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SYSTEMS OF COMMUNICATION: IDENTITY FEATURES OF THE LITERARY CHARACTER

– PH. D. THESIS –

SUMMARY

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SYSTEMS OF COMMUNICATION:
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The Ph. D. thesis entitled *Systems of Communication: Identity Features of the Literary Character* represents the result of an investigation within the field of comparative literature, research which started from defining the human being as *belonging consciously to a means of communication that he uses and which he permanently refers to:* "Only that who says *ego* can be *ego*. Within and by means of speech man becomes *subject*; since only language builds in reality, in *his* reality which is that of the human being, the concept of *ego*."[1]

The fact that some fictional works, like those selected for the analysis from the present paper, pay special attention to the functioning of language allowed us to propose a new approach to the literary character, the fictional being who lives not only as *homo faber* (whose identity is marked by his actions) but also as *homo loquens*, placing himself within a means of communication which contributes to shaping his identity. Therefore, on the field of comparative literature we introduced the semiotic perspective, through which we could answer the question *Who is the protagonist of this fictional world?* Due to the analysis of the **linguistic sign – referent**

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[1] Emile Benveniste, „De la subjectivité dans la langage", *Journal de Psychologie*, iulie-septembrie 1958, reluat în *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, I, Paris, Éd. Gallimard, 1966, pp. 258-266, în traducere românesc , *Probleme de lingvistic general* , trad. L.M. Dumitru, Editura Teora, Bucure ti, 2 vol. 2000, *apud* J.L. Austin, *Cum s faci lucruri cu vorbe*. Traducere din limba englez de Sorana Corneanu. Prefa de Vlad Alexandrescu, Pite ti, Editura Paralela 45, 2005, p. 8.

relation and its implications in the **speech acts** (directed to the self or the other) we have been able to elaborate on the initial answer.

In order to capture the identity formula of the fictional characters selected for our thesis, we were required a brief theoretical incursion into the field of cultural studies and narratology, on one hand, and, on the other, o short presentation of the most relevant theories and studies from semantics and pragmatics. Therefore, in the chapter *Theoretical Premises for a New Approach to the Literary Character*, we followed the two main guidelines in discussing *homo fictus*: its reactions in the diegetic world (the acting) and its status as structural component of the fictional text (the functional aspect). The first direction shapes the character's identity according to the aesthetical ideologies, the latter determining the way in which the ancient, classical, romantic, modern, etc. character manifests itself in the world where it was sent by the author. The human models presented by a writer or by an aesthetic doctrine were the main focus of theoreticians like Salvatore Battaglia (*The Mythography of the Literary Character*) or Jacques Le Goff (*The Medieval Man*).

The flourishing of the literary studies, in general, and narrative theory in particular, brings into attention the textual features of the fictional character, its place and role within the narrative process. Its status as vision carrier (an instance of the narrative discourse) was brought to light by Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette, whereas Jaap Lintvelt, in *Attempt for a Narrative Typology. Point of View*, underlines that the role of the

character is "to participate as a *dramatis persona* in the plot of the novel (…) thus having an acting function."[2]

Using pragmatics in studying the literary character allowed the elaboration of certain theories signed by Julia Kristeva (*Le texte de roman*), Philippe Hamon and Roland Barthes (*Poétique du récit*), the hero becoming the object of the dialog between the author and the reader (Julia Kristeva) or being explored within the frames of semiology integrated into the literary discourse linguistics (Philippe Hamon).

The first chapter also contains an outline of the history of language, which provided the opportunity to follow the dynamics of language studies, paying special attention to the contributions from the 19th and 20th centuries. Relevant for our analysis proved to be Humboldt's theory according to which language is not merely a *static product*, but *a dynamic process* understood *not as communication of something*, but *with somebody*, a linguistic doctrine which contains the premises of the speech acts to be discussed in the following century. Taking into account that the theory of signs and the speech acts theory form a "semiotic network" (Umberto Eco) and to discuss the process of signifying in opposition with communication would be in fact false distinction, we decided to use the theories of Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Searl, Wittgenstein, Kripke, Peirce, Austin, H. P. Grice or Greimas – later on applied to the means of communication from the fictional worlds selected for the present research. The new meanings revealed in the speech acts and the *ego – alter* relation established within the speech acts allowed us to reconfigure the identities of

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[2] Jaap Lintvelt, *Încercare de tipologie narativ . Punctul de vedere*. Traducere de Angela Martin, prefa   de Mircea Martin, Bucure ti, Editura Univers, 1994, p. 38.

the heroes in the spotlight. Therefore, language (as a system of signs) marks the identity of the literary character as shown in the following chapters.

