

ALTERITY IN IDENTITY

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ALTERITATEA ÎN CADRUL IDENTITĂȚII

We are positioning ourselves at the present moment of the signifying practice of writing and of the readership's types of response.

At a first glance, this present moment is divided between readers who stutter to believe that reading is the salvation and the answer to all our problems, and readers who see literature as a fashion.

Probing deeper into literary affairs, we see that high-minded literature is almost vanishing under heaps of waste products launched into the market by the art and literature of consumption, which haunt the reader disguising themselves as the latest fashion and modern tendencies. The latter type of literature mentioned is a cheap show, superficial, made for the only purpose of being sold. It usurps the status of genuine literature, revealing a total lack of aesthetic awareness. It attracts the reader through violence, eroticized bodies, exoticism and sex, creating in the mind of the reader all sorts of fake images and realities.

This present moment is the time when the differences between copies and originals are abolished and the readers consume illusions of reality and happiness, so we are witnessing to an act of "alterity" in identity. These readers' needs are manipulated in terms of profit of selling by the publishing houses and the writers who manufacture these types of books, whose unique epochal discovery is that money can be made through writing that create certain reading appetites and tastes in their targeted victim, the reader, who, from an acculturated individual turns into an obedient consumer of textual litter.

This society influences the readers' consumption habits, the writers' standards and the writing process itself. Nowadays, in order to be read, a book should seduce its readers rather than instruct them or move them to high pursuits. By seducing readers, a book gains power. It is the power to shape its reader

according to its main character, in the way of thinking, dressing, behaving in the real world or socializing.

The fictional plot of the book becomes thus real, creating hyperreality, in which the reader identifies strongly with the characters of the book. Coined by Jean Baudrillard, the word "hyperreality" designates a copy of a copy, that is removed from its original, which can stand on its own and even replace the original. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal, substituting the signs of the real for the real (Baudrillard, 1983). Baudrillard (1983) described the period as an "age of simulations" (p. 4).

Keywords: self, identity, fragmentation, simulacra, acceptance, diversity, integration

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Free readers can read what type of books they enjoy, when and where they want to, without being constrained by deadlines, reports and must 'read' lists. They have the time to choose and inform themselves on what they ought to be reading about. On the other hand, there is an elevated readership, including literary critics and even teachers, who must read a wide range of books from all domains. We may consider them abnormal readers or experimented ones. Some of the books they read are very good and were written a long time ago, or on the contrary, some are kitschy and shouldn't have been written at all. The latter type mentioned, understand and taste all kind of books. We may compare them with wine testers, because their duty is to taste good wines and bad wines in order to advise the consumer on what is authentic art and what kind of poisonous trash dished out by suburban culture should be avoided.

Further on, we will concentrate our attention on free readers. They are all unique, differing among themselves according to sex, age, job orientation, studies and passions. We live in a world galvanized by images, advertisements and social media. This society influences the readers' consumption habits, the writers' standards and the writing process itself. Nowadays, in order to be read, a book should seduce its readers rather than instruct them or move them to high pursuits. By seducing readers, a book gains power. It is the power to shape its reader according to its main character, in the way of thinking, dressing, behaving in the real world or socializing. The fictional plot of the book becomes thus real, creating hyperreality, in which the reader identifies strongly with the characters of the book. Coined by Jean Baudrillard, the word "hyperreality" designates a copy of a copy, that is

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Good literature was written to resist through decades, centuries and thousands of years. A piece of literature was everlasting, through depth, message and the experiential lore it transmitted. In our immediate present, in the Consumerist Era of post-literature, a book needs to impress and not to cultivate or educate. The writers of this type of books are driven by the ‘here and now’, the immediate present of trends. Literature becomes thus a vice for its readers. Literature no longer aims to shape the world to become a better one, but its direct objective is to impress the reader.

The ‘normal reader’ becomes the target. I am sure that the ideal “normal reader” still exists. He is intelligent, sensitive and cultivated, and he is able to distinguish between literature and lit. This is also the case of fine writers who still create art although swimming against ‘postmodern-water currents’. But this is a narrow niche, which should be broadened through education of the mind and of affections, teachers and parents being called upon to set values. Between the two types of literatures, there are no collaborative relationships, nor relations of adversity, they coexist. The main differences between them are the validity term and the esthetic value criteria, which clearly separate the two types. Lit permits the soul to be lazy, in comparison with literature which elevates the soul. Lit becomes a ‘second-hand’ type of literature, in terms of quality. Lit prospers thanks to the experts’ universal neglect, uncensored by the wardens of good taste, who take it for granted that the disappearance of the divide between high art and cheap entertainment has disappeared in the democratic spirit of postmodernism

In this article, we are focusing our attention on the common reader, because he is the one affected by lit. Actually few are those who can say that they have escaped it so far, because it's like saying that one has never tasted junk food by the year 2017. Moreover, there are people who consume lit occasionally and, on the other hand, people who love it and are addicted to this type of literature. Taking into consideration the fact that the border between pleasure and necessity is very thick, we will analyze this type of readers as a whole.

