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*Structural constants of the characters
in the novels of Nicolae Breban*

SUMMARY

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CONTENTS

I. Introduction	p. 6
1. Argument	p. 6
1.1. The importance of the subject.....	p. 6
1.2. The premise of the research.....	p. 8
2. The stage of exegesis.....	p. 10
3. Research methods... ..	p. 26
Key – words	p. 33
 II. Breban’s realism and anti-realism	p. 34
1. Bio-bibliographical survey	p. 34
1.1. Author’s steps and his work’s itinerary	p. 34
1.2. Bibliographical list	p. 40
2. Novelistic vision	p. 43
2.1. The consciousness of the Europeanism.....	p. 43
2.2. Syncretic Realism	p. 48
2.3. Breban’s New Humanism	p. 57
2.4. The punitive immanence – <u>Francisca</u>	p. 64
2.5. The Desert – Paradise Dyad – <u>In the absence of masters</u> ...	p. 69
2.6. Symbolic thinking – <u>Sick animals</u>	p. 73
2.7. Reclusion in myth – <u>The plaster angel</u>.....	p. 77
2.8. The aesthetic nobility of kitsch – <u>The annunciation</u>	p. 81
2.9. Anti-Don Juan – <u>Don Juan</u>	p. 86
2.10. The destiny of transformation – <u>Journey to the wall</u>	p. 89
2.11. Strategic hoax – <u>Prowl and seduction</u>.....	p. 92
2.12. From the petty seducer to God – <u>Amphitryon</u>	p. 95
2.13. Possession by description – <u>Day and night</u>	p. 98

2.14. <i>The return of the punitive self – <u>Will to power</u></i>	p. 102
2.15. <i>Hazard domination – <u>The unseen power</u></i>	p. 105
III. Dominator – dominated couple	p. 109
1. <i>Criteria for descriptive analysis of couples</i>	p. 109
1.1. <i>Dynamics of the couple</i>	p. 109
1.2. <i>The dimension of the exercise of power relations</i>	p. 118
2. <i>Illustration of various acting instances</i>	p. 124
2.1. <i>Master – apprentice</i>	p. 124
2.2. <i>Master – servant</i>	p. 133
2.3. <i>Aggressor – victim</i>	p. 137
2.4. <i>Man – woman</i>	p. 139
2.5. <i>Mother – daughter</i>	p. 148
2.6. <i>Hunter – prey</i>	p. 150
IV. False prophet	p. 157
1. <i>Prophets and false prophets</i>	p. 157
1.1. <i>The profile of the great prophet</i>	p. 157
1.2. <i>The profile of the false prophet</i>	p. 164
2. <i>The message of false prophecies</i>	p. 172
2.1. <i>The announcement of the superhuman</i>	p. 174
2.2. <i>False – Messianic Perspective</i>	p. 179
2.3. <i>The Narcissist preoccupation</i>	p. 183
2.4. <i>The autonomous message</i>	p. 187
3. <i>Aesthetic implications of the false prophet's stances</i>	p. 190
V. Constancy and variation in Breban's character structure	p. 196
1. <i>General features of the characters</i>	p. 196
2. <i>A different interpretation</i>	p. 204
3. <i>The character as vector</i>	p. 209

Conclusions.....	p. 218
Bibliographic references	p. 228
1. Main sources	p. 228
1.1. Novels	p. 228
1.2. Nicolae Breban „par lui même”	p. 229
2. Secondary sources	p. 230
2.1. Critical bibliography – volumes.....	p. 230
2.2. Critical bibliography – articles	p. 238
2.3. Theoretical bibliography	p. 244
2.4. Reference bibliography	p. 247

Structural constants of the characters in the novels of Nicolae Breban

Summary

This paper, devoted to the study of the characters in the novels of Nicolae Breban comes to meet those interested in understanding the evolution of this narrative category on his way from classical forms to postmodernist aesthetics. As the writings of this novelist have always attracted the attention of critics as a controversial topic, we intend in this study to configure a synthetic and coherent image for the entire diversity of exegetical representations suggested by the stances of the characters that fill the fictive universe of the writer.

There are two centres of interest, drawn from Nicolae Breban's novels, on which our preoccupations are focused: the repetitiveness of the dominator – dominated balance and the frequency of the false prophet motive. In the paper, we used certain concepts collected both from the literary space of Breban's prose, such as "master", "servant", "prophet", and from outside the literature, as the references to "realism", "authenticity", "politics", successively passing through the analytical stage, then through the critical one, with the intention to finally discover the theoretical premises capable to radically draw the conceptual borders which we considered necessary.

