

**“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA
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**PhD THESIS
SUMMARY**

**NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE PROSE OF SORIN
TITEL. A RE-READING**

PhD supervisor:

Professor Paul DUGNEANU, PhD

PhD student:

ROȘIORU Amalia-Maria

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Keywords: *reform, model, censorship, new novel, authenticity, Mitteleuropean, culture, myth, chronotope, symbol, sacred, profane, hermeneutics, duality, archetype, destiny, fratricide, mythical consciousness, initiation, biblical narrative, mariology, epiphany.*

The PhD thesis *Narrative Strategies in the prose of Sorin Titel. A re-reading* proposes an extensive *re-reading* exercise by which we highlight the fact that Romanian prose, just out of the dogmatic period and strongly marked by the ideology of socialist realism, has the ability and the courage, by writers as Sorin Titel, to put back the literature to its natural channel. From this perspective, we can add the fact that the literary model proposed by the Banat writer's prose, a model that we have identified as totally original, is revealed only after a simultaneous reading by which the recurring elements are placed separately from the original structure. His portrait as a writer must be evoked considering the leitmotif of his work, namely: *the destiny of the human being*.

By this PhD thesis, we carried on the first level of reception and we put in a mirror the Banat writer's prose with mythological and dogmatic sources, which served as an ideational substrate, to reveal the quality of a *paradigmatic writer*. We firmly claim that Sorin Titel succeeds in a renewal of the narrative strategies that will refresh the Romanian prose.

Following our *re-reading* process, we have identified a narrative formula with strong mythical valences that has direct references to the two cultural codes: Greco-Latin and Judeo-Christian. We have made a survey of the text and we have discovered a problematic ideational substrate that has as referent even an alter-ego of the writer.

I have also showed in this thesis that Sorin Titel was tempted, in *his long search* for modern narrative strategies and as a formula of the French *New Novel* with his prolific and non-referential style. The writer's prose is distinguished by its *authenticity* and the originality of the writing differentiates it from other works, becoming even a literary model that, however, young writers have hardly used. That is why our PhD thesis has sought all the arguments to restore the place and especially the role of a creator-maker of a literary school.

Sorin Titel (1935-1985) debuted in the early 1960s with Nicolae Velea and George Bălăiță, the three writers being concerned with the enrichment of the epic register and the formulas of creation. Along with D. R. Popescu, Fănuș Neagu, Ștefan Bănuțescu, but also with other representatives of the '60s generation, the prose writer Sorin Titel explores unexpected thematic territories.

Sorin Titel interfered with all the post-war literary movements, an issue that we have highlighted in this PhD thesis, precisely because we consider it to be essential. If in the inaugural volume *Copacul* (1964) the entry of the narrations in the expressionist aesthetics is noticed and the volume *Noaptea inocenților* (1970) is the result of the meeting with the French New Novel, the novel *Femeie, iată Fiul Tău* (1983), the writer's masterpiece, is an postmodernist experiment, going through the fantastic and the neomodernist lesson. The writing of Sorin Titel is indeed in a *long search* for unexplored thematic territories and, once discovered, they are capitalized on with the help of some unexpected narrative strategies that anticipate the later postmodernist experiments, but also the post-December literary discourse.

The man of Sorin Titel does not have a deity to worship, instead he finds another man to serve with devotion. The mother serves her son and the son dies to save his double (*Femeie, iată Fiul Tău*), a sacrifice that acquires mystical meanings. Heroes are not emptied of the sacred feeling, but they do not live on its horizon, nor do they seek support in their struggle with dreams; however, they want to receive signs, but do not question who reveals them. The attitude of the being that lives in the archaic horizon is to transform any historical event depending on mythical categories. Sorin Titel limits himself only to follow the reduced relationships of two individuals (mother-son, brother-brother), precisely to prove that man lives his destiny individually and he remains free in relation to society. In a few cases, attention is also paid to the social picture, but it remains only a canvas on which the filial relationship is drawn.

The discourse of Sorin Titel is customized by the careful narrative work from stories, to gradually reach a special refinement in novels. Through the dialogue proposed by the text, either with unique thematic areas or with established aesthetic categories, Sorin Titel builds an original literary discourse and our PhD thesis brings to light this writing with paradigmatic value for the writers of future literary generations.

