Metafiction in the Romanian and Spanish Contemporary Literature

Summary

This paper proposed a complex study framed within the area of literary theory and regarding a literary dimension which had been debated in the contemporary specialty literature-metafiction. The premise of this research encompassed an innovative contribution to the domain of Romanian literary theory, proving that there was a genuine poetics of metafiction, which could be applied in distinct literary and historical spaces. The second part of the study envisioned the applicability of the metafictional coordinates as a poetics by means of selecting several writers belonging to two different literary topographies and whose creations encompassed a period which began with the year 1970 and continued until the present times, being based on a series of common points which allowed the comparative correspondence and analysis.

The choice of the examples from the two spaces, Romanian, respectively Spanish, regarded two main arguments: on the one hand, I emphasized the fact that in both spaces metafiction occurred and was predominantly developed in historical periods of transition, after the communist regime in Romania, respectively the Civil War in Spain. The two literatures mentioned identified a support for innovation in the literary techniques approached by the French and South American novel, in an alert shadowing of the subliminal ideological discourse generated by the Francoist, respectively communist ages, by means of a visible revelation of the narrative process at the surface of the text. Utilizing parody as a main strategy for overcoming the ideological discourse, but also as a form of dialogue with the previous creations, literature opened the domain of hybrid forms. The concept which was denominated in the literary theory as “metafiction”, a term coined by William Gass in 1971, brought into discussion creations like the diaristic novel, the novelistic autobiography, or the problematic novel, which reconsidered the idea of national, and cultural memory, which was much more accentuated though in the Hispanic space, from the perspective of the status of literature itself, and of a discourse which was reflected and metamorphosed into the subject of its own text.
On the other hand, the writers selected in the analytic part of the research had as a foundation the circumscription of the metafictional prose within the tradition of the South American literature, combined with nuances of the French *nouveau roman*. That was the reason for an prominent correspondence between the profile of the Romanian and the Spanish metafictional prose, an aspect which also reinforced the premise that constituted the basis of the current research. Therefore, according to the premise, the metafictional strategies and techniques could occur in different literary spaces and contexts, encompassing a metafictional poetics which made them recognizable in a literary text.

The main motivation for the study under discussion considered the fact that in the Romanian literature there was no research completely dedicated to metafiction, lacking both the theoretical studies to exclusively refer to a poetics of metafiction, and the ones to exclusively consider the critical reception of the latest metafictional prose. The term “metafiction” remotely appeared in the general Romanian studies dedicated to postmodernism, and which mainly focused on the writers of the 1970’s-1980’s. At the same time, the Romanian literary critique, in most of its studies, negatively recepted the prose in which the metafictional narrative techniques predominated, because of the augmented reflexivity of the text, which was interpreted as abstract and was associated to the deprivation of the reader of the real prose in which the narrative predominated and not the technique.

In the topography of the Hispanic literary critique, the recent studies which debated metafiction as a form or as a narrative technique were very few, lacking a punctual and detailed analysis of the narrative means and techniques of the Spanish metafictional prose. Three studies which were published after 2000 and which exclusively debated metafiction, according to its manifold forms and denominations, should be mentioned. In 2000, Alicia Molero de la Iglesia published the volume *La autoficción en España (Autofiction in Spain)*, utilizing the term “autoficción” (“autofiction”) to denominate the confessing literature which was reflexively connected not only to the author but also to writing. In 2003, Francesco G. Orejas debated the aspects of metafiction in the volume *La Metaficción en la novela española contemporánea (Metafiction in the Contemporary Spanish Novel)*, from the perspective of the distinction that Gérard Genette made between “histoire” and “récit”. In 2009, Catalina Quesada Gómez published the study *La metanovela hispanoamericana en el último tercio del siglo XX (The Hispanic- American Metanovel in the Last Third of the 20th Century)*. Her research approached
the metafictional praxis in the prose of the South American writers Salvador Elizondo, Severo Sarduy, José Donoso and Ricardo Piglia.

