

## THE EXTREME-CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN NOVEL. TRANSGRESSIVE NOVEL VS. NEOMODERNIST NOVEL

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The discussions going around resemble more an advertising campaign – when referring to the young writers and with an acute need of polemics and immediate contextualization – on behalf of the critics. The generation of the 2000s has been the breaking news of criticism for the last years.

In an often confused climate, dominated by an eternal reassessment of the aesthetic canon after the hectic ninth decade, some novels were published that have established a new form of expression, somewhat forbidden to the literature that stumbled over the textualist discourse of the writers belonging to the generation of the 1980s. It was a form of underground resurrection of the language, as if the identity ravaged by the convulsions of transition had left no other formula of approaching the novel. Thus a few novels are issued, books that created a stir in our reception, due to some generous editors who took risks by publishing young writers. Whether the launching of the Ego Prose Collection and the promotion of the young men from Euridice Literary Circle meant a common attitude, for some even a generation, nowadays the matters are clearer though still far from establishing a distinct stage of literary history. As far as the growth of young prose is concerned, one can assert that, at present, we distinguish two different stages of the novel, as well as two waves of writers.

*The First Wave* or *The Confused Idealism* is the one acknowledged by the debut of those published by Polirom Publishing House, the Poliromists. Acknowledged, as several books have already ushered in a certain trend in a novel written by young authors ever since the beginning of the new millennium, some issued only in electronic format, without having a special impact on the readers. I keep underlying the fact that young author does not necessarily mean conclusive age but mainly a *common attitude*. Consequently, Ovidiu Verdeș, Felicia Mihali and mainly Constantin Popescu and Alexandru Vakulovski had already set a precedent. Sympathetically welcomed by a part of the critics, they have already established a nonconformist approach to the novel. So this first wave, besides those already mentioned, consists of other prose writers such as Adrian Schiop, Dragoș Bucurenci, Ioana Baetica, Ioana Bradea, Claudia Golea, Cătălin Lazurca, Ionuț Chiva, T.O. Bobe,

Cecilia Ştefănescu, Florin Lăzărescu, Cezar Paul Bădescu, Sorin Stoica, Alain Gavriluţiu, Lucian Dan Teodorovici, Răzvan Coloja, Adrian Chivu, Marian Coman, Tudor Creţu, Mihnea Rudoiu, Dan Lungu, Ana Maria Sandu, Maria Manolescu, etc. The novel of the first wave is one of searchings for a social memory, of exploring the identity wasted by the inaccurate metamorphoses of the society.

The writers of the first wave depict the vibrations of the transition period, an obsessive symptom that has entirely disappeared from the prose of the moment or is still to be found, here and there, as well as by means of some parodic representations. They are heterogeneous, individualists and nevertheless united by the new realities offered by the post 1990 liberty. What bind them together are the common social recollections.

It is a prose of social neurosis, which permanently claims a disintegration of the individual who fails to conceive both a convenient reality and a mainstay of inwardness. They experience the drama of the passage from adolescence to maturity simultaneously with the continuous alterations of a lost and permanently unreliable society. It is a generation of writers deeply upset and disconcerted by the post revolutionary social tensions, having all lost their childhoods in communism and their adolescence disfigured by the vibrations of the transition, each generation doomed to be one of "sacrifice". The lack of landmarks in a new regime means a sudden collision with the fullness of newly-appeared vices. Their addiction to the social is a hybrid one, one foot in the future, one foot in the platitude of the past – still to be influenced. Fortunately, none of the writers has succeeded in growing aware of the communist perversity. These young prose writers came up against a reality that offers, so generously, a multitude of existential hypostases. The result: precocious-grown-ups. They have no solutions, as they do not deal with fixed realities. They captured different forms of liberty, out of the blue, without a genuine lucidity. The historical moment is impossible to macerate realistically. They invite us to read their books leaving asides complexes, taboos and any other collateral thought. They do not believe in generations, not even one possible generation, so unruffled and quasi-pragmatic are they. Stigmatized exactly because they consider themselves a futureless generation, in a society that prolongs and constantly dilates the lack of perspectives, of opportunities, a world that invariably refuses them. Nevertheless, Holden Caulfield's dependence on the mundane is the *brand* of this refused generation. It is the generation that yearns to leave the country so that they might pursue happiness or, if they choose to stay in their homeland, *they do it through dreaming to make up for the failures*. Thus, the most wanted *myth* is that of *compensatory paradises*. A *touch of melancholy* moulds every character.