The first chapter of this PhD thesis is entitled *The scenery of Romanian prose during the period of 1960-1970* and captures a socio-cultural picture of the first decades of the post-war period. In the picture of the seventh decade, as a providential moment, a group of writers is configured who, in the shade of a favorable political context, begin to bring back the

literature to its natural channel. Now a new *generation of creation* is foreshadowed and what favors this is the political decision of 1964 when, at the order of Nicolae Ceaușescu, all political prisoners will be freed. The political power uses any means to impose its regime and has as tools, first of all, people eager to get out of ruck who are ready to cooperate and to betray their loved ones. The first subchapter is entitled ***The relationship between politics and the evolution of the literary phenomenon. The tool of censorship*** and starts from the premise that the reinvestment of aesthetics, resulting in the change of discourse options, is closely related to the waiting horizon of the reader who begins to see in literature a window towards freedom in the first decade of proletarian culture. Writers who have engaged in the radical change of the literary paradigm also consciously assume the role of opponents of the totalitarian regime. They find the state of cohabitation and interrelation between modernist and avant-garde tendencies and then bring a renewal of language and propose a new literary method. In the name of aesthetics, writers have the courage to also disguise ethical principles that, in another context, could not have been assumed, transforming the literature into a polemical, oppositional manifestation, even if this fact is not openly recognized by writers. The second subchapter entitled *The writers of the '60s generation: Aestheticism, eclecticism, authenticity* reveals the sources of authenticity that are always different for each *generation of creation*. The authenticity of literature from 1960 to 1970 derives from the capitalization of the layers of language and from the divergent narrative perspectives that compose a truthful picture. The sources of authenticity are varied, starting with the thematic areas addressed and up to the exploration of some languages such as slang. The writers of the '60s generation obviously sought other sources of authenticity precisely to avoid the treacherous mechanisms of censorship. To identify them, we put in dialogue the prose of the writers of the '60s generation: Ștefan Bănuțescu, a writer who is concerned with transferring the universe into an archetypal topos, Fănuș Neagu who proposes ample epic developments and evokes a spiritual geography configured around the Delta, Brăila or Bărăgan, Dumitru Radu Popescu, Alexandru Ivasiuc, Augustin Buzura, writers fitted with accentuated analytical availabilities. We also stopped at the prose of Nicolae Breban who is a novelist by vocation and by the force of epic construction, but whose work is too little known today. Sorin Titel also finds his place in this picture, experimenting with every book he publishes. We also notice the creation of George Bălăiță, Radu Petrescu and last but not least, Nicolae Velea, who is considered a *structural nonconformist*.

The second chapter entitled ***The contribution of Sorin Titel to the re-entry of post-war literature in the European context*** captures both the writer's artistic concerns and his relationship with society and other intellectuals. In work of Sorin Titel, we may find the

synesthesia, because his text is perfume, song and expressionist painting. The visual arts enter into a dialogue with literature, but also with cinematography, because the paintings rewrite a topos captured with the expressiveness of a film frame and book references prove the writer's erudition. The ability to transfigure the experience of universal literature leads to the formation of a style that we must bring in front of readers, but also young writers, who will be able to find here a new aesthetic paradigm. The first subchapter entitled ***Sorin Titel, portrait of a writer*** starts from the evocations of the weather. Mircea Ivănescu remembers Sorin Titel as a bright figure and as a man passionate about his art, because he fully assumed his condition and lived it with *religiosity*. Livius Ciocârlie, looking back, realizes that, although Sorin Titel created the impression that he was trying to discover those around him, in fact, he was in an exercise of rediscovery. When Sorin Titel joins a group that allows itself certain freedoms (1956-1957), he will be drastically sanctioned by the political power: he is expelled from the Faculty of Bucharest and will finish, only in a few years, his studies at Cluj. Fănuș Neagu also remembers the episode of expulsion from the *Faculty of Letters*, thinking that this episode was for Titel *his first death*. The second subchapter entitled ***The dimension of artistic creation*** considers the literary evolution of Sorin Titel. The period of artistic maturity indicates a change of readings and an embrace of the techniques of the French *New Novel* which involved a contestation of everything that would be understood by conventionalism. Sorin Titel was in a *long search* for modern narrative strategies and the meeting with the formula of the French *New Novel*, its prolific and non-referential style influencing his literary destiny. The writer's work stands out for its authenticity and the originality of the writing differentiates it from other works, becoming even a literary model. His novels, shocking by the depth of the issue, are: *Pasărea și umbra*, *Clipa cea repede* and *Femeie, iată Fiul Tău*, fundamental texts by the force to concentrate the human. We have found that Sorin Titel, as a *Mitteleuropean*, fully takes over the methods of *textualism* and *intertextualism*. The third subchapter entitled ***The dominants of the prose of Sorin Titel: The native Banat – The imaginary Banat and the theme of loneliness*** reveals the main topos of the writer's creation and the way in which he transcends in a symbolic representation. Sorin Titel was the expression of a cultural space marked by much interference, given that his native Banat was an integral part of a great empire. The picturesque *Imaginary Banat* comes from the contrasts captured in the fairs and markets of Banat. It is a strange world in which mothers mourn their prematurely dead sons, a world in which young people remain unchanged all their life and in which they live on the border between dream and reality. The writer's childhood spent in Banat with his maternal grandparents in Margina village will be found in his prose, keeping

