

Abstract: *The article aims at highlighting the valency of the different “meta” markers of a literary work initially prohibited in the totalitarian regime. Studied from the point of view of their orthography, phonology, morphology, lexicology, semantics and pragmatics, the “meta” markers reveal their inner referential capacity for providing the necessary clarifications both in the cultural spaces the novel evokes and in those to which it addresses.*

Keywords: *“meta” markers, testimonial fiction, text production, metalanguage, metatext*

About a novel and its historical meanders

Written by Paul Miclău, the novel entitled *Roumains déracinés* (Miclău: 1995) is the work of a Romania-born French writer who lived the exile nowhere but in his fatherland. This text of a documentary value (‘chroniques’, according to the indication of the subtitle) is the offspring of a totalitarian regime and the expression of the author’s literary dissidence. The themes of the book stand proof of the deportation, the terror-inspiring pressure from the secret police, the beginning of a unique kind of censorship, the repression of the intelligentsia, a perverted outlook on life, forced labour, the so-called ‘cultural revolution’, and so forth.

By enumerating these main threads of the novel, we may create the impression that the political is overpowering the aesthetic function of the writing. Far from it, *Roumains déracinés* is a poetical piece rare in its kind. It comes out of the mind of a writer in love with French, it comes as the work of a perfect bilingual, a militant francophone, active in his country of birth, Romania. As a matter of fact, the writing we are discussing is a perfect match to the literary atmosphere of the nineteen eighties, when what dissident writing puts at stake ceases to come from a political direction and when its testimonial role is dictated by the search of new modalities in text-production.

The very historical content of the book is nothing but the expression of the uprooting experienced by peasants in the Banat zone. Inhumanly treated, they were displaced from this south-west part of the country into the barren plain called Bărăgan, somewhere towards a distant end, in the south-east.

This novel written in French in 1985 cannot be published once the censor says no. The author sees himself compelled to translate it into Romanian in a purged form which can come off the press in 1989, but not under the first title of *Blood Treasure* (*Trésor de sang*). It might have been taken as hinting at the political line of the dictator Ceaușescu, with his malpractice of sweeping away whole Romanian villages. Thus, the author applies self-censorship on the title, gives up massive parts of his text and the mutilated novel gets to be known as *The Treasure*. Such a title no longer alludes to the tragic destiny of the Banat peasants forced to get a taste of exile in their own country.

The year 1944 witnesses the publication of the integral version in Romanian, the version which puts aside the dash as a conversational mark and is still shy of using the original real names of the characters in the French version. Thus, discourse occurs like an uninterrupted tape, the words of the characters are introduced without punctuation marks, and the author’s intrusion is the more subtle as it is not graphically distinguishable from the way the characters themselves intrude upon the scene discursively. Within such a type of continuous writing, it is only for a change in the deictic system to signal every polyphonic valence.

The integral version in French will not be published until a year later, in 1995, with the Publisud publishing house in Paris, and this version will be awarded the European literary prize of the Association of Writers of French Expression, one year later.

This book, however, does not stage only the drama of political terror, cultural amputation, moral annihilation, uprooting. It is a fresco of the traditional values in the culture of a country with deep orthodox feeling, to which French cultural values are added, recommending its author as one of the significant Romanian and also European francophones.

* Maître de conférences, dr, Université « Dunarea de Jos », Galati

Partaking of a strong autobiographic nature, the novel simultaneously follows the way up in the world of a man who is none other than the author as narrator and fictional character. Home-leaving and the relegation from the world and from genuine culture come out against a background of detailed presentation of peasant morals and customs in the village called Comoriște. This is the setting in which Paul Miclău was born. A second setting is supplied by the academic background of Romanian universities, part of which Paul Miclău is today.

The author sets himself a task, namely 'une défense et illustration' of the Romanian language and culture within a novel worked out in French, side by side with 'une défense et illustration' of the French language and culture in terms of ideological pressure, secret police action and cultural perversion. Under such circumstances, both for the author and for the narrator-character, the French language and culture become a challenge and a weapon against this fast incurable sickness with scores of facets, which is, alas! called 'cultural revolution'.

One may wonder how the writer can achieve his daring goal. At the level of theme, he achieves an astoundingly harmonious fusion of the elements making the specificity of the two cultures: Romanian and French.