Homo fictus at the Dawns of Humanity – the second chapter of the paper – presents a conflict (the Neanderthal versus *homo sapiens*) generated by the impossibility to establish communicative relations, the two parties belonging to different means of communication and world representation. The sign used by Lok (the protagonist in *The Inheritors*, by William Golding) este the word-image, with its help hierarchies and identities being formed inside his group. Lok's thinking system is based on transforming sensorial information into images shared by all the group members. The appearance of the Other forces the protagonist to place himself in a new relation with the otherness, a turning point in his evolution leading to a split identity. From this moment on, we talk about Lok and Lok-other, his attempts to get in contact with the "new man" changing him from *alter* into *alienus*, since Lok hunts the otherness until he becomes completely alienated. Furthermore, what is interesting is the staging of becoming aware of the Other and the process of perceiving him: first, using smell, then hearing and finally sight. This last phase represents Lok's endeavour to situate himself inside the system of signs used by the new group, but the words only have a denominating function, just the *name* the new man: "Bush-Head", "Chestnut-Head", "Hey-stack", etc. Acquiring the language of the new man can be effective only in the case of little Liku, the fragment presenting the scene when she "meets" the girl from the other group containing the essence of communication: the speaking subject realises that other subjects understand him and conceive him as object.

The new identity proclaimed by Lok – "I am one of the new people" – is a false one, since the end of the novel presents the protagonist suspended between two means of communication: the one using images (which he can no longer use because there are no dialog partners left) and the one using words (because he is not part of it and thus unable to connect with the new man).

In the third chapter, *Make Like Character: Alice in Linguistic Wonderland*, we tried to answer the question most frequently addressed to the protagonist, either by herself – "Who am I?" – or by the other characters – Who are you? The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, meaning of names, language determinism and instrumentalism are elements according to which Alice has to define herself constantly. The universes of the Alice books can constitute in themselves subject of a distinct research considering the rich linguistic material. From the semiotic perspective, we analysed in a first subchapter the language as main character in Lewis Carroll's books, using the theories and studies mentioned in chapter one, because among many characters there's one who manipulates them: language. Moreover, we highlighted the importance of communication for the protagonist's life – a little girl who does not cease to talk to herself and to the others. Trying to define the heroine of the adventures in Wonderland or Through the Looking-glass must bear in mind the fascinating catoptric game which makes Alicee redefine herself over and over again. Beyond the variation of her identity, Alice remains a curious girl who uses the power of language to be who and how she wants to be.

Mastering the language and through it was revealed in the investigation of another fictional universe, governed by Robinson Crusoe.

The stranded Englishman thrown by a cruel fate on a deserted island seeks the otherness to establish communication relations, loathing solitude and the lack of dialogue. Until the appearance of the humane otherness, Robinson creates different communication contexts: keeping a diary and pretending to talk to the animals on the island. Thus, we see how the hero's identity is definitely marked by the need to belong to a means of communication. When the Other appears, Robinson is presented the chance to exert the power of naming, being the one who sets the identity of the rescued "savage", named Friday, and alluring him into his own system of communication. Robinson is not in the least interested in Friday's world or his previous identity, he only seeks to mark the difference between the two of them by referring to language. Crusoe is the master because he masters the language. Moreover, while he has a nominal identity, the Other does not exist until he is given one, Friday comes to exist only due to the fact that the protagonist turned him into a sign of his own means of communication.

