

# 1 IN SEARCH OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY: HOW WRITERS CONSTRUCT THEIR IDENTITY IN NARRATIVES

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## ABSTRACT

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The main problematic of this research falls within the paradigm of linguistic and narrative theory of literary discourse which focuses on the study of the relationship between language and consciousness in general and language and literary mind in particular. In recent Ukrainian and foreign narrative and poetological research, the ability of the narrative to identify the self of the subject narrating, to reveal not only the identity of the story or that of the character, but to contain the implicit elements of the author's self still awakens a great interest. Despite the quite exponential linguistic and narrative tradition in the study of literary discourse, the question of the writer's narrative identity and the mechanisms of its constitution in the narrative remain quite controversial. In this research paper I have explored the concept of the writer's narrative identity in the French modernist literary text production. I have revealed and analyzed the most significant narrative techniques of the author's narrative identity construction in the formation of the surrealist narrative reality. Such a narrative reality is distinguished by the symbolism and the figurative language being generated as a result of asymmetric relationships between linguistic units.

## KEYWORDS

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Homodiegetic narrator, modernist narrative, convergence of artistic genres, montage, narrative identity, surrealist narrative reality, French literary discourse.

*L'identité n'est pas donnée une fois pour toutes,  
elle se construit et se transforme tout au long de l'existence*  
Amin Maalouf

*Identity is not given once and for all,  
it is built and transformed throughout life*  
Amin Maalouf

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the huge interest of researchers in linguistic and cognitive narratology [1–5] for the concept of *narrative identity* and, more precisely, for the ability of the story to reveal not only the identity of the character(s), but to give readers access to the

writer's deep "self". The referring question is the problem of finding out and cataloguing the means as the narrative tools used by the writer in the construction as well as the verbalization of his "self", created in a story.

Moreover, narrative identity is at the centre of interdisciplinary research with deep roots in psychology and sociology. According to the opinion of McAdams [6], in recent decades, a proliferation of psychological research into narrative identity has provided a solid empirical foundation for the construct, cutting across the field, including personality psychology, social psychology, developmental and lifespan psychology, cognitive psychology, cultural psychology [6].

I consider the French literary discourse as a cognitive and semiotic space in the frameworks of which the cognitive mechanisms that generate text naturally emerge as well as the narrative principles through which the different types of aesthetic communication can function in the triad the author – the text – the reader.

French narratives with a homodiegetic narrator became widespread at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of the narrator in the diegesis results in the "I-narrative". It is correlated with the voice of the author himself and, therefore, with the narrative identity of the writer. A homodiegetic narrator in an intradiegetic situation is able to recount and reinterpret what has been experienced before. The main narrative strategies here are the shaping of a polyphonic narrative or a game using narrative techniques such as kaleidoscope, montage or mosaic techniques.

The person's story always contains a number of signs that indicate its source and voice. In this case, of course, it is about grammatical categories (person, time, mode of action), referring to the speaker and the spatio-temporal coordinates of his speech. At the same time, in a homodiegetic narrative, for example, neither the homodiegetic narrator nor the present are directly linked to the author's identity. Here, rather, the expression of alter egos can take place or even a multiplicity of egos. Thus, the narrative principle of oscillation of the homodiegetic narrator is realized through a duality, a self-observation, a voice of conscience, a bifurcation of the personality. It could be conceived as an attempt to project an imaginary narrative focus in order to create the very individual possible adjacent or parallel worlds.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century French literary discourse is characterized by the tendencies to interiorize the story by giving it more psychologism, more intimacy and more symbolism. Subsequently, the real turn towards the subjectification of literary discourse [7] has engendered the modification and emergence of new, more complicated and sophisticated narrative forms, and configurations compared to traditional narrative practices. I would like to point out that by the term subjectification I mean a kind of "subjective appropriation" [8], which "does not only imply the recalling to consciousness of memories that have disappeared, thoughts that have suffered the fate of repression, this also evokes holes, flaws, and an inscription in the psyche that goes through a construction or a reconstruction" [8].

Generally, all narrative typologies refer to the category of narrative voice, and more particularly, to the relationship that exists between the author's direct intentions and the degree of subjectivity/objectivity in his way of narrating, between the story that seems to be told and the

degree of grammatical actualization of the "I" of the narrator/character in a literary text. From this perspective, I would add that the French narrative practices were almost always characterized by a strong psychological component, regardless of the degree of subjectivity/objectivity in the formatting of narrative reality.

As an example, I allow myself to cite in this context the modernist narrative whose creation is a process of self-awareness by the author; its fictional characters being a true means of implicit self-expression [9]. Through the individualization of events and/or actions as well as the subjectification of the story itself, a partial or complete transfer of the latter takes place on the internal, psychological and axiological levels of the narrating subject – the one who narrates in the story – and which can refer to the personality of the author in the diegesis.

### 1.1 WHAT IS THE WRITER'S NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND HOW SHOULD WE PERCEIVE IT IN A LITERARY DISCOURSE?

I find it important to point out that the concept of *identity* in general and *narrative identity* in particular as a linguistic problem has crystallized over centuries. The concept of identity as a "life story" [10] – what we now call *narrative identity* – has been largely developed over the past few decades.

Literary scholars and practitioners perceive *narrative identity* as something variegated and dynamic, culturally contoured, and situated in, and even constitutive of, ongoing interpersonal relationships and conversational performances [10].

