

THE CODE AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF IDENTITY IN THE NOVEL OF INTROSPECTION

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Résumé: Le roman d'introspection suppose une perspective qui dépasse les clichés avancés par l'écriture du roman d'analyse psychologique. Une des différences dont l'origine se trouve dans le système complexe du nouveau code moderniste et que l'on peut mieux observer dans l'espace du roman d'introspection où l'articulation de la pensée et la somme des perspectives sont instituées par le regard critique sur l'œuvre. L'article se propose d'analyser quelques formes du nouveau code littéraire où la pensée transposée dans l'art n'est plus l'expression d'un sujet mais elle se métamorphose, elle devient transsubjective. Dans l'espace de l'écriture introspective, la parole est plus qu'un instrument de communication, elle devient le signe de l'aspiration vers la vérité.

Keywords: introspection, novel, identity, Modernism, subjectivity

Regardless of the age in which it is produced, any novelistic work represents the object of a redefinition process, a process of interpretation in which the sense of creation is added in various degrees of pertinence, a coefficient of authorial subjectivity because “interpreting a literary work means interpreting yourself, hence, this means a work of self-criticism, a self-portrait.”¹

¹ Gaudemar, A., *Starobinsky en mouvement, propos recueillis*, in *Magazine littéraire*, Nr. 192, février, 1983, p. 77 (our translation).

The code aims not only at the inner articulation of the literary work, but also at the sum of perspectives being established by the critical view on the literary work. Reading a code in a literary work has a historical character, mainly a positive phenomenon because with every age we state the birth of new decoding forms which are nothing else than perspectives of some subjects who penetrate the center of the artistic construction in order to reveal its hidden articulations and meanings.

The subjective thinking is at the core of the introspective novel's construction, being determined by the rhythm of the living or the individual experience: it is, in its essence, reflexive. The thinking transposed in art is no longer the expression of a subject. It transforms itself and becomes trans-subjective. The transposing processes of interiority or thinking is possible only by means of language. The human being is born and dies in a certain language and the truth of this axiom exempts us from a repetitive commentary. In the novel of introspection, be it Proustian or Woolfian, the language does the translation of all the thinking processes of the characters; it defines their position of consciousness in the universe, their identity and, most of all, the difference from the Other and his way of existing in the world.

Through its characters and the depiction of their reactions, the novel expresses by means of language the psychical processes which have their deciphering made with linguistic tools, too. The liaison between language and human mind is important in our case only if it can prove the same resulting facts once more. Yet, the introspective novel does not depict only manifestations of sensibility and human intellect, but also the cognitive process is established on the discourse scene by an intense focus on the whirling consciousness. Beyond the language used by characters that become voices of the consciousness in such a novel (unlike the portraits in the traditional realistic novel where a ready-

made psychology is added) one can discern the fragments of a live thinking, an in vivo development of the human mind. The psychological clichés, so obvious in a classical novel of psychological analysis, are eliminated in the novel of introspection because they don't befit the way characters feel, see, represent, and most of all, perceive themselves and the world.

Throughout its works, each age brings in an amount of representations of the inner and outer reality which constitutes a code of the creative individuality. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* correspond to the modernist code because of the ideas they imply, the vision on the human individual and through the perspective centered on the character's interiority. This modernist code aims at the human subject, his nature and the perspective on himself and the reality.

The target of the introspective novel is different from the old representations and views of life and reality where the impersonal vision belonged to an omniscient narrator who used to transmit his own opinions and concepts to the characters. There was no fracture between the representations' system of the transmitter (proposed by the traditional realistic novel) and of the receiver's (the reader's) system, but, once with the coming out of novels by Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Henry James or by Romanian authors such as Camil Petrescu and Anton Holban, the perspective becomes very different because the social context now has a secondary function in the ensemble of the novelistic text, the chronology is fragmented, and some events are recurring obsessively. This recurrence becomes a device which explains itself through motivations other than those of the realistic perspective. Their character is either accidental or indefinite and, although they are perceived by different consciousnesses, the optics they show is variable. To this we may also add an impressing number of monologues which were missing or

rarely used in the classical realistic novel. Thus, one can discuss about a new code², a new perspective on the act of writing and the whole world.