At the level of writing techniques, he makes use of metalanguage and metatext, in order to get the French reading public (implicitly, French culture in the long run) familiar with facts, rituals, habits and customs manifest within a culture that is too little known to the French spirit.

The 'meta' markers and their meaning in Paul Miclău's text

The code of metalanguage and metatext must be part and parcel of the competence displayed by the two participants in interaction through writing. In his creative moments, the author is supposed to watch out for potential points of semantic tension: ambiguities, vague terms, polysemantic items. In order to achieve his purpose, the writer resorts to a number of techniques meant to neutralize the indicated tensions, thus ensuring the readability of the sequences, as well as a correct interpretation of the whole. In his turn, the reader is also expected to recognize the metatextual inserts so as to demonstrate that his reading is active and cooperative. In this way, both sides involved in the processes of writing and reading are in search of textual adjustment both to co-text and to the context of situation, to an epistemic condition, to a suitable socio-cultural code, at any moment negotiating them and then restarting negotiation. (Dima, 2000: 159-171)

In their capacity of polyphony-generators, the formants and the metatextual inserts function as if a reader or a character of the book were not apt of understanding or of accepting the sense of the message. The problem is posed with even more intensity in the case of a recipient placed at a certain distance from the writing in space or/and in time. The explanation for it is that certain notions or even whole chunks of the text may be wrongly or partially received, with a huge difference from the time they reflect or the geographic and cultural realities in which they are born.

To make the reading public know and understand – while in the space of France (they are contemporary with the publication of the book, but not with the events unfolding in its pages) – objects, man's activities, communal rituals, folk customs, words and idioms from the Banat region, not to mention all the atmosphere of the communist regime with everything it entailed, Paul Miclău is additionally careful about the potential zones of semantic tension.

The ensuing text has a relatively simple plot, yet it is achieved in an impressionistic and non-linear way, in which the chunks of the narrative are interrupted – and not in few cases – by passages of overflowing lyrical emotion and especially by what constitutes our focus of attention in the present analysis, namely fragments of metatextual presentation. Whether we are confronted with pure metatext or text and metatext introduced in overlap, in a fusion of styles telling of the author's craft and talent, the number of metatextual contributions is so high as to surprise any literary critic.

According to the expert opinion of Mariana Neț (1989), in such cases a text stops being a point of reference for a sub-world of the real world and starts telling about one of its own sequences converted into a possible sub-world which is now turned into the internal referent of the text. Actually, this phenomenon is in accordance with the idea propounded by Valeria Guțu-Romalo, who asserts that, at a different level, the referential function of metalanguage is characteristically performed by an orientation of the object-language towards the represented referent (Guțu-Romalo: 1985).

Paul Miclău's novel illustrates both ideas when metalanguage and metatext are handled with mastery, and this mastery marks an intention and a certain textualization skill, as long as the metatextual fragments, as already noted, are considerably more frequent than in other narrations.

From now on, we will be concerned with a survey of 'meta' markers occurring at the level of language and those going beyond this level, strictly speaking. Within the former group, we can think of metagraphic, metaphonologic, metamorphologic, metalexic and metasemantic markers, whereas the latter group is made up of metapragmatic markers.

Metagraphic markers

a) [:], colon followed by explanation

"Lénine, son 'génial' prédécesseur, avait inventé le triple mot d'ordre: appui sur les paysans pauvres, alliance avec les 'moyens' et lutte acharnée contre les Koulaks". (Miclău, 1995: 43).

b) [-] dash

In the uncensored Romanian version, as already shown here, the dash marking a conversational exchange is never used. In the French version, the dash is used, but we can signal another technique too, the one replacing ordinary direct discourse activity punctuated by dash or quotation marks. The text from page 285 to page 290 is arranged in two columns and a footnote explains to the reader this writing technique that manages to simultaneously orient the reading:

"Lecture parallèle de colonnes, par paragraphes. L'enquête est dirigée par Flory Porcan, grand militant communiste, étudiant à l'époque. La plupart des réponses à ses attaques vient de Mamia Naé, notre collègue". (Miclău, 1995: 285)

At this point, in fact, the absence of the dash and the presence of the two columns act as a metagraphic marker, while the footnote is pure metatext which seems to point out the suggestion, by means of the two columns, of a face-to-face positioning of the inquisitor (the left hand) versus the defendants (the right hand)". (Miclău, 1995: 285).

c) [,], comma

Framing an aside, an apposition, a parenthetical group of words, the sets of commas point to a comment coming from the narrator or one of the characters:

"Plus tard, toujours en 1966, dans un séminaire à l'EPHE, dirigé par André Martinet, tu expliques une opposition phonologique de ton patois". (Miclău, 1995: 10).