Consequently, I could deduce that narrative identity is a special kind of story – a story about "how I came to be the person I am becoming" [10]. With this special status comes the special function, a function that Erikson [11], for instance, assigned to identity itself. In this case I'm obviously speaking about the function of integration. Narrative identity brings things together, integrating elements of the self in both a synchronic and a diachronic sense [10]. Synchronically, narrative identity integrates different social roles, values, attitudes, and performance demands in the variegated here-and-now of life [10]. A person's story, thus, explains how he or she continues to affirm a sense of "inner sameness and continuity" [11] across different situational and role contexts. The life story also integrates life in a diachronic sense, that is, over time, ideally showing how the self of yesterday has become the self of today, the very same self that hopes or expects to become a certain kind of (different but still similar) self in the future [10].

A person's story is nothing other than a particular formation, an awareness of the experiences and choices of a person, and the knowledge that they gain from these experiences and choices. It should be noted that within the story, experiences meet and coexist in their different dimensions, weaving together a whole. It may also concern the sameness which is preserved and undergoes constant transformations; this is also the case when the experience is reviewed, understood and assumed as such. It seems that the story should be taken as one of the principles of identity as

well as a possibility of preserving it and developing it over time. It is, so to speak, a means of being in space and time for narrative identity.

Nowadays narrative identity theory posits that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized and evolving story of self that provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life [6]. This "life story" [10] integrates the reconstructed past, the perceived present and the imagined future. Moreover, this narrative is a story – it has characters, episodes, images, setting, plots and themes and often follows the traditional model of a story, having a beginning (initiating event), a middle (an attempt and a consequence), and an end (result) [12].

The hypothesis of narrative identity is also based on an analogy between the dialectic of plotting and that of the narrator/character himself, a dialectic of concordance and discordance, the same and the other [12]; this explains "the somewhat retroactive necessity of the story of a life, to which the identity of the character is equal" [13]. I believe that it is rather important to notice in this sense that style as particular procedure or way by which something is done also embodies a way of articulating identity and difference, concordance and discordance. This is not an oversight of the constitutive alterity of ipseity, but another bias on the stakes of this internal or successive multiplicity [12]. A style is, so to say, "a configuration of differences, a singular totalization"; simply, it brings into play less the structure of gathering than that of resemblance [12].

Different ways of interpreting and relating life's changes correlate with different forms of personality development [14] and its manifestation in the narrative. Due to the strong connection between narrative identity and psychological well-being, a common focus of research on narrative identity is to explore the relationship between the characteristics of narratives and their relationship to the development of personality in the areas of ego development and psychological well-being [14].

It is important to emphasize that the choice of the narrative perspective of the literary text, as well as its narrative form, depend on the roles that the author assigns to himself and to the person to whom his text is addressed. On the other hand, the narrative form is also directly dependent on the functional specificity of the narrative voice, which can be expressed in the story through its constituents, such as a narrator or a character.

Therefore, one could reconstruct and/or model the narrative identity of the author by making explicit the elements of his consciousness in the narrative, which implies, in turn, understanding the organization of the whole narrative. From this perspective, the author's narrative identity can be seen as a combination of universal and general strategies, i.e., intersubjective knowledge, individual's cognitive style, subjective knowledge as individual cognitive differences.

I suppose that in a story the narrator as a category of narrative voice carries the author's intentionality of the text, since he is addressing the reader and it is his voice that introduces the story into the communication. We know very well that the narrator performs in the text the functions of organization, arrangement of the story and ensures his connection with the reader. Therefore, I deduce that the narrator is a formal but obligatory component of the author's story, so to speak its actualizer.

Narratologists, who rely on structuralist positions, are of the opinion that the concept of narrator has an exclusively formal character and can be opposed to the concept of real author. This understanding of the narrative voice is also observed by French semioticians.

Thus, it is very important to focus on the fact that the category of narrative voice can be more or less explicit in the narrative, one who sees and knows everything, or is unaware of everything that is happening in terms of events and characters. I agree with the linguists who interpret the narrator as one of the possible forms of manifestation of the author's narrative identity. However, in my opinion, the image of the author and that of the narrator should not be identified. The narrator does not always directly represent and reproduce the author's personality development in his speech, sometimes he is endowed with characteristics similar to the writer-creator of the literary text in order to confuse the reader, mislead him or, on the contrary, to indicate the right direction, placing the reader in a certain interpretative perspective, which thus facilitates the perception of the narrative.

I should also specify that the narrator, depending on the functions assigned to him by the writer, can directly reflect all the moods and thoughts of the author-creator of the literary text, thereby forming the narrative scheme of the literary work, but not forming the common identity with the latter. Thus, the narrator is the main figure in the compositional plan, since he organizes and directs the story, the narrative identity of the author is a constructive and significant one, the properties of which are manifested in the semantics of the literary text.

As already noted above, the narrator acquires the status of a category that actualizes the entire text, since it structures the type of narrative. As an actualizer of the narrative perspective of a literary text the narrator introduces and develops events and/or actions, and realizes in the narrative the main functions of the category of narrative voice, including the sender of the message. Thus, the narrator represents a textual category that is formed, verbalized and placed in the narrative. From the extra-textual perspective, the narrator cannot materialize and fulfil the function of source of information, because he is a category who belongs entirely to the story being told. The narrator is not the true creator of the story, but a function, a role invented and adapted by the author. The author's identity manifests itself in the narrative in an indirect way, in particular because of the explicit or implicit presence of the narrator as an organizing and controlling authority in the diegesis.