Nicolae Breban's novels are placed face to face with a historic stage from the transformation of our present society, the communist dictatorship, without aggression our memory. The act of fictionalization is so powerful that only the symbolic meanings of the great themes approached deserve to be mentioned, leaving aside the references regarding politics which are, anyway, quite persistently avoided. Evidences, however, imposed themselves. The constant balance between dominator and dominated represents an artistic replica, transposed specular level, compared to the coercive order of the totalitarian power established in the society and in the relations between individuals. By its core analysis (the character with the role of the power exponent or, respectively, the subordination one as a false prophet), the research

directions of our thesis can become an ulterior tribunal of deciphering the forms of mystification of reality and of its disclosure through fiction¹.

In dealing with the creation of the writer, we exclusively had in view the aesthetic consequences of the targeted issues, identifiable at the level of style, narrative logics and discourse. The author transforms his work into a sinuous flow of ideas, often contradictory and even paradoxical. This would be his great aesthetic vocation: to challenge ideas, some marginal (the idea of suicide as self affirmation) other extreme (the politics and society found in inverse proportion to the sacralization and desacralization process), some obsessive (power, will and murder), other rational (creativity in a legitimate relation with the human), but each in its own insistently oppressive way transformed in an artistic or polemic replica (such as the dictatorship as masquerade, regarded under the incidence of the parody, cynicism or irony of hoax, escaping the serious register and remaining in the realm of the ridiculous and ambiguous), sensing and feeding the call of the 20th century erudite spirit.

The research object of this paper is the structural typology of Breban's characters, delimiting two unique features, solidly built by the author from the perspective of some ontological configurations opened to the abyssal. On one hand, the individual moves between the ambivalent frames of the dominator – dominated couple and extends this existential model to an archetypal one. The numerous examples offered by Nicolae Breban in his novels create types that avoid slipping into mannerism in a variety of ways: the dynamics the couple given by reversing the roles, fanatic ideas pushed to the madness of murder, master sacralization, his unfortunate substitution, power relations etc. On the other hand, the individual enters a relationship of authority with the time axis of past - present – future and builds his identity according to the status as a false prophet. His personality develops simultaneously on dimensions which are theological (lack of authenticity of prophecies by relating to well-known examples of the great prophets of mankind), psychological (specific social behavior, a certain disposition etc.), psychoanalytical (the example of narcissistic phenomenon, the identity mask etc.),

¹ Lăcrămioara Berechet, 2009, p. 18: „The communism seemed to have established in history a time of Passions, just like those of Christ, a reason for the emergence of this imperious need to reinvent myths, including political myths, as there is the case of Nicolae Breba's novels. The events of an outraged history are re-written at a different level. It would be interesting to identify the systemic structure of these mythical images as well as the semantic force which is triggered off by the new images that solidarize with the matrix system. This exercise would be beneficial for the diagnosis of a split collective mental in its native forms.”.

philosophical (the progeny of the prophet Zarathustra, Nietzsche's superman invention, etc.), anthropological (mimicry, autonomous prophet, etc..).

We would have been interested to take a monographic look on the novelistic creation of Nicolae Breban, as the writer challengingly launches in literature a vision of ample, systemic, coherent and at the same time coercive dimensions. However, the decision about the profile which our entire hermeneutic approach was about to take was determined by a confession made by the writer in which he circumscribed his creative intention around a particular problematized nucleus: *I have learned especially how to draw a character. The hardest thing on earth...*². This declaration seemed extremely challenging to me. What shall we understand? That there is an artistic manner to guide the creation of a character? That there is a comprehensive dimension of the world on which the conception of a character can rely? That the exercise of Breban's writing innovate a character model? We could not ignore either the statement of the critic Marian Barbu who says about Nicolae Breban that he „(...) is still of the opinion that the eternity of writing is in the symbolic prestige offered by the character.”³

The premise of this paper descends, thus, from the interest required by the effort to structure a narrative acting figure. Trying to find out what constitutes the performance, and also the novelty of Breban's humanity, new problematizing aspects were brought to life: the renewal of the image canonized by the modernist episteme through elements pertaining to the existence of the abyss, of artificiality, truth and credibility. Following the route of the character, we feel the trap set by Nicolae Breban, which consists in the duplicity of the hero, of his mask, if there is a mask, as we realize that there is nothing behind it and, in fact, it masks itself and simulates the dissimulation in order to dissimulate the fact that it is nothing more but simulation⁴. The principle originates in Nietzsche's theories and illustrates the substance of appearance, not opposed to the human being with all its defining manifestation, but designing the very life full of dynamism and ready to take itself in derision, as if valid, due to its seriousness, would remain just the appearance. The novelist launches a challenge that excludes the protection of the reader: *I write. The reader would better learn how to read.* (Mark Harris).