The three specifications above, within commas, clarify the reader upon the time, space and participant coordinates for the narrated event.

d) () or [-], ordinary brackets or the dash that are typically used for a word of explanation or motivation.

"Oravitza s'étend le long d'une vallée d'au moins sept kilomètres. Forviz, la ville d'en haut, du côté des lacs (il y en a un 'grand' et un 'petit') était assez germanisée alors que celle d'en bas est restée plutôt roumaine. Après la ville d'en haut, en 1945-1946, tu es descendu dans la ville basse – Oravitza roumaine". (Miclău, 1995: 62).

e) [=], the sign of equality marks synonymy or an explanatory comment. This graphical sign surprises us both by its presence in a literary creation and by its frequency of occurrence. We will provide only a couple of examples to be distinguished through three authorial intentions:

(i) the clarification of the meaningful content of Romanian terms and their accompaniment by French synonyms within brackets and succeeding the equality sign: 'le président (= le maire)' (Miclău, 1995: 100) ;

(ii) 'le central (= le standard)' (p.101); 'cantine (= resto)' (Miclău, 1995: 110).

(iii) the typically Romanian connotation of those terms revealing to some extent the bitter irony of the author: 'Revolution = papiers' (Miclău, 1995: 110) .

(iv) the explanation of certain Romanian terms, side by side with a description of the referents: ‘sarmale = boulettes de viande hachée, enveloppée de choux – plat national’ (Miclău, 1995: 181)

As a matter of fact, all these explanations stand for a plurality of metagraphic, metalinguistic and metasemantic devices. They function as guidelines for a culture and a tradition which the author feels compelled to bring along into the Romanian area (those passages on French culture and civilization) or to enlighten French and ultimately francophone men of culture on Romanian values.

f) “ , inverted commas

They bring into relief certain terms.

“Le cercueil descend la colline, entre dans l’église, monte sous la voûte et là, il tournoie lentement, tandis que le ‘parastas’ (requiem) devient cantante. Une bonne partie de l’ancienne chorale est là à psalmodier pour leur copain. Quand on soulève le plateau où se trouve la ‘coliva’ (gâteau de blé), tes jambes fléchissent: mère se fait toute petite, s’efface et l’église vorace a envie de la prendre”. (Miclău, 1995: 16)

Inverted commas also play a part in the direction of connotation, irony, double meaning.

“Sur la terre de Comoriște la lutte des classes bat son plein. Mais des fois on a l’impression que ça tourne à vide. Pourquoi? Simple: l’ennemi n’est plus sur place. Mais à l’époque la théorie selon laquelle la conscience reste ‘derrière’ l’existence avait un grand crédit. Alors il fallait se battre contre la mentalité de ceux qui sont restés sur place. Surtout qu’ils étaient des paysans moyens, et Lénine a montré combien mouvante est l’attitude du moyen: travailleur par sa condition de vie, il aspire à devenir bourgeois”. (Miclău, 1995: 166)

Metaphonologic markers

The difference between the language with which the writer set out, Romanian, the idiom of the narrated world, and the target language, French, into which he takes his world, lies in the fact that the former is phonetic, whereas the latter is etymological. This difference is a constant preoccupation of the author, since the sonority of anthroponyms and toponyms, alongside the sound of words themselves, cannot find a transposition into French so as to suggest what it is like in Romanian. That is why there are terms spelt ‘à la française’. By way of illustration, we can supply ‘Louca’, ‘Tzaranou’, ‘Romulus Poupou’, ‘Voiculesco’, ‘Nègrou’, ‘Kirou’, ‘Ceauescu’ as spellings ‘à la française’ for ‘Luca’, ‘Țăranu’, ‘Romulus Pupu’, ‘Voiculescu’, ‘Negru’, ‘Chiru’, ‘Ceașescu’. Likewise, ‘Oravitză’ is meant for the French reader, when the town called ‘Oravița’ is mentioned. In the following quotation, the first and the third word between inverted commas are non-existent in French. They refer, respectively, to a permit for being allowed entrance into a canteen and a first course when having dinner, a kind of soup served in Eastern Europe. The latter is so spelt as to make the French reader pronounce like in Romanian

“- Ecoute, ça fait un bon bout de temps que tu prends les repas ici, mais tous le monde sait que t’a pas de ‘cartèle’.