The narrator can be an integral part of the events and/or actions recounted or be completely exterior to them, that is to say, be exterior to the diegesis. In this case, the narrator is extradiegetic [15] or impersonal. On the extradiegetic level, he has the possibility of intervening in the story, at certain moments of it, of commenting on, or of formulating hypotheses on the subject of the story, on the development and formation of characters, or to explain the manner of his narration. On the other hand, the narrator can be the main or secondary character of the narrative. Most often, this type of narrator is found in autobiographical novels, within the internal narrative. In this situation, we speak of the intradiegetic narrator [15], or an internalized narrator, that is to say such a narrative voice which functions in the diegesis on the same level as the characters of the literary text.

The narrator may be absent as a character in the story, even if he intervenes in the story as a narrative voice. Such a narrator is heterodiegetic [15], or omniscient. The narrative voice, which is present in the narrative that it structures as a character, is said to be homodiegetic in Genette's classification [15], or a personified character-narrator. The homodiegetic narrator is not only a witness to events, he is the hero of his story, and therefore becomes a narrating subject.

I would also like to mention here the problematic of the modality of the literary text. Given the definition of the latter as a category that can denote the writer's attitude to the world as well as to the reality created, it is in the modal point of view that the modal position of the narrator or character is represented. At the same time, the latter is formed by the deictic elements and other specific means of textual modality of various types.

The objective modality of the narrative is built up by the modality of the author, that is, the author's point of view, which constructs the image of the author as an embodiment of the essence of the literary text. The subjective modality is a multiplicity of individual positions of a character or characters that change, thus reinforcing the dynamics of the narrative.

The character's point of view is always mediated by the author's appreciation of the main character or his personal development. In the narrative, the point of view of the character is defined, as a rule, by explicit emotional and evaluative lexical means, such as, for example, adjectives that do not simply characterize objects or phenomena, but also indicate the attitude of the person who perceives them. It is necessary to add the use of various means of intensification or evaluations by someone who perceives objects, and phenomena. The author's point of view correlates with implicit lexical devices at the subtext level and at the level of narrative formatting. It is about the selection of the leitmotif, implication of individual phenomena or repetitions of certain events and/or actions.

### 1.1.1 PROBLEM OF IDENTITY: FROM PHILOSOPHY TO LINGUISTIC NARRATOLOGY

The person and their identity character have always been within the interests of researchers and scientists working in very different fields: from sociology, through cognitive sciences to ideologies in action. It is well understood that the concept of identity is perceived differently in the various theories and approaches. The problem of the definition of the means of the constitution and the expression of the "me" in a literary text has also been resolved in disparate ways following the philosophical, aesthetic or cultural dominants of a certain epoch.

If we try to take a brief look at the whole genesis of this question, we should refer, above all, to Aristotle's theory which sought to define personal identity as "a relation of invariability to oneself over time" [16]. We must, without a doubt, mention the conception of the philosopher John Locke [17] who attributed the preponderant role in the constitution of personal identity to "consciousness" [17], estimating that "it is not the body continuity that founds personal identity, but consciousness" [18]. It is a question, for Locke, of what "is consciousness, or more exactly

that part of consciousness which is memory, that is to say the actions carried out by the individual in the past, which founds the "personal identity" [18].

We must also take into account the ideas of Michel de Montaigne [19] who explained the process of the constitution of the self through "successive determinations which authenticate it socially" [19] by introducing into the field of debate "a ritualization of existence on the basis of common practices" [20].

It would seem, in a general way, that personal identity, as we currently conceive it, is nothing other for a human being than "the possibility of being an individual at the same time distinct from all others and identical to oneself in time" [16]. Scientists believe that in its temporal dimension, identity also includes all the experience that the subject accumulates "relating to past forms of him in the mode of continuity ensured by autobiographical memory and the dynamic elaboration of a life story forming what is called the narrative self" [13, 16].

Apparently, the problem of the author's narrative identity could be associated, above all, with particular modalities of the constitution of his "self", the accent being placed not on the essence of the "me", but on how this "me" "speaks", "thinks", "acts" or "lives" in the diegesis and how it is represented in the narrative discourse.

One of the first attempts to put on the table the question of narrative identity belongs to Paul Ricœur [13] who distinguished identity as sameness, that is to say identity-*idem*, and the identity as ipseity, even identity-*ipse* [13]. Chloé Peetz believes that the logic of sameness and ipseity (selfhood) is the starting point in the constitution of personal identity [21]. For Ricœur, according to this scientist, it is precisely the narrative theory that plays a crucial role in the construction of the self. This is how personal identity "can only be articulated precisely in the temporal dimension of human existence" [22]. It means that identity is conceived as such only by being anchored in time. Identity, so to speak, "would be ensured by the fact of being able to say oneself and recognize oneself in a story of which one composes, one invents, the unity" [22]. It is precisely the faculty of the human being to narrate that allows him "to inscribe his existence within a whole that is the surrounding world" [22].

In a word, Paul Ricœur turns narrative theory into a true theory of "self-constitution" [22]. The scholar highlights the fact that the dialectic of identity-*idem* and identity-*ipse* is implicitly inscribed in the concept of narrative identity, because it is precisely the story that forms the identity of the character that could be, of course, called his narrative identity. This, in turn, creates the identity of the story being told. Indeed, narrative identity is defined as such in a certain environment, so to speak, in its external background that allows its "evaluation and determination" [23].