Language as a form of revealing the world during initiation processes constitutes the premises of the fifth chapter, which follows two destinies from the Romanian literature: Kesarion Breb (from the novel *The Golden Bow*, by Mihail Sadoveanu) and Dionis (from the short story Poor Dionis, by Mihai Eminescu). The worlds the two protagonists cross are, in fact, books of signs which must be read and deciphered. In the case of Kesarion Breb, reading the signs of the earth and the skies is part of the initiation process at the end of which his identity changes, being appointed the 33rd Decheneus. Reading beyond the surface of the Byzantine universe, recognising the moral character in the physical marks of the others, uncovering the plot – everything is possible due to a special communication

directed towards his inner world, silence becoming the specificity of Kesarion Breb. For Dionis, on the other hand, silence creates new worlds, the characters inability to accept the given world leading to its rejection and envisioning one to match his grand thoughts. However, here the sign of God incites his demonic spirit and he ends up challenging the entity to which he cannot talk thus falling back into the initial world he had left. The actions of the two heroes are motivated by the knowledge gained from reading the signs constantly surrounding them and lead, inevitably, to the shaping of their final identity.

We began our investigation with an exercise to recover the image of the "noble savage" placed at the "dawns of humanity" and we ended it by presenting the individual in the "twilight of humanity". Orwell's novel *Nineteen eighty-four* shows a man emptied of all human attributes by means of communication. Language becomes a tool of dehumanisation, of destroying the humane essence, in both its forms: the language of Oceania and the projected Newspeak are pseudo-means of communication. The former is, in fact, a means of ideological manipulation and terror reinforcement, Winston Smith being daily subjected to linguistic assaults. The protagonist desperately tries to keep his identity by writing a diary but the attempt fails since he no longer belongs to himself. The language used has no longer a meaning and remains merely a tool, later to be transformed into Newspeak, an absurd communication system. What is left of the Orwellian protagonist? An empty shell, subjected to Big Brother, who is worshipped by erasing all the possibilities Winston Smith would have had to rebel against his transformation into "the new man" of the oppressive totalitarian regimes.

The last chapter, *Perspectives for Further Research and Final Remarks*, contains examples of other literary works which could be analysed from the perspective opened in this paper. The dramatic character was offered special attention in the theoretical fields but almost exclusively within the larger frame of drama studies. However, it is the entity that communicates to define its identity. The protagonist of theatre plays do not exist unless they talk or are talked about. Either subject in the speech act or object to be talked about, the dramatic character assumes its identity firstly within the speech act. The existence for and through communication is best represented in Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett. The very first scenes shape the identities of Estragon and Vladimir not by their names, but through their dialogue. Their existence does not depend on whether Godot really exists or not (as they think at a certain point in the play), but on maintaining the linguistic development. The two seem to be aware of the fact that "language is the primary manifestation of the *otherness*, of the existence together with the other, specific to the human kind."[3]

Language as mark of intellectually sophisticated identity can be depicted in the rich detective literature. Since this can constitute alone the subject of a different literary investigation, we suggest approaching a less-known detective. Borges' intellectual sophistication and erudition are familiar with the readers through his literary masterpieces. As far as we are concerned, we are interested in him as a character in Fernando Verissimo's book – *Borges and the Eternal Orangutans*. Language reveals its most subtle and refined nuances in the detective's thinking and reasoning processes. The true greatness of this communication system allures the

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[3] Eugeniu Co eriu, *Omul i limbajul s u*, p. 10.

reader in a sign-symbol-number-image mechanism, governed by arcane laws, accessible only to those who have the ability to use this mechanism for their benefit. Thinking outside language or language supremacy (both aspects discussed at a certain point in the history of theoretical studies on language) are easily rejected once we watch the intellectual show of such a character, whose identity cannot be established without referring to a thinking and communication system carefully built and used.

On the other hand, there are literary works in which language is specially addressed from a different point of view. This is the case of the languages built in the world of poetry by Christian Morgenstern, Joachim Ringelnatz, Velimir Hlebnikov (the Zaum language) or Hildegard von Bingen (*lingua ignota*). As far as secret or invented languages are concerned, it would be interesting to investigate the field of pataphysics, with Alfred Jarry, Boris Ivan, Raymond Queneau (*Zazie* or the Oulipo project). The phenomenon of invented languages in fictional worlds flourishes in Tolkien's novels, where the communication systems are the result of a certain vision related to the literary paradigm of the modern fairy-tales.

Therefore, the astounding story of language is told by literature itself, the world populated with people who never cease to communicate with and about themselves.

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