² Nicolae Breban, 1994, p. 32.

³ Marian Barbu, 1995, p. 258.

⁴ Liviu Malița, 2001, p. 55: „The option for the falsity of the author, betraying the will to relate to modernity by Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche, by the ambiguity which characterises modernity of all values, otherwise intangible, is transformed again into a principle of building the character and, moreover, into a theme of the character himself: falsity as a way of existence. His heroes are fascinated by the fake, the uncontrollable dose of truth mixed with error, ambiguity and relativism.”

This proves to be the author's motto. Returning to our topic, such an approach of building a character has never been used by anyone. We discover similarities in the abyssal structure of Dostoyevsky's character or in relating the human to the myth and knowledge through Thomas Mann's character, but the differences are great. Nicholas Breban, however, brought something new to the actantial structure amid a strong antirealism epic, which leads us to place his hero on a position distinct from other actantial structures, describing him by the term of vector - character, no longer being considered type or prototype or archetype or character etc.. Learning to create a character involves, for the novelist Nicolae Breban, not a way to learn how, but to find a solution to appoint a new literary reality of his own.

Therefore, the premises of this particular configuration of the character, by the picture created by the false prophet and the false cohesion of the couple formed by domination, consist of a long series of interrogations referring to the unauthenticated impression, the difficult location of truth, to a certain aspect of the contrast between essence and appearance in an issue of credibility in terms of the hero, and his speech, as well as the issues of the symbols of the text; and the list remains open. How did Breban's humanity mark the existence of prophets and prophecies? Where does the destiny lead some of these false prophets? What lessons do they teach us within the evolution of the Romanian literature? How do the opposition relations of a couple transform into false couples?⁵ Which are the indicators which mark the logic of the couple internal dynamics? Isn't the dominator only a replica of the human perception of the divine? Isn't the dominator nothing but a false understanding of the role the human fulfills in his relation with the divine? We become preoccupied at the end of our research by a monadic concept capable of systematically concentrating the whole, and manage to contract the title *Structural constants...*, which points at multiple and varied aspects, to a unitary vision based on the principle of unity in diversity.

The chapter entitled *Breban's realism and anti-realism* functions as an anchor for this paper, establishing the roots from which our ulterior ideas for the research start. Thus, it quickly sets the bio-bibliographic references of the creation of the writer Nicolae Breban, offering a panoramic view; then it extracts the general features of the writing, which ensure its

⁵ Liviu Malița, op. cit., p. 46: „The antithesis „master” / „vassal”, „master” / „apprentice”, is complemented by a new opposition: "false" masters and "false" vassals, "false" masters and "false" disciples, "false" ideologue - ideologue when offered the opportunity, improvised prophet – and “false” believers. Nicolae Breban opens thus a wide field of investigation to one of the most modern theme: psychological duality.”

projection in the great European literature, according to the author's own exigencies; further on it typologically places Breban's work, describing a specific critical category, that of syncretic realism; later on, it extracts the specific of the human universe, which will guide the research, step by step, to the comprehensive definition of the condition specific to Breban's character, the aim of our paper. Understanding him through the fictional, meta-fictional and critical context in which he exists, represents a form of differentiating the particular way in which the author understands to build his character, by relating to the artistic canons of the modernism against which he claims his autonomy. We decided to go over the final moments of humanism in a staging form suggested by literary representations (Dante, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky), to find a justification for its entry into decline. After studying the reasons for the crisis of the humanism, based on advanced considerations of Gianni Vattimo, we stopped at describing the Nietzschean vein, to which we attribute the new humanism cultivated by Breban, seeking the explanation of the concept of nihilism.

