

THE GAME OF LITERATURE. STRATEGIES OF AVANT-GARDE DRAMA.
A CASE STUDY: GELLU NAUM'S *THE ISLAND*

Abstract: The present study deals with one of the possible deciphering interpretations of Gellu Naum's The Island, using the tools and concepts of pragmatic-semiotic drama. The critical investigation is a pretext meant to determine identity techniques for the avant garde drama. The stake in this reading attempt is to put the meaning of the text into perspective by highlighting the intertextual game.

Key-words: theatre, avant-gard, surrealism, intertextuality, theatre semiotics, thematization, actantial structures

For a number of reasons, Gellu Naum's experiment in the field of drama is the subject of a separate investigation in relation to his poetry. The most important argument would be the inability to fully integrate drama into the field of literature, on account of its being a paradoxical form of art. Double-faceted and autographical, drama is at the same time both literary production and actual performance, both text and representation.

Therefore, its subordination to a different genre requires the introduction of different criteria, more or less specific, appropriate to the constitutive conventions of drama. In this respect, the act of interpretation will include anthropological, semiotic, dramatic data of discourse analysis, provided (only) by the text incarnated in the letter, as researchers like Anne Ubersfeld, Patrice Pavis, Barrientos Garcia, Jean-Pierre Ryngaert etc. professed. If we stick to analysing the text only, that does not mean that we forget about the dual nature of drama forms, i.e., a "literary object" and "stage reality", but the interpretation herein does not have the necessary tools to investigate possible interpretations.

First, the term "experimentalism" receives a different definition in the methodologies that accompany the dramatic speech. Brecht was the first to say that any non-Aristotelian drama is experimental. In a sense this is correct, because non-mimetic drama enjoys a critical interrogation of all dramatic categories, from stage design, lighting, clothing, proxemics to the function of acting or language. It is interesting that exegete Michel Corvin differentiates between experimental drama (with its demand of systematic innovation and subversion of all codes) and avant-garde drama, without yet being able to identify exclusive specific procedures.

It is difficult to find in Gellu Naum's drama the experimental intensity of his poems. Nevertheless, his surrealist repertoire is certainly active both at the level of expressive procedures and at the level of symbolic images. We might rather claim that Apollinaire's "formula" is the one that guided Naum: "*We are here trying to infuse a new spirit into drama / Some voluptuous joy, some virtue / You will find happenings here / That add to the main drama and make it even richer / The change of tone from the pathetic to the burlesque / And the rational use of the unlikely/ Whether collective heroes or not / Who do not necessarily come from the world / But from the entire universe / For drama should not be an art of illusion / [...] / You, my dear audience / Must be the inextinguishable torch of this new fire (...)*".

The Island has been chosen as a case study since its symbolic significance contains an intense reflection of the writer on the concept of literature. *The Island* is a complex case of coding; by means of intertextual relations with the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, the text is organized at a latent level by reference to ideological, mentality, psychological, ethical, aesthetic codes of the 18th

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century, in a game of additions and oppositions, intersecting with the ones possessed by the contemporary writer and reader.

Therefore, the inner space where the meanings of text come alive includes several volumes: it is the authorial projection overlapping with those of the various interpretive communities. From the perspective of the game of literature the writer gets engaged in, a priority is to scrutinize the aesthetic practices intersecting in the text - those in Defoe's novel - and the way they are reshaped in a surrealist text. For example, each "moment" in the structuring of the meaning is "restored" by taking the reverse route of a hypothetical generative system, taking into account a new regime of representation, affiliated to some aesthetics of discontinuity. In our case, the reverse route of a hypothetical generative trajectory is driven by the ambition to discover the springs of thought that produced the text. According to a truth of semiotic thought, the attempted interpretation is contained in the text, in the sense that it is one of the possible meanings available to the prospective readers. If no interpretation can exhaust the complex meanings of the text, even more disconcerting is the case of a non-mimetic theatrical text, against which any methodology seems rigid, lacking flexibility.

The goals of the reading that we propose are: to crop textual sequences, to place events within the plot; to refigure a fable; to identify the types of dramatic events; to delineate the actantial roles; to investigate the status of the protagonist; to deconstruct the didascalica; to understand hypotextual relations. By investigating the way in which *The Island* decomposes and recomposes theatrical conventions, we can understand how literature and existence may be, how we can escape from the trap of a form of literature turned into convention.