In many cases, the dominating sensation is that of a new game with talkative characters, pubers, ignorant, mediocre, other dilettantes, fond on commonplace kidding and trying to imitate life from the movies. In their innocence, they look

upon themselves as film heroes. Suddenly, they turn interested in the (real or illusory) *overtake* if the *underground control of society*. Similar to their characters, present day young prose writers do share a childhood lost in communism. Their adolescence, prolonged into maturity, is but a hybrid state of *terribilism*. They strive to give life to phantasms prepared by repeated illusory states. They do not regard themselves as failures but rather mistreated by the world they were born into. Their biggest fear lies in the impotence of giving life to illusions, the fear of lacking in perspectives and the fear of turning into human failures, *the fear of squander*. Tragicism is no longer possible, being replaced by the *salvation through illusion*. Furthermore, we notice that in the first wave novels we come across an *ethical chaos* caused by a society inflamed by the “virus” of freedom, so the human destinies are incidentally (re)formed. For the domineering *narcotic inaction* has for its source nothing else but *the feeling of vacuum and powerlessness*. These writers *reconfigured taboos* and out of the constant obsessions, sexuality and its myth is, without any doubt, the most common in textual infernos. No wonder, since, in the post communist era, the censorship of sentimental education was followed by *the explosion of the myth of revealed sexuality*.

It is a generation that has just awoken, reluctantly, in the midst of social riots. The first phase: *the confused idealism*. Everyone seems to have opinions on every subject, some loiterers who are drug-addicts because of the lack of any accurate chart of the real. At a certain moment of its evolution, *solitude* is no longer en vogue for the first wave prose writers. Emotions, issues of all sorts, the most intimate experiences, they can all find adequate interpretations in a group of pals. Most of them are addicted to friends and in the pages of their novels the permanent *necessity of the other* looms large. In this stage of the novel, the writers are promoting and assuming *elementary passivity, accelerated pragmatism, scepticism, semi-loser's condition, vitalist independence*; they are craving for alternative options, deconstruct skilfully, out of a disclosing vanity, they de-taboo and what not. The weapon they use against the new realities, against the boundaries they fail to grasp, is weeping-laughter and this is why they generally strive to produce smile. Some novelists seek for solutions investigating the mystical social, deciphering the enigmatic sense of the human existence. Some others are writing the novel that is to avenge a certain socially invalid, freudian-unhappy adolescence. Sociologically, this type of literature proves how cynical, violent, innocent and mature the post-revolutionary adolescent is. The prose writers of the first wave may be called *the new degeneration*. They enlighten us about adolescence, puber age, libertines, about that *dolce far niente*, ceaseless and emblematic, hallucinogenic and funny, dark and *terribilistic*, tragic above all.

The enforcement of morality, the denial of the canonical, paroxysm of limits, indignation and offence to political correctness, defiance of social and artistic

authority, triumph of violence and subversive imaginative, the fascination for necrophilia and exacerbate sexuality would be the features (together with the ones mentioned above) of this novel, which I would name, according to the terminology required by American art, a *transgressive novel*, appropriate to the actual generation. Not just a simple transgressive art or an imitation. The autochthonous transgressive novel has its own particularities, starting from the resonance of the established term. The actual difference lies in the influences and adherences to communism, as well as in the specific postrevolutionary psychology and imaginative. Several thinkers (from Foucault, Bataille, Kristeva to Steven Dubin and some others) have predicted and conceptualized the transgressive, attempting to clarify the antinomies of modern art. However, none of them has succeeded in imposing – and probably that was not even desired – a strict literary terminology. In autochthonous art, techniques, theories and representations of the transgressive circulate in several other arts as loans or imitations, but without conceptualization. That also happens in literature. At least here, but in cinematography as well, the influence of beat generation novels until Ellis, Palahniuk or Coupland are more than obvious. In the Romanian version, this type of prose acquires, as I mentioned above, new dimensions. Of course, it is a matter of the “anxiety of influence”, but also of a too gentle assumption of an already existent direction. In other words, the contemporary novel has accumulated in ten years of production (counting more than one hundred novels) the main arguments of transgressive prose, permanently configuring it through structural particularities of literature nowadays.