The chapter *Dominator – dominated couple* initiates a thorough study of the unconscious mechanisms of Breban's character who lives the experience of discovering his spiritual mate as an initiatory act ritualistically performed. The author artistically experiences a scheme, then repeats it using different nuances until he feels the satisfaction of the comprehensive ingress into the essence of the phenomenon and until it reaches the most subtle form of complete sublimation, through more and more ciphered symbols, but with more distinctively crystallized shapes.

Starting from a reality consistently reported by literary criticism, regarding Breban's epic universe and the perception of human individuality as part of a couple, our first preoccupation aimed the dynamics of these couples. The inner connection between partners escapes consciousness. What seems to be a predefined strategy represents an act of blind obedience of an archetypal will to power. The strength of character dominating character is actually an exemplary assuming of a role of Master, Master or Amphitryon, in which he who manifests the will and power is God.

The exercise of power is spectacular, with a perfect performance of the actors placed in different situations, each of them confirming a constant structural human archetype: power, on the ascending scale generating the need for master, on a descending scale, the need for victim. The couples illustrate the variety of these acting situations: master – disciple, master –

servant, aggressor – victim, man – woman, mother – daughter, hunter – prey, clarifying the resources of unseen forces that drive the behaviour of the actors to the extreme sublimation of myth. Symbolically, each of the heroes allows to be inhabited by a mythical figure, committing an act of obedience, expanding or dispersing his human content in order to grow his sacred self, fulfilling his mission. The relation between domination and subordination is consumed not between the individuals, being an act of transcending and renaissance, but between God and the profane demon which he replaces.

The chapter *The false prophet* initiates a profound study of the hypostases in which a distinct category of Breban's characters appear. Dressed in master's authorial clothes, they hide an overwhelming power over the others that do not belong to them (but they use it as if it belonged to them), whose meaning they do not know (but can take radical decisions on its behalf), of which they do not know the outcome (but they do not abandon). This character behaves as if he were penetrated by an alien being, to whom he is blindly submitted. For her whole reason conceives as her own resounding imperative echoes of a mysterious inner calling. The confusion between the "spirit" ruler and supreme deity creates different hypostases of characters, depending on the level that is achieved, each introducing its own narrative determination: the actors' consciousness, the overloaded subconscious of the receiver or the authorial vision.

Looking from several perspectives, religious, philosophical, psychological or social, the false prophet figure gathered images taken from different epic situations, which display similar characteristics, reaching, thus, four hypostases: the false messianic (seen as a reflection of messianism), the narcissist (perceived as a social projection of Narcissus), then artistic replica of the Nietzschean superman as well as the stance of a full autonomy of personality. Bringing together these classes of events, the false prophet comes to dominate both the intellectual environment, that of intellectual hypocrisy and the religious environment, and the desecrated one. The purpose remains exclusive artistic experimental as the destiny of assuming the status of prophet constitutes neither an acquisition strategy for success, not a battle of self to come near its deepest being. In the ontological plane occurs only a complete loss of authenticity, an axiological relativism pushed to the limit of the individual inability to discern between true and false. The aesthetic consequences of the existence of this new type of character, identified on the basis of the arguments offered eloquent narrative discourses are the only relevant ones.

The chapter *Constancy and variation in Breban's character structure* re-assesses the human universe from an abstract and generalising perspective. The behavioural indicators of the individuals, extracted from the force that comes through repeatability or artistic impression of the author's obsession, allowed the separation of some invariants which, by successive series of abstraction, led to the configuration of a unique actantial model. So, after the initial operation (carried out over Chapter III, "Dominator – dominated Couple" and Chapter IV, "The False prophet") of illustrating of a certain class of characters, known generically according to the fundamental criterion that particularizes them, in the fifth chapter I switched to the reverse operation, from concrete to abstract.

What we sought to identify through this process originates in the manner discovered by Nicolae Breban to create a unique configuration of his character. Therefore, based on theoretical elements drawn from documentary sources, we introduced, as proposal, a new tool for analysis and interpretation of the concept of character - vector. Although we briefly presented the theoretical support of the concept, believing that the time and the literary practice will constitute decisive factors in confirming or infirming its validity, we consider that our arguments could be enough, relating them to the level of the intentions on which our research work started.