As many psychologists noticed, the language of the consciousness is the most complex one, hence the most difficult to transpose in a transparent way. The torments of Flaubert's style have become common ground to be summoned by any critical study, yet these torments do present a genuine reality.

The word, more than a simple communication device in literature, becomes a sign of yearning for the truth. Beyond the word and the network of images lies the mysterious creation of the being which utters itself. This mystery, sought by subjectivity and reflected by the creator is perceived as one of the basic structures in *The Waves*.

The consideration on the poetical word, on the possible meanings it carries, is inserted in the text of the novel that reminds us of Mallarmé's and Valéry's meditations. Louis, Neville, Bernard, the voices of the novel, ask themselves terrified: "Not the words—but what are words? (...) I shall be a clinger to the outsides of words all my life. (...) Image on top of image. I must open the little trap-door and let out these linked phrases in which I run together whatever happens, so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another."³

Between the Mallarmean search of the language purity, of a musical language, and the Proustian or Woolfian

² Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch in *Modernist Conjectures. A Mainstream in European Literature. 1910-1940*, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd. London, 1987, pp. 102-118. The authors of this volume present us with an analysis of narrative codes in the novel *To the Lighthouse*.

³ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, Oxford University Press, 1998, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Gillian Beer, pp. 37-38.

search there is practically no breach. Marcel Proust or Virginia Woolf continue to tenaciously and ardently attract the poetical verb, purified by the slags of the real which is apt to “translate” the yearning into the being’s purity.

In the novel of introspection, the search for the lost innocence by means of language is not only a simple theme, a structure upon which the Whole is orchestrated, but rather the yearning of rediscovering the space where words and objects can coexist in an edenic harmony. The poetical utterance which Bernard is looking for means in fact the nostalgia of rediscovering this pure space, a space of pure communication, necessary for the reconstruction of Wholeness.

The sentences used by Bernard to build up his stories are fragments of a discourse which cannot touch but accidentally the consubstantiality between language and being. Words, in their articulation, try to build bridges which cannot be caught by the eye. Words sometimes become substitutes for sight. Bernard hopes that by means of the word, the being casts anchor in the world, and this ensures stability and lost order. As an authentic creator, Bernard knows that by means of words and the stories imagined by him, he reinvents a world. Bernard transfigures the given order into a superior one which transgresses the determinations of space and time. Same as the Proustian narrator, Bernard hopes to rediscover the grace and purity of the language that propels into the atemporal.

With her novel, Virginia Woolf manages in an original way to establish a new and modernist poetics, much like Proust and Joyce. The language will be the first element in which all the efforts of the introspective novel creators concentrate. In the traditional realist novel, the language used to be bound to objects in the sense of assimilating their forms, without piercing the illusive shield of the image. The novelist is a scriptor who does not doubt the given linguistic order. Yet, with the introspective novel one witnesses the denial of

this language perspective. Bernard, the narrating character in *The Waves*, denies the tyranny of words bound to matter, words that do not allow the spirit to transgress the immediate reality. Bernard prefers the sonority of the pure expression; the quality of this expression lies in naming the being and the object in their essence, and not the verbal tyranny. His aspiration to full transparency of the language as a relation between the creator and the world proves to be dramatic, because it ends in the land of silence, which does not necessarily mean an abdication, but rather a benign interval between language and world, between aspiration and profound knowledge of the world's hidden mysteries.

Nowadays, the meditations of the narrating character are still up-to-date: the word mined by the usage of so many centuries must regenerate; it has to be reconstructed.

In the modern thought, deconstruction seeking a reconstruction is a postulate which differentiates two visions of creation, regardless of the literary genre. One success of the Woolfian novel is this tragic finding of the being which shows us that the language denaturalizes the living by its incapacity to validate the truth upon objects and deep realities of the consciousness.

The code of the introspective novel is noticeable also because of the particular state owned by the image and the imagery in the general economy of the novel. The image is not a simple tool for metaphorical representations of the universe. It builds itself from fragments of reality. The reader has the task of regrouping particular segments in order to obtain a coherent and productive perspective of the meaning. In the discourse of the introspective novel, images are functional, constructive, inviting us to an active process of decoding the text's whole structure. First of all, they are expressions of a consciousness ready to explode, like a volcano, and from its eruptions sentences strained with images start to reveal hidden and repressed meanings.