- Bon, tu sais, c’est pour un ‘supplément’, s’il en reste. Une assiette de ‘tchorba’ ça peut toujours se trouver pour n’importe qui, et le pain, on prend ce qui reste de la portion des filles”. (Miclău, 1995: 246)

Metamorphologic markers

At the level of morphology, such operators can assume the forms of almost any part of speech. They can be adverbs (‘donc’, ‘certes’, ‘peut-être’, etc.), adverbial phrases (‘par exemple’), verbs of opinion (‘on dit’, ‘on croit’, ‘on affirme’), copular verbs (‘être’, ‘paraître’, ‘s’appeler’, ‘se nommer’) with their participial forms (‘appelé’, ‘nommé’, ‘dit’) or infinitival forms (‘à observer’, ‘à noter’), nouns (‘exemple’, ‘le fait que’, ‘genre’, ‘une sorte de’), numerals (‘le premier’, ‘le second’), demonstrative adjectives and pronouns or personal pronouns, with anaphora or cataphora

to confer cohesion to the statement, simple and compound conjunctions ('c'est-à-dire', 'parce que') and, last but not least, the heaping-up of devices.

"Notez bien la différence entre le maïs bouilli et le maïs cuit. Le premier tient de la culture (en Occident on le sert même comme 'garniture'), alors que le second est du côté de la nature (Lévi-Strauss): contact direct avec le feu, la terre. On en bouffait comme des fous". (Miclău, 1995: 23).

Due to their frequency of occurrence, the markers under analysis have been offered in a general enumeration, without indicating their presence on the respective pages.

Metasyntactic markers

Like the ones above-mentioned, these markers are to be found over and over again in the book, being in fact the predicates (single or copulative), the appositions, the relative clauses, the parenthetical constructions; interrogative patterns either requiring a piece of information or putting across conspicuous facts, therefore classifying as rhetorical questions; infinitival and participial constructions ('pour mieux dire', 'soi disant', 'ainsi dit') etc.

"Un texte, c'est comme un être: ça naît, pousse, se développe, comme on dit, et finalement ça meurt. Dans le fond, une fois écrit, un texte est mort". (Miclău, 1995: 23)

"Il existe aussi des cas où les sons et les lettres se superposent. Mais les significations, elles, peuvent-elles se superposer comme dans un tableau cubiste? Pas exactement de la même façon, car elles ne sont pas plates. Il s'agit plutôt d'attractions magnétiques ou de combinaisons de champs". (Miclău, 1995: 97)

Metapragmatic markers

Within this class of markers, we generally conceive of operators restating the message. Virtually, they are not anything different from (self)correction, confirmation, explanation, motivation, qualification, comment, opening and closing formulae, recapitulation, repetition, illustration, comparison, argumentation, and so forth.

"La vigne aussi, c'est toute une encyclopédie. Exemple: si l'espèce est tant soit peu fine, il faut la sulfater. Une vraie mise en scène: on remplit d'eau un grand tonneau qu'on transporte là-bas". (Miclău, 1995: 46)

... and the explanation is lengthened at the same time with the description of vine caretaking.

Metatextual markers

All this set of operators is simultaneously metatextual marking, since they lead to the building of some ampler sequences of pure metatext or metatext thought out in half-technical, half-literary registers, as shown below:

"La moisson du blé approche et il nous faut des cordes pour 'lier' les gerbes. On peut faire aussi avec des tiges de blé [repetition]. On doit se lever très tôt le matin [explanation] ; quand on arrive au champ il faut que le blé soit mouillé par la rosée [motivation]. On le coupe à la faucille. On en prend deux poignées et on les noue l'une à l'autre, là où les tiges sont plus minces, avant les épis [explanation plus description]. Toi, tu es très spécialisé: [...] C'est simple: tu cherches dessous les deux bouts de la lanière, tu appuies le genou droit, au milieu du tas de blé, pour que ça plie, tu enfonces le coude dedans et ensuite tu serres le plus fort possible. Une fois que c'est bien serré, tu fais le noeud, vite et méthodiquement. Là, c'est un art" (Miclău, 1995: 22).