The anti-canonical battle of the present could raise a repugnant barrier to our intention of running after constants. At the core of defining the particularities of a creation there is always a set of invariables together with a set of variables, and among these some are known and the others unknown. Covering the critical bibliography related to the work of Nicolae Breban, we have identified so easily a profound disarray of speculative and uncertain nature, that, it seems to us that, coming close to the writer's creation we have, first of all, the duty to make some order. We expected from the outset that through the research work initiated on the field of the actantial structures, to reach some results that allow us to introduce a new autonomous concept, that of the character - vector, being for the first time, as far as we know, when we can establish a defining term for the unique character built by Breban. As the notion of vector has been used before by the critic Vasile Popovici, we felt that this is a fertile field which can be successfully exploited.

To build a character, "the hardest thing in the world" is to create a reality out of the real which lies unlimited outside of ourselves being not only at the basis of our senses but within the reach of our soul. The author pushes the perspective of the perspective on the

character towards an underground existence, extending from the immediate.⁶ And in the world of the contemporary novel, presented as a tortuous and full of pitfalls array, the character denies the immediate reality and enters a timeless abyss, from which everything which is ephemeral or accidental disappears in order to allow the great imaginary projections of states and original insights⁷. The metaphoric referentiality, reduced to a constructed history, outside the tangible one, brings emblematic significations to the time – space relation. The idea of consciousness insufficiency admits the unconscious intrusion in the reason for the existence.

A new character pattern that passes Nicolae Breban's novels represents an experience which cannot be absent from the literary histories. The structural constants of this character, attracting abyssal psychological and archetypal analyses, reflects an innovating vision on humanity, anticipated by Nietzsche's philosophy, confirmed today by the contemporary psychology and sociology, in which the lack of authenticity and the cynicism become a reason of being of the individual.

Leaning towards authentic the self means returning to the archetypal substance of the being, because what they created together, education and society are just shells overlapping the identity essence of the individual. Contemporary novel mutations are strongly felt in Breban's literature. Even though very few consider him as the origin of these mutations, because, in fact, Nicolae Breban is creator of literary school, any inventory practices of the new novel send to the novelistic experience which he left in the Romanian literature: the essay introduced into the epic forms, without feeling like an intruder, then the work procedures including the parable, the tragic and the symbolic. A spectacular innovation at compositional level is the rupture, the interruption of the storyline. For a writer, it would be the deeply loaded epic moment, when the text starts and something happens. As, until then, the narration developed diffusely and linearly, the expectation horizon was shaped on the threshold of predictability, after which the unpredictable is revealed. At the level of discourse, the phenomenon is re-edited by the temporal (digressive) rupture of the storyline.

Although the work pattern invited us to pay the adequate attention to the releases of the constraints exercised once by the realist representations on the method as well, we placed face to face the realism and non-realism typical for Breban and resorted to all the necessary methods to render this perspective. However, the evolution of the novel towards significations

⁶ Vasile Popovici, 1988, p. 168.

⁷ Marian Barbu, 1993, p. 7.

which are today extracted from the literary relation to aesthetic and vision contexts (unlike the previous period, when the relation to the world was the measure for all the innovations: types of narrators, character typology, social, theological, psychological or philosophical considerations) makes the sign, the word perceived as a sign referring to cultural landmarks to specifically impose the semiotic method, respectively, the hermeneutic one in our study of Nicolae Breban's characters. Regarding the novel in progress, many of the methodological directions were imposed on us. Displacements of the reception of the novel were recorded in terms of imitation, when the feeling of veracity gets to support subversive attacks. In turn, the vision centred on trans-textuality draws attention to the material used. Of all these, bound by the narrative grammar which generates unique rules of combining the material, we reached, in our turn, a complex and varied methodological unit which has guided us towards reading multiple texts. The direction of our research was the following: the lecture of the texts provided a primary intuition to us and, as we listened to it, we decided to bring arguments in its favour, looking for the hidden forms of the phenomenon. Following the footsteps of Laura Pavel who experienced a concentric argumentation of a hermeneutic type, we also get to support the identified typological constants. If the author of *Grob's Anti-memories* initiated a road open to the principles of a postmodernist poetics, we followed the direction of the new aesthetics which the novelist intended to illustrate: the verisimilitude of the absence of verisimilitude in the construction of the character⁸.