The first sign of the text has a special status. At the level of content, the lexeme "island" works in a plurisemantic way: it denotes a space, for it seems that events happen on an island, but it is also a vehicle for several symbolic meanings. The symbolic encyclopedias define the "island that you can reach only after a journey at sea or by flying" as "the symbol par excellence of a spiritual center and, more specifically, of the primordial spiritual center"² In various mythological systems, the island is a complete and perfect *imago mundi*, a place full of privileges, an Eden in the middle of an ignorant and profane world. Psychoanalysis has already revealed a specific feature: the island is a refuge where the conscious and the will unite against the assaults of the unconscious. Was it the author's intention to create a utopia meant provide a comic X-ray of the World from an avant-garde perspective? Is the island from the universe denoted by the play an ideal representation of human existence? Or are we in front of a dystopia attuned ironically? A first interrogation of the title should not exclude any of the possible interpretations.

The title allows also a scriptural interpretation, informing about an epistemological option, descending from fragmentarism promoted by the gnomic romanticism; the island, the fragment, the monad confess an act of subjective, relative understanding, which the humankind has with regard to the world. An insular text thus becomes a corpus marked by a willingness of self-reflexivity: the meanings of the world are recycled according to some internal rules; the fictions in which the world becomes possible to us turn their apodictic character dim; the fragment turns into a hologram of existence and is part of the work of art. Such a text exceeds its precarious nature by a semiotic trick, because it admits its sign value.

The linguistic prescriptions compete with the dialogue in terms of quantity, for the theater of the 20th century turned their verbosity into a rule. Moreover, the main function of the Didascalica appears to be global, that of placing the text under another type of representation. Mimetic drama used to legitimate the dramatic world by concealing some "real" coordinates; non-mimetic drama intensify the unachievable effect by vague or contradictory deictic indicators. In the mimetic theater, the dramatic event is dominated by the verb *to do (faire)*, while in non-mimetic forms the event is refined in the discourse, and becomes affiliated to the verb *to tell (dire)*. Mimetic drama "forces" the character to identify with a real person; in the avant-garde drama, the character refuses the support of a possible referent in reality, emphasizing its status of a textual subassembly.

The Island includes different didascalica sequences as graphics, structure and functionality. Thus, the first didascalica fragment is an inventory of *dramatis personae* where the first two names,

² See Chevalier, Jean, Gheerbrandt, Alain. *Dicționarul de simboluri*, volume II, București : Artemis, p.155.

Robinson Crusoe and Friday are not supplemented by a label role; this explicitly gets the text into an intertextual relationship with a famous hypotext, a landmark in the history of novels, i.e., *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. Cautioning the significance is not minor, and the consequences are complex and, not infrequently, paradoxical. We may suspect that the author intended, in the good avant-garde tradition, to disanchor the text from the world, and place it in the vast field of literature. However, where is the identity of the new Robinson to be found? For a reader who accepts the convention of likelihood in the realistic tradition, the dramatic character molds onto the character from Defoe's novel; the "unfolding" of the referent triggers changes: first, the emancipated reading is scriptural, building the *topics* of the text based on self-referential isotopes. The text talks about itself, about the inextricable laws of construction and operation, about complex intertextual mechanisms by means of which cultural meanings are taken over, deconstructed and reshaped. But the writing that comments on the reflection of the real in distorted mirrors will attain the reflexivity feature. The exacerbation of the autotellism does not lead - as we said before - to an irreducible separation from the world, but, through a mechanism specific to the poetic sign that surreal poetics invokes so often, it reaffirms the original consubstantiality of words with things. In the melting pot of language, the writer reformulates the structures of the world, gets to know them and is born with them, the text has the power to experiment with the virtual aspects of the world, depicting it not only as it appears to be, but how it is in an ideal way.