If we consider the other composing codes of the novel, we will see the metatext is ever-present. We include here the components known as paratext, architext and intertext. In our case, the metatextual function of the paratext is illustrated in the foreword of the author which surveys the editorial misadventures of his writing. Everything is basically a word of self-defence, explaining to

the reader how the decision was born to write a novel in French: in order to offer cultural reference points to the reading francophone.

“[...] dans le document qui retrace l’exclusion politique, la déportation, l’amputation culturelle – autant de coordonnées qui marquent le contexte où un fils de paysan roumain réussit cependant à faire des études de français”. (Miclău, 1995: 7-8).

The architext also has a powerful role in metapragmatics. The second subtitle of the novel – ‘Chroniques’ – stands proof of certain communicative intentions, and the plural form of the noun announces a piece of writing that narrates history, but in a manner that comes out to be notliniarn but cubist while it unfolds before its reader. In its turn, the intertext with metatextual role is vividly felt and we will choose for illustration one of the most beautiful passages from the point of view of intertextuality. We find in it traces of the books that had an impact on the author in his intellectual growth, like Rimbaud as in the fragment bellow:

“Ecrire l’écriture. Le monde comme texte. Mais la réciproque aussi. L’écriture comme monde. Comme un vœu ; L’autre a renversé les voyelles : le A et le E, le I et le U, pour pouvoir y mettre du sexe. De l’écriture peut pousser le monde : elle devient la racine de l’univers” (Miclău, 1995: 81).

Recovery of spiritual values by a cultural dualism

The chronicles constituting *Roumains déracinés* delineate the events of the fifties going to the eighties, a span of time during which politics in Romania develops from wild forms – “la politique rôdait autour de nous comme un animal assoiffé de sang” (p. 68) – down to more subtle, yet tougher manifestations. Totalitarian nonsense and the grotesque urge of redeeming the wisdom of a whole nation from the perspective of Marxian thought have for a permanent background the pattern of the Banat spirit and culture which is extremely rich and varied. Myths, archetypal situations, symbols relating to original human experience are made familiar to the French reading public.

The main character – witness, observer, actor, narrator at once – depicts, in turn, religious rituals on holy days, wedding and funeral customs, ritual gestures connected with work in the fields, magic originating in superstitions. An artisan’s craft goes into the description of such things. The reader feels the religious ardor of the farmer who lives them and the refinement of the intellectual who can pass from literalness to metaphor in a stroke of the pen, like in the following passage:

“Le pain on l’entame dans un rituel. Grand-père prend le couteau qui sert à sacrifier les cochons. Dans ses bras d’hercule le pain est une petite planète : il en tourne la face contre sa poitrine et se penche sur la partie plate. Le geste est décomposé : dominé par une attention sacrée, il dessine de la pointe du couteau le signe de la croix, après quoi il coupe d’énormes morceaux. [...] Dans le calme concentré de l’homme se résume le travail fourni pour cultiver le pain et le porter dans cet état de grâce. Il y a là tout le combat contre la terre, le vent, la pluie et l’orage, contre les animaux et les hommes récalcitrants, maladroits, pour changer une corvée en art” (Miclău, 1995: 94-95).

Long chunks of metatext relate to all these traditions and symbols in a kind of polyphony featuring documentary explanatory as well as poetical intentions simultaneously. The French signifier causes the Romanian signified to be circulated in the world of great cultures. It also causes the call of the dissident to be heard and its topicality understood. Elements of French culture occasionally come to support already familiar notions. For instance, the Revolution is experienced twice: in Romania, the socialist revolution and in France the revolution of May 1968. The narrator imbued with French literature re-asserts at the same time with Baudelaire the idea of a correspondence between sounds, perfumes and colours while keeping alive exactly like the latter – the contact with the reader whom he addresses quite often and in a like manner.