The selection of the Spanish authors from the second part of the paper was based on two main reasons: on the one hand, the Spanish literary studies lacked a comprehensive hermeneutics from the perspective of the all metafictional aspects theoretized by the Hispanic, and also by the Anglo-Saxon and American researches; on the other hand, in the Romanian literary topography there were only seven novels translated into Romanian from the total of sixteen Spanish novels selected for the paper. *Fragmente de Apocalipsă (Fragments of Apocalypse)* by Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (translated by Mihai Iacob, Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2008), *Juan fără de țară (Juan Without Land)* by Juan Goytisolo (translated by Ariadna Grădinaru, Leda Publishing House, 2008), *Carte de identitate (The Identity Card)* by Juan Goytisolo (translated by Andrei Ionescu, Leda Publishing House, 2008), *Don Julián*, (translated by Andrei Ionescu, Leda Publishing House, 2010), *Bartleby & Co* by Enrique Vila-Matas (translated by Ileana Scipione, RAO Publishing House, 2005), *Soldații de la Salamina (The Soldiers from Salamina)* by Javier Cercas (translated by Cornelia Rădulescu, Humanitas Publishing House, 2003), *Viteza luminii (The Speed of Light)* by Javier Cercas (translated by Ileana Scipione, Leda Publishing House, 2009).

Concerning the selection of the Romanian authors, the motivation was also twofold: on the one hand, the re-dimensioning of their framing/association in/with the textualist praxis, by means of clarifying three key concepts: metatext, metaliterature, metaprose and, on the other hand, the construction of a complex image about the Romanian metafiction, with similar and disjunct aspects for each case under discussion. In comparison with the selection of the Spanish authors, with respect to the case of the Romanian literary space the research included a subchapter which debated the short fiction of the literary groups *Desant ‘83* and *Noii*, even though the second hermeneutical part of the paper focused on the novel only, in the Romanian and Spanish literary topography. The first metafictional attempts in the Romanian literature could be identified in the short fictions of the 1970’s-1980’s and some of the novelists discussed in this research developed their novelistic structures based on the foundation of the short prose. That was the case for authors like Mircea Nedelciu, Mircea Cărtărescu, Gheorghe Crăciun.

The paper was constructed according to two main plans. Firstly, a theoretical one, whose purpose was to prove that one could speak of a poetics of metafiction, by means of analyzing,
comparing and interpreting critically the various perspectives illustrated by the theoretical studies approached. Secondly, a hermeneutical layer, referring to Romanian and Spanish authors whose novels took metafiction as a reference point.

The first part of the research was organized into three chapters (*Towards a Poetics of Metafiction, Forms of Metafiction, Metafictional Strategies and Techniques*) which demonstrate the possible existence of a poetics of metafiction, by means of a comparative and critical analysis of the main theoretical studies based only on the topic under discussion (Patricia Waugh, Linda Hutcheon, Rüdiger Imhof, Larry McCaffery).

The first chapter referred to *The Terminological Options* by means of which the same narrative reality was denominated, *The Contextualization of the Contemporary Metafiction* by evaluating the connections and the correspondences with the main literary directions that intersected with it in common or divergent points (Realism, Structuralism, and Postmodernism), followed by a limitation of the milieu, *Metafiction in the Romanian and Spanish Contemporary Literature*, by means of a comparative evaluation of the two literary topographies. In this first part of the research I expressed my option concerning the terminology utilized in the research, opting for the term “metafiction” instead of “representative fiction”, “surfiction”, “fabulation”, “anti-novel”, in order to designate the literary prose marked by a dual discourse, both a narrative and a critical one, doubled by the author’s message on the manner of writing a novel and on his vision about literature in general.

The second chapter continued the demonstration of the existence of a poetics of metafiction by means of three main coordinates which could not be missing in a viable argumentation, and in a hermeneutics of the metafictional prose, those being the two manners of constructing metafiction, *covertly* and *overtly*. The demonstration cumulated the distinct developments of the narrative forms that each type of construction presupposed, and, at the same time, it encompassed the critical evaluation of the consistency of a covert or overt construction. At the same time, the argumentation referred to one of the paramount aspects of the metafictional prose, the triple reflexivity of the diegesis, of the act of narration, and of the narrative voice. At this point of my research, I considered that an argumentation of the distinction between two narrative procedures which were erroneously interpreted as synonyms in theory and in the hermeneutical space would be equitable. In consequence, the terms under discussion would be “pupa russa” and “mise en abyme”. The final part of the chapter approached from multiple
perspectives an aspect which was marginally treated in the theoretical studies of metafiction- the fictional pact- the profile of the metafictional reader, and the two major distinctions between the intra- and extra- diegetic reader.