Defoe's novel gained literary recognition: events, legitimized by probably by factual anchorage, became emblematic of the transformation of nature into culture; the proper name Robinson became a metaphor for the civilizing hero. The literary career of Defoe's book shows that this has shown a response in a particular context to an insatiable need of the human being for utopia, for the need to find the initial vitality again. For the 20th century reader, Robinson Crusoe is, however, a repressive closed text, limited by ideological coercion, a poor lens through which reality is perceived. Aware of the subversive power of irony, Naum Gellu changes the refraction angle to show another side of the world and literature. In the literal sense, *The Island* (an equivalent to a canonical reading of the novel *Robinson Crusoe*) is placed into abyss and used freely by the character narrator. In this respect, the strategy of intertextuality is a happy choice: the dramatic text is loaded with the ability to quote a foreign speech, to signify itself, creating meaning through the fusion of horizons.

The identity of the dramatic text in question is built through an ironic distancing from the hypotext and nurtures itself from the flavor of an oblique reading; like any other closed text, *Robinson Crusoe* leaves enough flexible room to receive playful meanings from the reader. *The Island* questions the hypotextual procedures and meanings, and uses them as pieces of a puzzle which are playfully recomposed. The reader who accepts the intertextual bet is offered some faulty communication and is required to restore the transvestite omitted meaning. Thus, depending on the richness of the cultural encyclopedia that the reader appeals to, the gap between the denotative meanings of the text and any parasitic ones can be quantified. The jamming strategies of canonical meanings imposed by Defoe's text from the first sequence are triggered by the very first didascalical sequence: either by integrating people like the Selkirke family – here the appeal is to extratextual information, because Robinson's adventure has the happening of a sailor named Alexander Selkirke as a related factual story -, or by superimposed instances: a pirate, Pierre Surcouf, the Mermaid, his illegitimate wife, a white cat, the Bedouins (distinguished as following: their chieftain will be converted into a guide, a dumb Bedouin and a Bedouin child) indigenous police, tourists, Coco the parrot, seals singers, a zebra etc.

This first heterogeneous didascalical fragment is symptomatic.

e.g.

A storm at sea. The ship gets shipwrecked next to a deserted island. The entire crew perishes. I am the only survivor. Saving a few useful things, such as weapons, ammunition, an umbrella, a hammock, a ladder and a watch. Am pondering on my situation. I'm singing a hymn to Providence.

MUSIC. A ROBINSONIAN LEITMOTIF, WHICH IS TO BE HEARD AT THE BEGINNING OF EVERY SCENE AND SOMETIMES IN THE COURSE OF ACTION WILL ANNOUNCE THE ARRIVAL OF THE ROBINSONIAN GROUP.

[...]

AGAINST ROBINSON'S VOICEOVER, THE ROAR OF THE STORM INTENSIFIES AND, WHEN THE CURTAIN'S UP, THE STORM IS AT ITS PEAK.

[...]

ROBINSON IS IN. HE IS DRAGGING BEHIND A ROPE BINDING THE THINGS MENTIONED ABOVE, PLUS OTHER. ONE END OF THE ROPE REMAINS IN THE SEA. ROBINSON IS ARMED TO HIS TEETH.

BOTH HERE AND IN THE FOLLOWING SCENES, UNTIL LEAVING FOR THE GOAT FOLD, ROBINSON IS ALWAYS FOLLOWED BY A WHITE CAT, WHO HAS ALSO SURVIVED THE SHIP WRECK.

ROBINSON SEEMS TIRED. IN A SELF-ADDRESSED MONOLOGUE IN A LANGUAGE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, HE UNTIES HIS UMBRELLA OFF THE STRING. THE CAT FINDS A SHELTER FROM THE SCORCHING HEAT UNDER THE UMBRELLA. FROM TIME TO TIME SHE COMES NEXT TO ROBINSON. [...]

ROBINSON TAKES HIS WATCH OUT OF HIS POCKET, HE SQUEEZES THE WATER OUT, AND HANGS IN ON A LINE. FROM THIS MOMENT ON, THE METRONOME CLOCK WILL KEEP STRIKING ON AND ON THE RHYTHM OF VARIOUS ACTIONS, IT WILL CEASE ONLY FOR MONOLOGUES OR COUPLETS. SOMETIMES ITS SOUND WILL BECOME EXTREMELY LOUD. [...]

ROBINSON: I have good reasons to believe that Providence would me like to finish my days living in despair, on this desert island. I am crying my heart out when I think about my fate. I often wonder why Providence takes its own creatures to perdition, destining them to this state of misery and leaving them helpless and hopeless, thus making them hardly thankful for the fate they were given.