In the 20th century, the link positions of the writer and the reader have been reversed, the centrality of the writer being replaced with that of the reader. A writing act in which both politics and economics are involved, which packages our time in terms of empty images, unnatural colours, hobbies, shred of happiness and dissolution of essence. The mass production of lit favors quantity to the detriment of quality. Unfortunately, this lack of quality is not isolated, applicable only in the case of culture, but is universal, affecting all branches, like industry for example.

On discussing about the present cultural degeneracy, mention should be made of social media such as: Facebook and Twitter, of the whole new concept of "The Facebook Generation". Social media and literature of consumption go hand in hand, having many things in common and the same target: consumers. Of the Facebook generation, we are all members, including toddlers and, why not, grandparents, because I am sure that upon this moment there isn't a single person who hasn't seen an image on Facebook, either from their account or from others around them.

Social media are an integrated part of the consumer society, and a perfect way to seduce the audience through advertising, images, fake realities, illusions of a prosperous world and of easily bought happiness. Often literature is advertised on these social networks, people creating groups in which they chat, share their beliefs and tastes and make suggestions on readings. Social networks are

one more possibility for different industries (such as clothes industry, furniture industry and, why not? print industry) to make profit and sell goods. Through social networks, the consumer society developed a way to free advertising, in which the protagonists of the show are us, as consumers. Through each picture we post on the internet, we advertise indirectly our clothes, holidays, food and why not? our tastes of books.

One more issue to be taken into consideration when dealing with social media is YouTube. This is in a way also a social medium, because movies of common people are shared worldwide, and by the comments its users receive, their identity is transformed. People have the vague impression that online identity display is completely controlled, and they let people see only what they want them to without being affected, but through their friends' comments, personality, thus identity, is shaped by others' beliefs as well (Lange, 2014, p. 22). Technical identities are negotiated during an online interaction: "while certain amount of control is arguably in evidence online, one cannot always be sure about who has control when it comes to group media-making. Also mere display of identity cannot control people's interpretations; viewers may not ratify the impression that video makers aim to project" (Lange, 2014, p.22).

Thus the self is being constructed by others, each individual generating multiple conflicting identities.

People nowadays are connected worldwide. Boundaries of space, time and class belongings have been blurred. People live with the impression of talking and sharing more, but in reality, they communicate less, especially face to face, because the quality of the message transmitted has become superficial. Social media have become drugs and disguised addiction to most of its users. According to many studies, "a lack of social participation on Facebook leads to people feeling less meaningful" (Kirkova, 2014).

Without being active on social media, people often feel invisible and less important:

With 1.11 billion users per month on average, Facebook has become a global phenomenon offering continual and direct communication with friends and family. But new researchers suggest it also defines us socially and influences our personal welfare. Researchers concluded that active participation on Facebook was key in producing a sense of belonging among social media users (Kirkova, 2014).

Each user's social network address is like a bubble of hyperreality, a kind of simulacrum. People spend hours in front of their laptop, computer or phone, chatting virtually with friends. This inadequate behaviour leads to interiorization, lack of communication with the real world, nervous depression and deterioration of the family relations.

It seems that a growing number of people simply find "living in public" more exciting than living privately. Clearly, the boundaries between private and public have been eroded through the influence of literature of consumption and especially of the Social Media. The reality represented by the real world is replaced by the motto: "as seen on TV, as seen on the internet". Reality has transformed itself into a dynamic process of remaking, of decanonization and of fictional recycling.

Literature of consumption has known a huge success since the role of the press and of the publishing houses grew in importance permitting the industrial development of writing. This type of literature is manufactured upon the readers' demand, being in a permanent process of readjustment. It is written to sell and to make profit, literature having no more the status of art, but of business.

Literature of consumption mirrors the present society, the sorrows and preoccupations of the middle classes. Its heroes are based on stereotypes and are easily spottable without too much effort from the reader. They are invulnerable and have the possibility of transformation.

Thus characters have a mythical value, a fact which gives the literature of consumption an immense power of fascinating the readers. This type of literature follows the reader's boulomaic, desire states. It is not the cultivated reader they are appealing to but a savage one, who searches for a sensational, dream life and illusions of prosperity.