unchanged the names of places such as: *Pădurea de la Turcoane* or *Balta Caldă*, and the names of his heroes have roots in his family history: Crăciunescu, Sofia.

The third chapter entitled ***Formulas of creation. Necessary interrogations*** begins with the subchapter *The influence of The New Novel in the choice of some narrative strategies*. We have started in our intercession with theorizing the *New Novel* which is understood as an experiment that takes paradoxical forms, because it tends to completely disperse to the person of the author, and the reader is given the status of investigator who may find a meaning in the evidence that is the novel itself. The original narrative structure of the *New Novel* assumes the cinematographic procedures: the editing, the cutting or the representation of an entire series of snapshots for which the reader may find the meaning. The second subchapter ***Why other narrative strategies? Necessary interrogations*** highlight the fact that writers from the first decades of the post-war period rediscover the text and use it to be a generator, in its turn, of other texts vested with the function of authenticity. The narrative style is configured to such an extent as to push the imagined universe into a territory between two realities that eventually fade and become transparent. One becomes the agent of the act of passing through the mirror, of transcending the real, this is generally a chosen spirit, a chosen nature, a hypostasis of the noble spirit of the writer. Starting from the association between the spider's web and the complicated fabric of the imaginary universe, one can perceive the role of guide of the narrator who can keep you captive in a labyrinth of signs. The universe imagined by the writer has a strong cinematographic component. In the third subchapter entitled *Re-reading of the short prose: Copacul (1963), Valsuri nobile și sentimentale (1967) and Noaptea inocenților (1970)*, we have followed the ways in which the writing of Sorin Titel transcends the real in a surreal or “*in a deconcentrated imaginary*”¹, as Dumitru Micu calls it, a fact possible through the discontinuous narrative flow. Sorin Titel manages to transfer to myth the epic substance of his texts because the characters' experiences are exemplary, and the temporality is blurred by one-to-one formulations. The intention to mythologize the text is clear, especially by overbidding of the sign which is a representation of the myth whose role is to render unaltered the atmosphere of Banat from his childhood. In his stories, time seems to refuse to flow and remains stagnant in a picture with strong expressionist resonances.

The fourth chapter entitled ***Re-reading of the novel Femeie, iată Fiul Tău, argument for the acceptance of the writer by the literary canon*** highlights the myth as a literary method that can lead to a new literature. The archetypes that set up the writing of Sorin Titel may be cut of the text only if one uses an ontological hermeneutics that will mean a *restitutio* of the world that generated them. The fictional world is rewritten according to the inexorable

¹ MICU, DUMITRU, *Suflet delicat*, in *Caiete Critice*, publication edited by *Viața Românească*, Bucharest, no. 1-2/1984, Bucharest.

ancestral patterns in which the sign encodes and decodes and both the social monograph and the psychological monograph are the expression of a cultural code. As a matter of fact, the prose of Sorin Titel rewrites a cultural model by referring to culture as a *mental reality* that inaugurates the factual space and defines it according to its own norms and beliefs. The first subchapter *The chronotope as a source of authenticity* starts from the sacred geography recognizable in the writing of Sorin Titel. The sacredness of a certain space is conferred by the cosmogonic myth, which tends to be updated periodically on the occasion of the great holidays. The sacred geography of the prose of Sorin Titel has as a premise, for the spatial dimension: *Banat or province*, and as a spiritual dimension: *melancholy*, that sensory imprint specific to the entire Romanian universe. Sorin Titel took over the mythical dimension of existence and revealed it every time disguised to preserve the mystery. In the third subchapter entitled *The biblical narrative as hypertext: Sophia and her four sons*, we have showed how the biblical narrative is a source text or as a hypertext for the writer's masterpiece. The novel, which finds its roots in the biblical history, is built on the principle of parallel planes in which the motif of the *double* is found. Sacrifice takes place as an expression of love, for only through sacrifice the twin brother, the *Other*, may be saved. The relationship between Marcu and the three brothers is a rewriting of the biblical scene between *Joseph and his brothers* who, envious of their younger brother because he is so loved by their father, will sell him as a slave and will claim that he died. In *the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Genesis (Genesis): 37 – 3, 4, 20*, the source text is given for one of the most important themes in the novel: *fratricide*. *The myth of the fratricide* is reinterpreted in the text and is found in the multiplied hatred of the older brothers towards the little one that the mother's love cannot fully defend, causing him unhappiness and loneliness (a different death from the biblical Abel). The narrative structure of the novel *Femeie, iată Fiul Tău* is limited to some great themes that have here the function of updating of the cultural code, themes such as *the eternal return and the double*.