Among the theorists of postmodernism in various fields, the idea of Fredric Jameson, American literary critic, is gaining more and more popularity: a narrative text is defined as a particular epistemological category, revealing the different ways of human perception empirical [24]. The scientist's conception is explained by the fact that a person internalizes the universe thanks to the ability to narrate, or even more broadly to tell stories.

Jerome Bruner, for example, highlights the narrative mode of self-reflection and self-understanding, serving as an intermediary in the transfer of human experience. Its implementation in the form of narration (or narrative) makes it possible to reflect on it in the interpersonal sphere [25]. Therefore, the narrative could be interpreted as a narrative form of the plot, proposing a certain narrative scenario of the process of mediating elements of the social order and individual practices.

Post-classical narratology or, to be more precise, the post-structuralist period in the formation of modern narratology is marked by a narratological turn, that is, the penetration of narratology and its methods of analysis in other disciplines. This is why narratology takes new forms and is implemented in such directions as contextual, thematic and ideological.

I must note that scholars do not consider most of the newly formed currents to be narratology, since in this case it is only a question of the implication of narrative models and narratological categories in the texts of certain genres or of certain historical periods. Such approaches represent all sorts of forms of narrative theory, analysis or application that have arisen in different theoretical schools of narrative research. Even the term narratology itself causes much discussion these days, as it is used in, at least, two different senses. First, narratology is identified with narrative studies, which greatly broadens and diversifies the research perspective, since it covers any narratively organized discourse: literary, historiographical, conversational, cinematic or otherwise. Second, it is also interpreted as an offshoot of the narrative theory that developed in the 60s and 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly in France under of structuralism and its formalist predecessor.

At the same time, many linguists and narratologists agree that post-classical narratology appears today as a kind of hybrid form due to the mixture of feminist, cognitive, rhetorical and cultural-historical narratologies. On the other hand, it is generally accepted that structuralist narratology itself, evolving, has turned into a real variety of new approaches, among which there are those which have lost all connection and point of intersection with structuralism.

The essential difference between structuralist narratology and post-classical narrative studies lies in the latter's abiding interest in the process of creating a narrative, rather than the narrative text itself. Recently, in various scientific works in the field of literary text formation, the opinion that the main factor in the creation of texts is an individual author's narrative program, which over time is expressed in the narrative form of a literary text, in which elements of the writer's worldview is encoded (process of semiotization), the perception of the world is gaining more and more importance (cognitive process). This position is based on the narrative principle of the literary formation of textual strategies for representing the author's universe or the author's experience. In this case, the interpretation of the narrative as a narratively organized knowledge system is entirely justified.

Crossing a notorious period of methodological reformatting and witnessing the appearance of new approaches in the theory of narrative, narrative studies tend, first of all, towards the systematization of the achievements of previous epochs by bringing together main ways of apprehending narrative. Secondly, they are also characterized by the re-examination of the links between the plot and the narrative sequence, the conception of the narrative as a product of

a configuration of intertextual frames, the recourse to enunciative linguistics, or even psycho-cognitive research favouring the mental structuring of the narrative.

Being a true interdisciplinary theory, linguistic narratology fits perfectly into the context of discourse analysis, covering the linguistic and literary tools to identify the interdependence of form and meaning in a literary work. The narrative identity of the author, who assumes the full responsibility for producing a text in his own way, is expressed there by explicit/implicit markers, or other deictic elements forming its so-called peculiar narrative code.

Starting from the idea that human consciousness organizes itself according to the laws of the deployment of a literary text, one could estimate that linguistic narratology sees itself as a key metaphor for psychology. Linguistic narratology as an interpretive approach to literary text theory has much in common with cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology, and now focuses on two main issues. First of all, the question is to know what forms and defines the cognitive status of the narrative, because a literary text appears as a system of knowledge constructed and deployed according to a certain narrative scenario. On the other hand, a lot of efforts is also put into identifying how the author constructs a narrative based on his own resources and cognitive skills. Thus, a literary text is analysed not in terms of what it represents, but from the point of view of how a writer constructs and semiotizes the external universe or his own experience and knowledge. In a certain sense, I could argue that contemporary text research is enriched by linguistic narratology. Given that linguistic narratology could be defined as an interparadigmatic interpretative approach, its potential is seen, first of all, in the possibility of modelling the author's narrative identity by revealing the textual means of creating the author's narrative identity.

In a literary text, one of the levels of conceptually significant information deployment is its narrative structure, or the narrative scheme of the unfolding of the story, since the singularity of the way of narrating, chosen by the author, is correlated with the key principles of the representation of a story.

Summarizing what has been said above, it should be emphasized that identity could be taken for "the fact of being one" [21], that is to say the relationship that every individual has to himself and which makes him feel himself to be the same [21]. It may be that it concerns in particular those representations that a person possesses or can possess of himself, taken in "continuity and permanence" [21].

### **1.1.2 SOME REMARKS ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE WRITER'S NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN MODERNIST NARRATION**

By revealing the problem of narrative identity from the perspective of understanding it as a communicative construction, the focus is on the real identity and the moral foundations of understanding one's own history and existence [26]. Taking into account the interpretation of identity as a narrative construction, the constitution of the latter is "quite possible in certain

dialogical networks", where it is "conditioned by temporal structures and can be defined contextually" [26]. This is precisely the reason by which the speaking, or even narrating, subject acquires its identity in the discourses and its general understanding in the narrative [26]. In this case, the story for the writer becomes one of the possible means of constructing and understanding his own identity.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the narrative identity is not built solely by the self-awareness and self-perception of the author, because the writer can invent and, as a rule, introduce in his story the multiple identities of its narrator(s) or its character(s). He does this, of course, in order to create the fictional universe of his story, which is characterized by framing in time and space. It happens that, sometimes, behind the personality of the narrator / character is the author himself who wears the mask.