(A pause for thinking, marked by the metronome. The outbursts of the waves punctuate the sentences of the Robinsonian monologue: the sea places commas, periods, etc. sound, obviously the same. Robinson continues his monologue.)

It's hard to answer these inner questions. But I find it possible to resist a lifetime without any shortages. So, let's be thankful to Providence.

Robinson raises his hands to pray. The metronome that beats the normal pace speeds up, sounding like a baton hitting the desk. The voices of the three parrots and two seals, only masculine voices, begin to sing against the canon. During the canon, two kids appear on the rock, and they will start singing at the right time, along with children's voices. (I, p. 7)

The initial sequence seems to contain information about spatiality, temporality, characters etc., but they cannot be totaled to give the illusion of reality. For example, the space is configured heterogeneously by the addition of unusual objects, some useless, some metamorphic (such as the watch squeezed of water and let dry). The burlesque abundance of visual indexes - which is Gellu Naum's recognizable signature - brings along the dissipation of the visual. Moreover, a subsequent fragment (written in uppercase) indicates that the protagonist ("the only survivor") is already "a paper being" with a recognizable identity, it is reified as a cultural sign (the music is Robinsonian, the character is self-referential as Robinson). The inner dialogue of the character symbolizes also by phrases like "pulling a rope behind him" etc.. Similarly, the enrollment in another horizon of representation, that of surrealism, is marked by the act of the squeezing the clock (a transparent allusion to Dali) and putting the object back to get dry. Along the way, the metronome clock will show the events (its rhythm controls Robinson's movements, he moves more or less slowly according to the beat of the metronome) and will measure, symbolically, the inner time of the crystallization of meaning. The objects recovered from the sea (and from the textual worlds built by Defoe, Beckett,

Dali, Ionescu) state explicitly or unconsciously the pleasure of the game of literature, the joy of revealing secret analogies between various genres of literature.

The didascalia exploit in a plastic way the page, they juxtapose different font types organized in oppositional series: uppercase / vs. / lower, normal / vs. / bold. Each font receives a distinct function to compel the reader to pay attention. The passages in bold that open each scene are double oriented: a series of statements quote exactly the epic titles of Defoe's work, achieving what David Lavoie called "the field of coexistence", in which the hypertext will construct meanings by interpolating sequences from the hypotext. The voice of the dramatic character echoes the voice of the character-narrator in the novel: each moment of the dramatic texture shows the distance between Defoe's century and Naum's, between these different age, cultural codes, attitudes, and aesthetics. The interpolation strategies, which reveal the mechanisms of a secondary development, turn the dramatic text into a dialogical, plurivocal, polygraphic entity.

Even within these first fragments appear quotations or statements that counterpoint the sequences calqued after Defoe's text; if the former seem to confer a transitive value to the text, building an effect of the real, the latter intensify the reflexive power of the discourse. It is reflexivity of discourse text Gellu Naum emphasizes. As the text progresses, the non- plurivocal, polygraphic mimetic statements, infested by parasitic conflicting information, exceed the number of mimetic statements.

II. I'm isolated and forgotten by the whole world, and I am bound to suffer. I have no soul to talk to and to comfort me. [...] I sing my own loneliness. I've met a mermaid and I'm falling in love with her. The pirate's story. I am bound to suffer, because my girlfriend is in an illegitimate marriage. / (...) /

III. The cabin is ready. Succeeded in pottery and other useful work. I'm running out of ink and hard tack. [...] There is a naval battle. I find my girlfriend and I see a balloon crossing over. [...] I save Friday and enslave him. / (...) /

IV. Friday's education. A dialogue with him. [...] While I'm sleeping in the cave, strange things happen. I wake up and I struggle with temptation. / (...) /

V. Serious discipline. Friday cannot commit suicide, which is why I'm teaching him how to dig. Life for life. A duel that could have offended a woman's maternal feelings. The balloon is filled with hatred. Circumstances force me to bid Friday goodbye and to head for the Goat Fold. / (...) /

VI. We are tired owing to the long journey, but we have little left to the Goat Fold. I go hunting. My mother turns out to be reckless, but also very shy. A moving conversation. I manufacture a few useful items. The story of a pirate's leg. We are trapped by cannibals. / (...) /