The images' germination and maturation in such a novel cover the trajectory of the consciousness as true support of the semantic reflection. De-configuring the universe does not imply depersonalization. Actually it emphasizes the role of the creative subject in the irisation act of meanings which have a character almost impossible to decipher. On the other hand, Bernard, the narrating character in *The Waves*, clearly expresses his wish of **not** giving up in front of the languages' incapacity of piercing the invisible.

Expressions of an uncommon sensibility, the images in the introspective novel become one by one symbols, concepts, ingredients of a mythical substance in which the meaning is carved.⁴

The journey into the abyss of words and consciousness, apparently full of disappointments, proves to be a constructive one in the purest sense of the word. As opposed to the homogeneity of the language used for centuries, there is the wish to transgress the opacity of words and the surface of things in order to restore the initial transparency, the purity of an utterance in which the sonority and the plasticity of the image will reestablish the inner order, undermined by the absence of an outer order.

In Marcel Proust's novels, critics are brought to the impossibility of language in revealing the fundamental truths of the universe. He expresses his admiration for the language of music which is able, in his opinion, to build more subtle and bigger bridges of communication between human souls.

The identity of the greatest two creating subjectivities, Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf is also visible in the temperate attitude of the critics toward language, since both Proust and Woolf admit to the relative capacity of restoring the ineffable of the human consciousness.

⁴ See Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and especially *The Waves*.

The sight and the language, two perspectives in the novel of introspection, two instruments, contribute to the success of a new aesthetical vision; they also contribute to the establishment of the identity in the novelistic field, an identity which is always in search for its own difference as a subject in the act of writing, and also as a dynamical substance of time perception in the field of art.

Reduced to the simple act of enunciation, Woolf's characters in *The Waves* never cease wondering what the use of their existence is, progressing from emitting certain impressions to the painful utterance of some fundamental truths about the universe and the human being.

The six soliloquies in *The Waves* betray the deep anxiety in the quest for guide marks that go beyond the social sphere. It also betrays the anxiety of an instrument through which one could establish world order, the sight often proving to be helpless in "catching" the entire world wherein the human being is lost: "I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness".⁵

The new vision of reality owes to the fact that the scene of the introspective novel is to be found inside and not outside consciousness and the mutations occurring in this space possess a certain quality: the substantiality which helps define the human being in its essence, rather than the mimetic reflection of a social depiction. The consciousness producing the text in the novel of introspection signifies the origin, the form and the substance of the Meaning which ensures the genuineness of the perspective. The novelistic creation is remarkable for the role and the gravity of the cognitive act in the novel's economy.

The authentic knowledge cannot be realised otherwise than through the knowledge of the self. This is clearly stated

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, Oxford University Press, 1998, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Gillian Beer, p. 33.

in the novels of Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban.

Still, the unity of the perspective does **not** exclude the existence of multiperspectives. Hence, in the Proustian novel we deal with the perspectives of Swann, Odette, Charlus, Verdurin, and not only with that of the narrator, as one could have thought. The introspection novel is, in this matter, different from any kind of novelistic writing because of the liberty it gives to characters - generally speaking, consciousnesses with a specific identity which differentiates them from other characters (mere accidents of the stage).

The code of the introspective novel obstinately refuses the chronology, the temporal order, the so-called order of the objective reality. Time is one of the essential themes in the field of the introspective novel, also known as the consciousness novel, according to Vasile Popovici⁶. It contrasts the chronological linearity to the entire series of anachronisms which play their role in genuinely uttering the functionality of the human thought.

The message of the code in the introspective novel is the following one: the fiction offers us ways of discovering the world on a much larger scale than sciences do in aiming at the structural knowledge of the objective world. The access to a diversity of perspectives - a diversity of visions eliminating the risk of imprisoning oneself in an illusive world - is the path proposed by the aesthete as a superior form to any other form of authentic knowledge.

⁶ Vasile Popovici, *Eu, personajul*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1988

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