The principle of narrative identification of the author and the narrating subject is also called (auto-)biographical parallelism [27], because, by developing and implementing such a narrative technique, writers can resort, most often, to a realistic reproduction of their own life situation, while specifying the time and place of the action. To sum up, I would say that in "literature, the notion of writing the self aims to take into account all the gradations that lead from "autobiography" to "autofiction": in the extreme and in a caricatural way, the autobiography would ignore its part of fiction and would refer to an identifiable, permanent, unique Me; autofiction would refer, on the contrary, to an invented Self, self-created from scratch, without an umbilicus in a way" [28].

In narrative and poetological studies of the literary text, (auto-)biographical creation and production are still marked by a number of questions that remain open or controversial.

Firstly, the question should be asked of the degree of the writer's presence in the fictional space of his work, given that the (auto-)biography implies a certain distortion or transformation of events and /or actions, taken from the author's life.

Secondly, there is a lot of discussion about defining the role of the narrator who, as a purely textual construct, is not the owner of the text, but he is the one who is able to convey the intentions of the author, to embody his image of the surrounding world or to describe what haunts or worries him.

In (auto-)biographical writing, the author and the narrator form a whole. Assuming that such a narrative is one of many variants of the writer's literary identity [29], I postulate that in the French modernist narrative of a notoriously (auto-)biographical character the author's narrative identity is forged. The latter is, to a large extent, constructed by the narrative identity of the homodiegetic narrator – the novel's protagonist – who does not constitute, in this case, the writer's *Alter ego* in the dichotomous "Me/Other" model, but, on the contrary, introduces and verbalizes the diegesis of the very author of the text.

The narrative in the first person singular, called homodiegetic, or the autodiegetic narrative in the terminology of Gérard Genette [15], in the 20<sup>th</sup> century French novel is a response-reaction to the surrounding reality and the need of a creative person to talk about himself, his past or his

present. It is precisely the conscious refusal of the writers to follow the clearly defined principles and canons, specific to a certain genre of literary creation, which sometimes becomes a real experiment and motivates them to express themselves in a very allusive and very symbolic way in their own works.

The modernist narrative, shaped by a homodiegetic narrator, is marked by a change in the traditional code of the (auto-)biography genre and is characterized by the involvement of a large number of intertextual images or symbols. Gérard Genette, by revealing the specificities of the identity of the narrator and his direct link with the author of the text, defines the homodiegetic narrative as the text in which we witness the replacement of one narrative voice by another [15]. This does not prevent the writer from pretending, because he begins his game with his readers on the subject of his own identity and the textual elements that bear witness to it. Thus, the question of narrative identity is nothing other than the question of the degree of representation of the real life of the author in the story.

In the modernist novel, the homodiegetic narrator quite often appears not only as the narrating subject, but also as the object of the narration, which makes him a source of metanarrative judgments [30], textualized mainly in the narrative perspective of the present.

## 1.2 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES OF THE AUTHOR'S NARRATIVE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FRENCH MODERNIST LITERARY TEXT PRODUCTION (CASE STUDY OF ANDRÉ BRETON'S NOVEL "NADJA")

Taking as my starting point the idea that the modernist shaping of the narrative foresees the number of narrative techniques as unusual as they are effective, I want to consider the narrative identity of the author within the framework of the construction of surrealist narrative reality.

The fact is that in the narrative style of the French modernist author André Breton, notably in his novel "Nadja" [31, 32], the homodiegetic narrator positions himself as both the subject and the object of the narration. In addition, the subject of the story told is the writer's reflections on his self, on the world around him, on creativity as a mode of existence and self-knowledge [33].

It should also be emphasized that André Breton is more than a modernist writer, he is one of the founders of "surrealist prose" [34], the latter forming a veritable union of theoretical postulates of surrealism as an artistic doctrine and literary practices carried out within it.

In Breton's *Nadja*, it is above all the homodiegetic configurations and the Present of the Indicative which best represent the intentionality of the author; the homodiegetic narrator tending to merge the signs of the personality of the writer himself, that is to say the real elements which imply the signs of the consciousness of the author, and the object of the narration.

The novel "Nadja" [31, 32] as a surrealist narrative is characterized by a powerful authorial dominance, which is actually explained by the presence of objective signs referring to the daily reality of André Breton as a personality of the literature:

"Le jour de la première représentation de **Couleur du Temps**, d'**Apollinaire**, au **Conservatoire Renée Maubel**, comme à l'entracte je m'entretenais au balcon avec **Picasso**, un jeune homme s'approche de moi, balbutie quelques mots, finit par me faire entendre qu'il m'avait pris pour un de ses amis, tenu pour mort à la guerre. Naturellement, **nous en restons là**. Peu après, par l'intermédiaire de **Jean Paulhan**, j'entre en correspondance avec **Paul Éluard** sans qu'alors nous ayons la moindre représentation physique l'un de l'autre" [31].