The fourth subchapter entitled *Re-reading in a theological key: The Christ myth, an universal cultural archetype* has as a starting point the evocation of the tragic moment of the Savior's crucifixion (the Virgin Mary, transfigured by grief, cries at the feet of her crucified Son), acquiring impressionistic valences in the text. It is clear that once transposed into myth, the *Christ* destiny will be rendered by a distinction between *homo religiosus* (Mircea Eliade) and the hermeneutics. Obviously, the one who assumes the condition of *homo religiosus* will be eminently interested in *the History of Salvation* associated with *the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ* and the soteriological implications, while the hermeneutics will follow the paradigm that led to the occurrence of the story. *The Christ myth* will meet the apocryphal evangelical imaginary.

In the fifth subchapter *Re-reading in a theological key: Mother and Son, imago mundi*, we have evoked the suffering of the Mother that transcends the theological sphere and refers to all humanity. In the novel *Femeie, iată Fiul Tău*, there is only one connection of the Mother, and that is with her Son. The novel of Sorin Titel empties of the sacred the relationship between God (Son) and humanity (Mother), because the epic scenario descends into the world and the stories of the two Marcu and the two Mothers will lead the discourse and invest it with an initiatory role. The history of the double Habsburg Marcu and Marcu Crăciunescu, but also of the two Mothers rewrites the desecrated relationship Divine – human and, in the end, deifies it. *The Orthodox Mariology* questions the solidarity of the Virgin Mary with the mankind and the novel of Sorin Titel also talks about this mediation between man and God. The title of the novel lay at the foundation of many theological interpretations that converge on the idea that man's alienation from God was eradicated by the exemplary gestures of Mary and the Savior, who does not forget his mother, as he does not forget the fate of humanity. It is emphasized that the words of Christ, by which Mary is left in the care of another psychic son, are a Testament dedicated to humanity. The spiritual dimension of this Testament transcends the human boundary and brings man, again, into communion with God. The other presences of the Virgin Mary in Holy Scriptures have the role of reaching to this biblical Testament essential for the Christian dogma. As an example, the wedding in Cana of Galilee is evoked when the Mother of God becomes the first Apostle to present Christ to humanity.

In the last subchapter *Sorin Titel, a paradigmatic writer*, we have considered the epic scenario in which the description plays a significant role in the rendering of this new *Tower of Babel*. Carrying forward the pertinent observations of literary criticism, we were able to find, after the *re-reading* of his prose, other processes of narrative or themes such as: *reconsideration of ridiculous, marginality or fragmentarism*. As a matter of fact, Sorin Titel is largely assumed by the '60s generation, and about this generation Nicolae Manolescu recognizes the merit of the metamorphosis of writing, with all the aesthetic gain, showing that it does not return entirely to the '60s generation, but also to the previous one.

Moreover, it has been shown that after re-reading of the work of Sorin Titel, he must find his place among the canonical writers and only if his concern for fundamental themes such as *loneliness, death, innocence, loves* may be revealed. Sorin Titel manages a process of transcendence, of transition from individual to collective, from the small man to the idea of humanity, which makes his work even more valuable and different in an *imaginary geography* compared to the work of others authors.

Consequently, in this PhD thesis, we have revealed the success of the reform of Romanian prose after a decade in which the realistic-socialist dogma annihilated the aesthetics (1950-1960) and we have proved that this renewal is largely due to Sorin Titel who is a maker, a head of a literary school, idea that we have illustrated in our extensive exercise of re-reading of his prose.

Therefore, we argue that Sorin Titel is a writer who must be assumed by the literary canon that needs the writer's contribution to rediscover new creative models useful, we would even say necessary, to circumscribe the Romanian literary phenomenon in the context of European modernity.

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