In establishing this complex research strategy we have relied on a personal theoretical foundation adequate to the claimed requirements, which will keep us from a flawed understanding of the material, respectively of the obtained scientific discoveries. During the advance in the study, we intended to pursue, with the extraction of the expected results, the extent to which the type of qualitative research will prove its relevance. If we can provide an intimate knowledge of how Nicolae Breban created his characters, its validity will be partially confirmed, taking into account the specific purpose that can be achieved: qualitative research ends with a theory, not with a demonstration, being chosen exactly for the theorizing of the process and not the logic of evidence. On the other hand, the methodological relevance comes from the comprehensive approach, characterized by the depth of analyzes, by flexibility (the ability to adapt to the variation of the conditions accepted by us but imposed by the novelist) and by the recursive character.

⁸ Laura Pavel, 2004, p. 61.

We really got, through the research work initiated on the field of Breban's concepts, to a series of encouraging results aiming at the possibility of configuring some unitary constants based on which to establish a few structural hypostases of the characters from Nicolae Breban's novels. Seeking to clearly delineate the object of research, we set as the title of the thesis that following wording: *Structural constants of Nicolae Breban's characters*. Taking this into account, we focused on several principles that also printed a specific methodological orientation to our entire analytical journey. Firstly, we covered the milestones explicitly provided by Romanian novelistic texts, which consist of the completion of the overall image of the life style specific to the characters. Why structures (unarticulated plural)? Because it was practically impossible to identify a unique truth that could dominate the entire assembly of meanings found and coagulate as a nucleus of which substance everything could come to life. Although we found the generic name of the end, the term "character - vector" which encompasses these structures, the title is based on Breban's perception of the world he created: diversity in unity.

Nicolae Breban's texts are demanding, both during lecture and during reception. Nothing is easy for the reader: from the uncertain feeling of credibility, through the narrator's and the characters' ironic nuances reaching vocal pluralism. And the reception of Nicolae Breban's work seems today on a descending direction, probably just after the novel *The Annunciation*, when there are remarks about the imbalance of the relation between real – abstract, the ostentatious philosophical trends tending to dispel the epic monologue speech etc. We have chosen a theme that could bring a solution to certain problems, some even concerning the work of the writer we are analysing, Nicolae Breban. The most useful of goals seems to build an analytical structure to help understanding and accepting a type of writing which can be said to define, with honor, the Romanian spirit. We intend to deal with Breban's texts outside any evaluative tendencies, either praising or detracting, selecting, therefore, what is stable in the structure of his work (that is exactly why we named our thesis "Structural constants...") in order to make it understood and accepted.

An area that we consider would be the neuralgic would be the one coming to life from the radical statements or labels of the critic Nicolae Manolescu, which establish that no character is consistent. We would be deceived believing that, if it were real, such a statement would be generated by some flaws of the author. Intending to get into the building mechanism of the character and we manage to see to what extent we can speak of inconsistency, if we follow

the whole authorial vision. On the other hand, we find that Laura Pavel sets out about the character E.B. that this person would be of a consistently inhumane type⁹. We could not agree with the radical or labelling statements which determined the fact that no character is consistent, or that, once chosen the moral stereotypes, he repeats them as an obsessed person. The interest centres of our paper attacks two aspects which define a stable vision of the characters, which the author consistently supports not only with literary arguments, as his success novels provide, but also with arguments outside literature which can be identified in numerous confessional texts, memoirs and essays. Tracing a purpose of the critical confirmation and one of the exegetical discoveries, we selected the optics through which these two aspects have been perceived so far: the issue of the couple and the image of the false prophet.

The aspect of the actantial invariants¹⁰ however aroused our interest until the final stage of theorizing. As a result, we started to walk along the winding road of novel reading, our first working stage, in order to establish the two main categories of characters, the dominator – dominated couple (1) and the false prophet (2), then we proceeded to the extraction of some defining structural constants out of the substance of these categories, and we finally described various stances where the identified actors could be found and synthesizes the results obtained. In other words, we walked up the path indicated by the shift from gender species, followed by the transition from the concrete to the general picture of abstract images. For each narrative image, artistic response or stylistic reinterpretation we outlined the performance of style and vision of our chosen novelist.

Key Words: abyssal, actant, actor, truth, anthropology, authenticity, couple, deconstruction, de-adaptation, speech, dominator, dominated, hermeneutics, immanent, transcendent, unauthenticity, master, disciple, mask, messianic, Neomodernism, character, presence, absence, High modernism, Late modernism, prophet, prophecies, power, reality, split, subject, superman, humanism, vector, victim, visionary.

⁹ Laura Pavel, *op. cit.*, ch. I.

¹⁰ Victor Marian Buciu, 1996, p. 31.

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