"The day of the first performance of **Apollinaire's Couleur du Temps** at the **Conservatoire Renée Maubel**, while **I was talking to Picasso** in the balcony during the intermission, a young man approaches me, stammers a few words, and finally manages to explain that he had mistaken **me** for one of his friends supposedly killed in the war. Naturally, nothing more was said. A few days later, through a mutual friend, **I begin corresponding with Paul Eluard**, whom I did not know by sight" [32].

The most notorious clues to the homodiegetic narrator are the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun *je* and the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronoun *nous*. The latter underlines in this case the sense of plurality, thus referring to the environment of the French writer (*nous* contains "I" of the author and other people who are part of his life). I must note that the "I" of the author does not distance himself from society, but on the contrary, recognizes himself as an integral part of it. Moreover, the adverbial and independent pronouns *me*, *moi* respectively, are the deictic markers being correlated with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun.

Such a narrative technique makes it possible to build up a story in which the real events and/or actions of the life of their author are recreated: the meeting with Picasso, the acquaintance of a young artist at the theatre during the "Couleur du Temps" d'Apollinaire, correspondence with Paul Éluard. Breton's surrealist narrative thus appears as a sort of document or chronicle setting out certain events (the first performance of "Couleur du Temps"), times and dates (the day of the first performance); all this being associated with very personal and quite intimate moments in the life of the writer. These localize events and/or actions by limiting them to the framework of a very concrete situation taken from the life of the writer.

In Breton's *Nadja*, the story appears for readers as a particular form of becoming acquainted with the detailed vision of the author's inner world and, more precisely, of his way of perceiving things. Such a very particular way of this modernist writer of composing a story is to share in a very subtle form his own associations and reflections on what life, art, true love, destiny is.

It is also important to underline that the surrealist narrative is mainly formatted on the level of the present: *un jeune homme s'approche de moi* ("a young man approaches me"), *balbutie quelques mots* ("stammers a few words"), *finit* ("manages"), which explains the situation of the narrator of speaking or commenting "here" and "now". In fact, in this context, we have a whole series of narrative segments, in which the homodiegetic narrator meditatively conveys certain events and/or actions of his life that have already taken place: *nous en restons là* ("nothing more was said"); *j'entre en correspondance avec Paul Éluard* ("I begin corresponding with Paul Eluard"). What is of great relevance is that the homodiegetic narrator does not

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summarize these events and/or actions; he relives them for the umpteenth time in the context of the present.

Nevertheless, if the homodiegetic narrator appeals to the past, the events and/or actions are presented in the perspective of the unfinished past (the Imperfect of the Indicative): *je m'entretenais au balcon avec Picasso* ("I was talking to Picasso in the balcony") or of the past which allows to express the accomplished facts whose duration is indefinite (the Pluperfect of the Indicative): *qu'il m'avait pris pour un de ses amis* ("he had mistaken me for one of his friends"). Therefore, verbs and verbal constructions in the temporal forms mentioned above express the narrator's desire to temporally represent events and/or actions in a linear way, being, however, somewhat procedural.

Before getting into the issue itself, I must note that André Breton begins his story with the rhetorical question *qui suis-je* ("who am I") by engaging, in this way, the problematic of the quest for his own identity in his novel.

Collins English Dictionary [35] defines identity as "the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing" [35]. In this context, I might suppose that the formula *who am I* implies the textual realization of what constitutes or could constitute the real dilemma for the writer on the path of questioning his "me":

*"Qui suis-je? Si par exception je m'en rapportais à un adage: en effet pourquoi tout ne deviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je "hante"? Je dois avouer que ce dernier mot m'égare, tendant à établir entre certains êtres et moi des rapports plus singuliers, moins évitables, plus troublants que je ne pensais. Il dit beaucoup plus qu'il ne veut dire, il me fait jouer de mon vivant le rôle d'un fantôme, évidemment il fait allusion à ce qu'il a fallu que je cessasse d'être, pour être qui je suis. < ... > Il se peut que ma vie ne soit qu'une image de ce genre, et que je sois condamné à revenir sur mes pas tout en croyant que j'explore, à essayer de connaître ce que je devrais fort bien reconnaître, à apprendre une faible partie de ce que j'ai oublié" [31].*

*"Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I "haunt". I must admit that this last word is misleading, tending to establish between certain beings and myself relations that are stranger, more inescapable, more disturbing than I intended. Such a word means much more than it says, makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be who I am. < ... > Perhaps my life is nothing but an image of this kind; perhaps I am doomed to retrace my steps under the illusion that I am exploring, doomed to try and learn what I should simply recognize, learning a mere fraction of what I have forgotten" [32].*

In the narrative shaping of the fragment in question, the homodiegetic narrator is actualized through the rhetorical question *who am I*, as well as a series of associations and metaphorical images, notably *des rapports plus singuliers, moins évitables, plus troublants* ("relations that are stranger, more inescapable, more disturbing"); *le rôle d'un fantôme* ("a ghostly part"); *ma vie ne soit qu'une image de ce genre* ("my life is nothing but an image of this kind"). It is exactly in the narrative identity of the existence of the narrator that the identity-*idem* and the identity-*ipse* of

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the writer are formed and defined. This is implied by the denotes and connotes of textual units such as the verb *être* v.i. ("to be"): "if something is, it exists" [35], the nouns *fantôme* n.m. ("ghost"): "the spirit of a dead person that someone believes they can see or feel" [35], *vie* n.f. ("life"): "state of being alive, especially when there is a risk or danger of them dying" [35].