The diversity which the literature of consumption has known of late is a result of its success among the readers. In all cases, the plot is mainly the same. The hero is a stereotypical figure who is capable of social ascension, ending up as a normal human being whom the reader resembles in sharing the same reasons for happiness and sorrows. By the end of the novel, the hero has exhausted his mythical powers becoming trivial, letting the reader move on to be seduced by another such hero. The pink type of literature of consumption is addressed mainly to women and their whereabouts, and we will refer to it as chick lit. Those who promote this school of writing do not hesitate to refer to the female protagonists with a word coined for the heroines rebelling against patriarchy around the turn of the twentieth century: the "New Woman". In her book, *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction* (2006), Suzanne Ferriss sees in women's attempt to fulfil both their sentimental and professional aspirations as a new emancipation project:

From the perspective of literary criticism, chick lit can be defined as a form of women's fiction on the basis of subject matter, character, audience and narrative style. As chick lit features, we must include single women in their twenties and thirties [...] navigating their generation's challenges of balancing career with personal relationships. (Ferriss, 2006, p. 3).

The typical Chick Lit heroines are not perfect, requiring readers' compassion and identification at the same time. Heroines deploy self-humour that entertains and leads

readers to believe they are in their skin. Narrative techniques such as the diary, e-mails, letters or the first person narration, result in realistic elements and the perception is that Chick Lit is not fiction at all. These narrative techniques appeal to readers and link Chick Lit to a large body of women's fiction from earlier generations: "The observations stress the similarities that exist between heroine, reader, and author thus blurring what we might have previously considered a fairly stable distinction" (Smith, 2007, p. 7). Because of the popularity of the genre, there have been tendencies with publishers and critics to label novels with different characteristics as Chick Lit. It has therefore become more difficult to define what is allowed within the genre: The critic who wishes to present taxonomy of this popular genre confronts a daunting categorical concern: "the task raises the question of what recent fiction by women featuring a female protagonist or cast of women characters is not chick lit?" (Harzewski, n.d., 124).

Women writers create mostly Chick Lit novels, and in their writings they focus on women's experiences, fashion, money and what seems popular to them. These kinds of writings may be considered lightweight novels, disqualifying them from being literary. It's the duty of literary critics to analyse how Chick Lit assured its place on the literary market place.

The Chick Lit term can trace its roots back to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-1748). Furthermore, Chick Lit is claimed by most to have originated in the mid-nineties, and had a breakthrough with Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996). The source of Fielding's novel is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, from which Fielding admittedly borrowed much of her plot and many of her characters. Juliette Wells, author of the article on Jane Austen and the creative woman, claims that Fielding's novel cannot make claim to comparable literary status, but its popularity leads to significant issues surrounding the reception of women's

literature. She argues that “to judge whether an individual work of Chick Lit, or the genre as a whole, has literary merit is to participate in a long tradition of discounting both women writers and their readers”(Ferriss, 2006, p. 5)

Acknowledging, rather than ignoring what students read in their spare time is important, and the Chick Lit genre is popular. There is even a sub-genre dedicated to young adults called Chick Lit Jr.

It tries to affirm women, acknowledging insecurities and give lessons in negotiating relationships by showing the wrong way first. With fashion and shopping, these novels embrace the power of consumer culture. However, instead of addressing the challenges of the singleton in women’s novels, Chick Lit Jr. stresses issues of coming of age. The Chick Lit genre is young; therefore, research about it is few.

Postfeminism can be seen as a reaction against earlier feminist theories as it is a problematic term to define. Thus, postfeminism can be described as relating to the current state of feminist thinking and the culmination of a number of debates within and outside feminism. Specifically, the term refers to feminism’s intersection with elements of cultural theory, particularly postmodernism, poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theory, as well as with the theoretical and political debates around post-colonialism. (Baga, n.d.)

Furthermore, postfeminism is seen as a critical engagement with earlier feminist political and theoretical concepts and strategies as a result of its engagement for change. Hence, it represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks. However, discussed in relations to the Chick Lit Genre, the term is more vague resisting the kind of certainty and clear meaning that a definition demands.

We live in a posthumanistic civilization governed by image and publicity. Wherever we are, we are besieged by images that permeate both our material and mental world. All aspects of our lives and all options that we make are

determined not so much by realities, but by their images, so that the image is not a representation of reality; it has become more real than reality itself.