#### THE SECOND WAVE OR THE REHABILITATION OF THE TALE

But for few cases, in the prose of the second wave we no longer deal with the receptiveness of the publishers for whatever a novel might mean, that is to say the desideratum that required novelty by all means has disappeared. The discourse has turned into a more sophisticated one, getting rid of the *je m'en fiche*-like obsession to shock. Then, the intertextualities have faded away and wherever they still exist, they are part of the *parabolic* or *allegorical dimension* of the book. “The acts of fictionalization” (according to Iser) are now visible in the successful convergences between the real and imaginative. This period enjoys the advantages offered by the *fantasy novel*, *historical novel* and *parable novel*. It is obvious that the present day writer has rediscovered his appetite for the tale, being fed up with *transient experimentalisms*. Unlike the attempt made by the first wave writers (*the Transgressive writers*), the expected fictionalizations about the communist epoch are now registered through a careful underlining of some sore points, interwoven in the text through subtle parabolic contours. The novel acquires much strength largely through gracefully polished stylistic designs, through the rediscovery of the spell

cast by polyphony, as well as through the virtual reconditioning of the spaces, realities and imaginative. Thus, some communication channels with the readers are established, readers who were merely left aside whenever the novel was teeming with flamboyant textual games, feigning a shared empathy towards the reader. The prose writers of the period succeeded in assembling ample apocalyptic scenarios, making use, without any restraint, of specific procedures belonging to *conspiracy*, *detective* and *allegoric novel*. Romania, seen as supertheme or supercharacter, is grasped through maximal, universal moves, acquiring an aura of a space not only of all possibilities, but of continual metamorphoses, hard to decipher with accuracy. Contemporary novel shows a unique sensitivity for the social and historical panorama rendered by means of a certain magic realism or by melting virtual terminologies, such as the theory of the fractals. The propensity for mythologizing and the parabolic is the very hallmark of this generation. Hence, a fresh air of authenticity, so different from the promoted minimalism of the Transgressive novel. Cristian Robu Corcan, Răzvan Rădulescu, Bogdan Suceavă, Doina Ruști, Filip Florian, Petre Barbu, Bogdan Popescu, Florina Ilis, Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari, Horia Ursu, Ion Manolescu and some others are undoubtedly the prose writers of the present day, causing in the fall into oblivion of the majority of the first wave writers but for the three Jassy musketeers (Teodorovici, Lăzărescu and Lungu). I detect a certain responsiveness of the young writers to the film script. We are now witnessing the existence of certain distinct stages and each of them stands for a form of understanding normality, of setting down. One can discern: 1. A stage of searchings and compelling recognition of certain new names (taking into account the aspects that are believed to be the expressions of rebelliousness and nonconformism, in fact a belated retort to the grizzled 1980ism). 2. The stage of assimilating literatures that belong to some writers who concede novelty to the discourse (this is a stage typical for the publishing houses as a gesture of editorial maturation and secondly, it records a resetting of a vision/landmarks held by criticism meant to discover new values). 3. The recovery of the theory (a return to the construction and execution of the types of a novel, “brought up by date” in a genuine western spirit as a repartee to the Transgressive fiction). 4. The promotion of certain marginalized writers as representative exponential authors for export as well (R. Rădulescu, F. Florian, B. Popescu). 5. The stage of re-orienting the discourse – having the awareness of translation, of international success. Our literature has nothing but advantages since the greatest benefit of contemporary writers might be the commitment to the integration in a reality offered by an open society with its multiple expressions.

The affair of the actual Romanian novel lies in accepting the value of the transgressive writers together with the ones tributary to literary neomodernism – in fact, the followers of the 60s generation, with insignificant postmodern pirouettes. An acceptance, which has to connote a real competition instantly. Unfortunately, a

certain commodity of the autochthonous critique gives birth to a canon of the contemporary novel, which excludes the representatives of the transgressive art. Even if the real innovation stems from the transgressive novel, they prefer a neomodernist romanesque, easily recognizable and somehow dated scheme. Marching with the latter ones, our point of view tends to be carried away from the true architecture of the young novel. I am interested in how some newcomers have tried to make a paradigm change, being included in different categories and many of them being even excluded because of ambiguous reasons and hardly due to aesthetic or simply meritorious causes. I also observe an almost anti-experimentalist vocation of an opinion of our active critics. Anything that does not belong to a satisfying novelistic area, somehow predictable, should not be in any serious critique publication. In conclusion, we debate, regarding the contemporary novel, on a matter of merits of the transgressive novel versus the neomodernist novel. Independent of the canon which is going to result in a few years, there remains an unattackable advantage of time; no other generation of writers has not been so lucky, since having the possibility of simultaneously claiming an autochthon and international success.