I would say that in the narrative segment above we find out the traces of the self-awareness by the author, the process being accompanied by the constant internal struggle (*existence/non-existence*), the feeling of imperfection (*life as simulacrum*), and the bifurcation of thought or even the splitting of personality (*me – ghost / illusion*).

The ideas of internal struggle and human imperfection are also verbalized in Breton's surrealist narrative by verbal constructions with the semantics of "*resignation*": *il me fait jouer* ("he makes me play") and *que je sois condamné à revenir sur mes pas* ("I am doomed to retrace my steps"). Depending on the denoted meanings of the conceptual dominants *contrainte* n.f. ("constraint"): "something that limits or controls what you can do" [35] and *resignation* n.f. ("resignation"): "the acceptance of an unpleasant situation or fact because you realize that you cannot change it" [35], I come to the conclusion on the implicit deployment of the idea of the loss of the limits of one's self and, consequently, the limits of reality, which could explain the increased desire of the author to find himself, to become aware of himself as well as his place in the surrounding world.

The metaphors *il me fait jouer de mon vivant le rôle d'un fantôme* ("makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part") to say *I'm only a ghost / an illusion* and *ma vie ne soit qu'une image de ce genre* ("my life is nothing but an image of this kind") to suggest that *my life is a simulacrum* conceptualize the process of becoming aware of one's identity, the process of searching for the meaning of life as well as one's own place in such an absurd and imperfect world.

I presume that one of the relevant features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century French modernist discourse is the suggestive tonality of the narrative, the latter tending to "condense meaning" [36] and not be too saturated with events and/or actions. Such a "compression" of meaning [36] does not only result from the reduction of the eventual or from the erasure of one of the traditional narrative models in the classical narrative (the narrator ≠ character :: narrator = character). What counts, in this case, is the union in the same category of narrative voice elements involving the consciousness of the author and the object of the narration.

In order to better understand the narrative techniques that Breton used in creating his own world, I would like to point out that the novel "Nadja" [31, 32] could be divided into three parts. The first represents the French writer's reflections on himself and has the most pronounced self-communicative character. The second part is reminiscent of a diary because it sets out the author's impressions following his encounters with the heroine of the novel. The third part is described by literary critics as "a lyrical appeal" [33] and is dedicated to another woman, Suzanne.

The singularity of Breton's story is created thanks to the author's narrative technique of resorting to intermedial mechanisms in the deployment of the narrated story. It is about "the possibility of creating new concepts or meanings not only through vocables, but also thanks to other

semiotic codes, in particular visual or audible ones, which, finally, are able to form a real unity at the level of authorship strategies, used in literary production" [37].

It should be noted that all the narrative segments of the surrealist story in Breton's narration are intertwined and completed by images, in particular photography. By combining with the word, the latter lend themselves perfectly to constructing a story with a high degree of authenticity, on the one hand, and probability, on the other, which is also explained by a large viewer potential. Such a narrative technique is called "the convergence of artistic genres" [38]:

*"Le 4 octobre dernier, à la fin d'un de ces après-midi tout à fait désœuvrés et très mornes, comme j'ai le secret d'en passer, je me trouvais rue Lafayette <...>. Tout à coup, alors qu'elle est peut-être encore à dix pas de moi, venant en sens inverse, **je vois une jeune femme**, très pauvrement vêtue, qui, elle aussi, me voit ou m'a vu. Elle va la tête haute, contrairement à tous les autres passants. **Si frêle** qu'elle se pose à peine en marchant. **Un sourire imperceptible** erre peut-être sur son visage <...>.*

*Je la regarde mieux. Que peut-il bien passer de **si extraordinaire** dans ces yeux? **Que s'y mirent-ils à la fois obscurément de détresse et lumineusement d'orgueil?** C'est aussi **l'énigme** que pose le début de confession que, sans m'en demander davantage, avec une confiance qui pourrait (ou bien qui ne pourrait?) être mal placée elle me fait" [31].*

*"Last October fourth, toward the end of one of those idle, gloomy afternoons I know so well how to spend, I happened to be in the Rue Lafayette <...>. Suddenly, perhaps still ten feet away, **I saw a young poorly dressed woman** walking toward me, she had noticed me too, or perhaps had been watching me for several moments. She carried her head high, until everyone else on the sidewalk. And she looked as delicate she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked. **A faint smile** may have been wandering across her face <...>.*

*I took a better look at her. What was **so extraordinary** about what was happening in those eyes? **What was it they reflected – some obscure distress and at the same time some luminous pride?** And also **the riddle set** by the beginning of a confession which, without asking me anything further, with a confidence which could (or which could not?) be misplaced, she made me" [32].*

The homodiegetic narrator, behind whom is the author himself, shares with the reader all that he feels at a given moment through the use of the number of verbalized images: *si frêle* ("delicate"); *un sourire imperceptible erre sur son visage* ("a faint smile may have been wandering across her face"); *s'y mirent-ils à la fois de détresse et d'orgueil* ("they reflected – some obscure distress and at the same time some luminous pride") sketching the portrait of a woman. In this context, the descriptions made with so much scruples and so much authenticity refer to photographs being the set of techniques that make it possible to record a subject in a fixed image. It is precisely these observations fixed in a timed way that give even more relief to the surrealist narrative reality created by the French writer.