The culture of image, which was propagated rapidly in the post-war world, has won everything, including territories that we thought to be immune from such a danger, situated in a completely different sphere of human experience. The culture of a book was undermined by the culture of image and reading experience seems even more than ever an eccentric occupation. Art lost somehow its primary function of reflecting reality, given the fact that it can no longer distinguish between reality and image, which has led to a deep crisis of representation. The literary imaginary is now being constructed by folding to the imaginary media. Contemporary writers saw themselves forced to adapt to this dramatic separation, of art from reality. The only possible mimicry of literature in this context is "camouflage", the act of assuming the colors of the environment of adjusting oneself to the media culture (Cărtărescu, 2010, 477).

In a famous essay, postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha ascribes the technique of camouflage to the people in the colonies who are trying to ape their masters, to hide under borrowed masks. Authenticity is lost on both sides, as the masters too cease to be identical to themselves when confronted with copies of them. There is differentiation, self-alienation in repetition. The images thrown up by the media are empty, they are not Plato's icons, *eideia*, archetypes of things enjoying full presence in the divine mind, but simulacra. The alienation generated by colonialism is, in the media dominated societies, complete, as the last difference, between Empire builders and people in the colonies has gone:

As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. Its threat, I would

add, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory "identity effects" in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no "itself." (Bhabha, n.d., p.131).

Due to the abundance of media products which the public has embraced with fervour, not only in the media but also in literature do creators find themselves forced to burn stages and to align with the "fashion" and Western trends. On the other hand, the freedom gained through the disappearance of dogmatism and censorship imposed the redefinition of literary language, modelled now by avatars and paradoxes of democracy. In this context, the most significant challenge for postmodern literature is the tough competition of media culture, based on the seduction of journalism and entertainment delivered in the most brilliant packaging.

Bogdan Ghiu proposes the term "the media age" (Ghiu, 2008, p.140) to name this period, marked by consumerism and by the aggressive media infiltration in the natural world. Ghiu is convinced that literature can withstand the challenges of the consumer society, to the extent that the writers must understand that they have to use media strategies in their favor and of art's as well (Ghiu, 2002, p. 141). In conclusion, we can find a series of questions that haunt the contemporary literary world. Is the media culture guilty of unprecedented aggression of anticulture and antiart? Philosophers talk about the "death" of history, of time, of art, of God, the end of humanism Are we witnessing, therefore, at present, the "death" of literature? Or is it just a transformation that we're not totally prepared to understand and, especially, to accept? Any thoroughly research, that carefully considers the arguments of both sides, can be undoubtedly a step forward on the path of knowledge.

In the present, it is significant that the phrase "international literature" or "global" is preferred over the

traditional term 'world/universal literature'. We witness a weakening of the concept of "national literature" in the context of postmodernity and fragmentation of societies in a multicultural mosaic. A "small" culture has quite a few chances to shine while the "visibility" has become more important than anything. In postmodernism it can no longer apply the Cartesian principle of "I think therefore I am" as notes Mihaela Constantinescu.

In postmodernism, as Mihaela Constantinescu remarks, the Cartesian principle of "I think therefore I am" no longer applies. The Cartesian principle was converted under the influence of the pragmatism of the media culture, being mainly visually focused: "I am seen, therefore I am" or "I am what I have" (Constantinescu, 2001, p. 52).

When we talk about the current culture, words such as "media" and "postmodern" will often show up. Postmodernism, postmodernity, posthumanism, globalization, media culture, mass culture, multiculturalism, consumerism are a number of current concepts that a proper analysis cannot ignore. On the one hand, postmodernism cannot be defined while ignoring media culture and the information society is currently the background against which postmodernism is projected in all its forms: political, cultural, social, economic, artistic, etc. According to a well-known media culture theorist, Douglas Kellner, there is no distinction between culture and communication. He says simply: "Culture can only be communicative" (Kellner, 2001, p. 9). In turn, the fact that media culture relies heavily on consumerism and globalization is only a direct consequence of the homogenization of different cultures as a result of planetary information explosion.

A widely accepted definition of media culture is offered by Douglas Kellner in his book with the same title: "Culture Media consists of radio systems and sound reproduction (albums, cassettes, CDs, radios,

tape recorders, etc.); the film and its distribution arrangements (dramatic performances, television broadcasts); in print, from newspapers to magazines to television system which is seated in the centre of media culture. Media culture is a culture of the image [...] that favours either sight or hearing or combines them at the same time appealing to a wide range of emotions, feelings and ideas" (Kellner, 2001, p. 13).

There is also a mass culture which benefits from the advantages of mass media and which cannot be excluded from the definition of theories of media and media culture. Mass culture was defined by philosophers of the Frankfurt School as addressed to the general public, broadcast in a standardized form and subject to the rules of chain production (Kellner, n.d.)

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