“Toi, lecteur, mon frère, si tu n’as pas l’habitude, regarde attentivement : la goutte se fait rosée qui embaume ton regard, te transmettant un frisson où l’opposition banale entre vie et néant est supprimée à jamais” (Miclău, 1995: 126).

Proust is an explicit or implicit presence. In all those parts referring to time and duration:

“... la révélation te vint tout récemment après un dialogue d’écriture. Normalement, c’est l’événement qui crée le temps. L’écriture, elle, en crée un autre, ou plutôt d’autres : subjectif, affectif, dilaté, concentré, anticipé, ‘retrouvé’, etc.” (Miclău, 1995: 63).

Montaigne survives in the memory of the author-narrator through the formula ‘Écrire c’est apprendre à mourir’ (Miclău, 1995: 75); Rombaud looms with the idea of writing which creates worlds – like in his poem *The Vowels* (Miclău, 1995: 81); Camus marks his presence with the *Great Plague* afflicting the Banat village and the whole country; Villon regretfully ascertains the passage of time – ‘Mais où sont les neiges d’antan ?’ (Miclău, 1995: 274); Brassens and Brel cast a nostalgic light upon the places provided with a special semantic and emotional load – the sea at Sète (Miclău, 1995: 55) and ‘le plat pays’ (Miclău, 1995: 253).

In this discussion meant to unify the two historical, geographical and spiritual planes, the language handing them becomes worthy expression of the major questions on the meaning of man’s existence in a diseased world of folly. In this world where ‘le retour au temps mort est douloureux, le vécu du présent est tragique, l’illusion de l’avenir est absurde’ (Miclău, 1995: 64). The only way out is to live your life giving full scope to your bodily temptations, fantasies, ideas and last but not least, your writing style. For it is only through love, uprightness facing political terror, while writing can build a ‘third space’ much more tolerable than the one before. It is the space drawing on memories, subjectivity, different duration, all of them re-occurring in the text like the beat of waves, the succession of seasons or the movement of scythe in the field.

The narrator-character-witness is aware of the fact that although it has reached the highly poetical climax, the diction is subject to distortions of all kinds, and is found to be hollow and fake. The brilliance of metaphors turns to ash and the world seen as linguistic expression loses part of its senses, actually it crumbles down. The wooden idiom is thus frustrated of its demiurgic characteristic meant to bring forth new worlds; its own death entails the death of beings, objects memories. The last judgement itself is displaced, pulverized and, all along, pessimistic for a while the narrator foresees the impossibility of restoring light and justice. The only redeemer is ‘la maîtresse écriture’ in an intimate embrace doomed to be fulfilled in a different realm. This is a beneficial nevertheless painful rescue.

“- C’est ça, écriture blessée, bannie du monde réel, on est infirme, toi et moi, mais cela ne nous empêche pas de faire l’amour, au contraire. Cette infirmité nous libère du monde trivial pour cultiver les noyaux de l’au-delà” (Miclău, 1995: 251).

The moment the flight of time freezes the writing winds up and the blank page narrows down to a black dot: it symbolizes the end of the book.

“Drôle de sensation quand on sait que dans quelques minutes ça va être la fin. Feuille blanche qui, à force de se rétrécir, devient noire. Allez, un brin de toilette, faut être propre et fraîchement rasé pour le moment où. La plume aurait envie de continuer son vol calligraphié, mais un verdict est un verdict. Elle doit descendre à côté des racines des fleurs plantées devant la maison. À partir de là, le hasard seul pourra dire si...” (Miclău, 1995: 289).

One cannot overlook the fact that the call of despair and revolt of a whole generation finds its expression in the refugee’s language, a language which has come of a free choice: an excellent French idiom over which the writer has mastery concerning the most refined nuances and the most varied registers.

Conclusions

Though the starting point is a dissident’s stance, the present book is a success from many points of view. Its author carefully trained in the French school of semiotics, approaches political issues in an original manner: fragmentary, polyphonic and poetic at the same time. His steady interest in textualization modalities could be remarked through the actualization of the multiple metalinguistic and metatextual markers which appear constantly in the novel. This study also allowed a way of

pointing out several reading layers. The events of the envisaged period and those in the main character's life, the blending of two cultures – Romanian and French – the self referential and postmodernist formula are keys for the reader's access into the text and the entrance of the writing in the francophone space and, therefore, in the written memory of mankind.

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