I must emphasize that the surrealist narrative abounds in symbolism and its language is very figurative, which could be explained in terms of the asymmetrical relationships that exist

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between textual units. Consequently, in the fragment under consideration, we notice the true "dissonance" [33] that appears following the simultaneous coexistence in the same context of concepts that are distant and close at the same time (*à la fois obscurément de détresse* "some obscure distress" and *lumineusement d'orgueil* "and at the same time some luminous pride"). The union of the adverbs *obscurément* ("obscure") and *lumineusement* ("luminous") in their contradicting denoted meanings ("gloomy, dark, clouded, or dim" [35] and "giving off light; shining; bright" [35] respectively) as well as the highlighting of the primary meaning of the noun *détresse* n.f. ("distress"): "a state of extreme sorrow, suffering, or pain" [35] by the adverb *obscurément* adv. ("obscure") allowed the author to create and visualize a very delicate and very sensory portrait of a woman.

I would say that the analysed textual units indeed form and deploy the semantic space of "the unconscious of the author", this one being moreover implied by the textual unit *énigme* n.f. ("riddle"), which, in its primary meaning, designates "a person or thing that puzzles, perplexes, or confuses; enigma" [35].

By its secondary meaning, this textual unit brings to the fore the universe of feelings and dreams of the author, even of all that is desired and can, possibly, occur.

By erasing the border between *the real* (images and photographs) and *the unreal, the super-natural* (desires and associations that arise during the search for perfection), and the surrealist narrative in Breton's *Nadja* is constructed via other semiotic codes than the verbal one. I am talking, above all, of the visual and pictorial codes, which, strung on a single axis, act as a whole, while each keeping its potential and its autonomy.

Thanks to *the montage narrative technique*, the photograph and the images do not repeat the text but rather play the role of parallel and similar recursion, which makes it possible to understand the whole verbal code of the work, especially its figurative language designating and developing surrealist narrative reality. In the fragment quoted above, the last is filled with a particular symbolism and a series of surprising images which are mainly formed by figures and tropes such as the oxymoron *que s'y mirent-ils obscurément de détresse et lumineusement d'orgueil* ("what was it they reflected – some obscure distress and at the same time some luminous pride"), or else the metaphor *un sourire imperceptible erre sur son visage* ("a faint smile may have been wandering across her face") illustrating the asymmetrical relationship between the linguistic units.

If we take a look at the quoted metaphor, we will see that there coexist elements designating very close notions, given the secondary meaning of the adjective *imperceptible* adj. ("faint"): "lacking clarity, brightness, volume" [35], and the verb *errer* v.intr. ("wander"): "to walk around there in a casual way, often without intending to go in any particular direction" [35]. In fact, the semantic meaning of the adjective seems to extend into the verb, while the latter in combination with the adjective does not change: it is neither amplified nor acquires any other repercussion.

The montage narrative technique, based on the cinematic effects of the event and/or the parallel or crossed action, combines with the visualized images and subjective associations, and thus,

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erases the border between the real world (photographs and images) and fictitious / unreal world, which explains, in turn, the verbalization of the idea of the irrational search for perfection in the world of the French writer.

As a result, I would deduce that the surrealist narrative is constructed through the elements of the narrative technique called *the convergence of artistic genres*, being possible thanks to the use of *montage narrative technique*, which, due to the variety of images created in the text and a large number of visualizations, leaves the reader confused and bewildered. In addition, the surrealist narrative brings real places and/or events to the fore through the imaginary, the hypothetical or the simulated. It is, in this case, the reproduction of what is objective through the subjective.

The montage narrative technique and the first-person singular narrative, as well as the flow and rapid change of visualized subjective images and associations in combination with the cinematic objective elements can be taken for the mechanisms of the expression of the "me" of the writer by introducing the concept of his self-identification in the pages of his novel.

It is precisely thanks to the narrative techniques mentioned above that in his surrealist story André Breton erases the border between the real world and the fantastic, even unreal or simulated world:

- the first is built and unfolds via photos and images. These, being very closely linked to the personality of the writer himself, contain information about the life, entourage and friends of the author and therefore reveal the peculiarities of perception and understanding of the surrounding world of Breton;
- the second, on the other hand, is based on the idea of the irrational and sometimes painful search for perfection or the ideal.

## CONCLUSION

After having studied the reference works on the issue of narrative identity, I would like to assume that the question of self-constitution still arouses great interest among scientists and enters, nowadays, in the paradigm of multidisciplinary research.

I could define André Breton's surrealist narrative in terms of the mental construction of authorial identity, created in the narrative space of the analysed novel and being verbalized using a whole series of narrative tools as well as means of expressiveness which, all together, form the singularity of the individual style of the French author.

The surrealist narrative in Breton's *Nadja* is, therefore, composed of elements from the convergence of artistic genres, including the montage narrative technique which, thanks to the fluidity and change of images and highly subjective author associations visualized in combination with photographs, becomes a means of expressing the self, that is, the narrative identity of the writer. The modernist novel, based on a large number of (auto-)biographical elements, creates the narra-

tive identity of the author, being constructed by the narrative identity of the narrator as the main character of the novel who verbalizes the self of the writer.

In the formatting of the French modernist narrative, I was also able to reveal a tendency towards hyperrealism which becomes very noticeable especially when the writer describes the narrated objects through carefully chosen details so that we obtain very multifunctional descriptions. The lexical, syntactic and figurative originality of the modernist narrative is also forged as a result of the conciseness of the style as well as the expansion of the symbolic space of the surrealist reality, being activated thanks to the presence of the number of iconic signs that are related to the personality of the author.

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