The third chapter debated two nuclei of the metafictional prose, the parody of reading with a pragmatic function and an assessment of the narrative jocularity utilized by the writers in order to offer the readers an active role in the reading process. The innovation that this chapter brought in the research of metafiction referred to the approach of the form of “pseudo-diary”, not from the perspective of the narrative construction, but as a strategy of utilizing confession as a foreshadow for the reflexivity of the narrative voice, and the text itself.

Following this theoretical part, I considered that the central premise of the present research- the demonstration that a poetics of metafiction did exist- was developed and nuanced beyond some temporal constraints and delimited within a national literary space.

The comparative approach in the second part of the study is doubled by an assessment, in each novel, of the metafictional nucleus around which metafictional prose was constructed. The strategy permitted a reversed identification of the innovative forms of the metafictional strategies and techniques, commencing from text and coming back to theory. Therefore, those metafictional innovative devices were: the narrative jocularity in the Romanian short prose, the jocular nucleus in the writing of Ioan Groşan, the metafictional reader and character in the creation of Dumitru Țepeneag, and Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, the pseudo-diary in the case of Marin Mincu, Juan Goytisolo and Alfons Cervera, the mediatic metafiction in the creation of Adrian Oțoiu, autenticity in the case of Gheorghe Crăciun, the book, the double manuscript and the text in palimpsest in the case of Mircea Cărtărescu and Bernardo Axtaga, the fictional narrator and editor in the writing of Răzvan Aldulescu and Antonio Muñoz Molina, Javier Cercas’ and Antonio Muñoz Molina’s “fictional” reality, and the object as subject in the creation of Enrique Vila- Matas.

After evaluating the main theoretical aspects of metafiction, also analyzed in the texts selected for the second part of the paper, I considered justified the choice of the term “metafiction” for designating the double discourse as fiction and literary critique, along with the re-positioning of the reader’s role, cumulated with the message of the writer who was present covertly or overtly in the prose. I asserted that the concept of “metafiction” allowed a justified opening towards the main coordinates of the metafictional prose, without the delimitations
implied by other terms used in literary studies. A term like “self-representative fiction” limited the discussions to the representation of the diegetic process or of the narrative discourse, excluding other factors mentioned. The “anti-novel” was an erroneous denomination, while metafictional prose did not have as a premise the rejection of a previous *modus scribendi*, but the innovation by means of the cultural dialogue or of re-discussing literature in the realm of fiction, “experimental prose” disqualified the purpose of that type of prose, while placing it in the experimental milieu, and not as a complex literary oeuvre with peculiar innovations and techniques marked by each prose individually.

Another aspect argumented in the current research was the fact that metafictional prose was not an informative text, did not provide data regarding the writer’s creation laboratory, but it was a text which debated the validity of some narrative forms, the reader’s receptivity, or the authenticity of the writing through the discussion of the textual layers, in a covert or overt manner.

At the same time, I considered that the variable element of metafiction envisioned the reading-writing rapport, and the contextualization of the text through the act of reading. With respect to Romanian literature, if metafiction was a common coordinate among the literary groups *Noii* and *Desant’83* and among part of the writers from the 1980’s, in the 1990’s and starting with 2000, one could identify several novels which either encompassed metafictional strategies or contained metafictional techniques, occurring remotely. Romanian literature illustrated a transition from the overt metafiction of the 1980’s to the covert one, marked by the return of the narration which now supressed the technique. In the case of Spanish literature, the post-1990 period was marked either by a general overview of not only of the novel, but also of literature in general (Enrique Vila-Matas) or by the priority of the personal, intimate confession over the act of writing as a form of authenticity (Alfons Cervera). Spanish metafiction redimensioned the equation reality-fiction through a series of binary rapports: official document/diary page, cultural memory/individual memory, real person/historical character/character in the novel.

The comparative approach on the Romanian and Spanish literatures, emphasizing the common elements which allowed the comparative research, and also the features identified in the analysis of each author, confirmed the conclusions from the theoretical part of the current research- that one could genuinely speak of a poetics of metafiction. The verbalization of a
classic, complex formula of a “coursebook” of metafictional prose would be inconclusive in a given historical context, since literature is in a continuous innovative process, even in the stages when it returned to the classic story, folklore, or the fantastic. What was indeed significant referred to approaching the central coordinates of metafictional prose, valid in any literary epoque, irrespective of the cultural space in which it was placed.