jocurile Daniei*), and other times the so-called reversed spyglass does not exist and the subjective narrator focuses on presenting events that include himself, creating an effect of authenticity (this would be the case for Max Blecher, in *Vizuina luminată* or of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, in *Ciclul Halipilor*).

From this perspective, Anton Holban's novels appear as a trilogy presenting Sandu's (the protagonist) experiences. Choosing a writer character is, in Holban's case, an option, and not a

lack of narrative alternatives, as observed in the Romanian romantic novel. In Liviu Petrescu's words, Sandu has the profile of a "problematic" character, mirroring many perceived traits of the author's personality. But being an exact reflection of the author usually had a negative connotation among critics. For instance, Manolescu considers that Holban is not capable of creating credible characters, other than himself, and that the exact reflection is the sign of a limited imagination. Differing with Manolescu, we believe that using the same name for the main character in all three of Holban's relevant novels is not a mere coincidence but a conscious strategy used by the author to create a strong sensation of authenticity. The differences in personality of the three Sandus can be regarded as different aspects of the same underlying character. In the first novel of the series, *O moarte care nu dovedește nimic*, one discovers a main character that is trapped in the world of books with a tendency to overthink everyday problems. In the second, *Ioana*, Sandu's observations of the titular character interacting with this bookish universe put her in a much more favourable light. In *Jocurile Daniei* finally, he displays a much more balanced perception of his female counterpart and with regards to himself he not only emphasizes the activity of writing as a strategy to filter real-life experiences, but also as a respected occupation.

Camil Petrescu's poetics emphasize the aforementioned topic of writing too, but he does it through a different strategy. His characters become writers without willing to, due to the narrator's positive encouragement to express their emotional troubles with words. The role of the narrator is thus only relevant for organising the materials. Each of these characters shares some possible features of the author; therefore they are all accurate reflections of aspects of the author's personality in spite of their apparent narrative independence.

From Eliade's generous variety of characters with an artistic structure we chose three, each representing a different hypostasis of the writer: the protagonist of the meta-*Romanul adolescentului miop*, whose vocation becomes clear only once he finishes his novel, the main character of the "indirect novel" *Șantier* who is also created in the process of writing, and the fully formed writer (despite his flaws) from *Nuntă în cer*. The first two are exact reflections of the author at two different moments of time. Mircea Eliade is the one Romanian writer who pushed the limits of the novel more than any other and by transgressing the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction his works appeared more and more like diaries. In the case of the latter character, Andrei Mavrodin, the profession of writer becomes the core of the novel and the

trigger for the plot. Like in *Jocurile Daniei*, in *Nuntă în cer* the character writer Mavrodin has a series of privileges and uses his profession to seduce – following the cliché – a woman.

The fifth chapter investigates the *Avant-Garde and the Distorted Metafictional Reflection*. In the experimental novel, the author's reflection is distorted and the connections with the real writer are not even possible features of his personality anymore, neither are they customs nor habits. Therefore, they must be looked for at the structural level of the text. The two novels of Horia Bonciu, an interwar writer also perceived as belonging to the avant-garde movement, *Bagaj... Strania dublă existență a unui om în patru labe* and *Pensiunea doamnei Pipersberg*, are narrated by a poet-narrator who introduces himself with the author's name. Moreover, he confesses that he writes a book, and its description reflects the set of Bonciu's artistic beliefs. The process of writing guarantees for Bonciu a stable identity that might be obtained through narration. Any alternative forms of living are, in his opinion, steps downwards on the evolutionary ladder. Despite this apparent coherence between the author, the text, and the character, the metafictional mirror voluntarily distorts reality.

Pleading for the necessity and the novelty of studying Romanian prose from a metafictional perspective is based on three arguments that constitute the main axes of this thesis: the configuration of some different typologies of writing, according to the reflection of the author in his text; establishing a history of the metafictional discourse in the Romanian novel; and, offering a new perspective on the Romanian novel by integrating the topic of metafiction with the way it interferes with various cultural ideologies, starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the end of modernism.