Act II

I. The situation is tragic, which is why I'm crying together with my mom. The pirate's adventures and rain. Randolph goes fishing. The arrival of King Mabolo and the follow-up. After I've knitted my socks, I propose to build an umbrella and find a way to travel in the shade. / (...) /

II. The Selkirkes are brooding my mother's future. The fight with the lion. A tender talk with my grandmother Adelaide, whom I'm making a leg. Randolph is founding the Selkirk dynasty, usurping some intentions of his father's, who is my maternal grandfather. / (...) /

Setting the fable (an operation called- according to structuralism- thematization) is a difficult project that engages the reader in a kind of pact. It is known that the fable is not a given text; so, restoring it is a subjective investment, an individual signature of the reader in the text, because it, as Brecht had felt, meets determined interests.

Thematization is rather complex an operation in a 20th century literary text, the reader has the possibility to have several initiatives: he can choose to extract the fable in a naïve way or to use the text upon his wishes, he can insert keys or links, he can propose original solutions, can convert the reading into a free interpretative adventure etc. Our option is to have a transitive update of the fable

foregrounded by the theatrical text. First, it is risky to proceed to labeling, generalizing and assembling discontinuous elements extracted from the text, precisely because the divergent information carried by this type of text circumvents the aggregation intentions of an eventful scenario based on causality. Secondly, we can quantify the distance between the "denotative" reading and the reading process which engages intertextual, symbolic, ideological skills.

The fabula consists of a sequence of eventful transformations: Robinson, abandoned on a desert island, laments his fate and sings hymns to the Providence. He saves several objects from the wreck and builds a hut. The Mermaid sets in, and Robinson has amorous intentions towards her, but these stay only at the level of discourse. It is Pierre, the Mermaid's former husband and former pirate, who goes in between them, makes a jealousy scene, and separates them. The Selkirk family is gradually introduced into the story: the old Selkirk recognizes his son (Randolph) after a series of clues (his city of birth, age, mole etc.); after that, daughter Mary is introduced, she runs with Pierre, and the family are trying to find them. Friday is saved and the Mermaid has an attempt at seducing him. Robinson and Pierre cross swords for the Mermaid. Mary intervenes. Mary recognizes his son, Robinson, after the same number of clues - name, city, mole. Later, Mary runs with Pierre and Robinson leads them to the Goat Fold to escape the wrath of the Selkirk family. When they meet them along the way, Mary and Pierre are hiding, Robinson talks with the pursuers and finds that he is their grandson. Mabololo, the king's butler, asks Mary, Pierre and Robinson to show their identity; as they do not have any papers, they are gated. Mary and Robinson cry together. The Selkirks appear, since they have not abandoned their search. Robinson knits stockings to his mother (Mary), lest she should catch a cold. Mary meets King Mabololo, who, judging on the well-known cues (city of birth, mole etc.), is recognized as Mary's former student Mab, with whom she had had an affair and a son (Pierre). In his turn, Mabololo recognizes Pierre as his and Eleonora's son. In the meanwhile, after a battle with a lion, out of which Adelaide stands victorious, the Selkirk family, traveling in a hot-air balloon, get unified with Robinson and negotiate the forgiveness of the two. Mary and Pierre steal the balloon, but it turns out that it was a fake balloon. Mary, Pierre and Robinson get to the Goat Fold, which is full of Bedouins. The Selkirks show up, engage in a fight with the Bedouins, and Adelaide dies temporarily in the aftermath. Mary is kidnapped by the Bedouins. Robinson has ecstatic dreams of goats and kids, the dream is interrupted by the Mermaid, who deplors the loss of Robinson's love, and by Adelaide, who comments on the nephew's allegations. Mary is found by her family, she gets separated from the Bedouins' Chieftain, she changes her job and becomes a tour-guide. Upon return to Robinson's plantation, it appears that it is visited by a group of tourists led by the former Head of the Bedouins. The guide finds his son Friday again and Robinson discovers the double betrayal of the Mermaid and of a cat, a betrayal certified by the presence of children, and of blue kitten, respectively. Robinson bemoans his loneliness.

The practice of implementing the fable in a transitive way shows the distance from the upstream text, i.e., Defoe's novel. In relation to the upcoming event, two observations are essential: first, it is no longer possible to separate the main events, the cardinal ones, from the secondary ones, the catalyzers, and therefore there are only false outbreaks. Second, causality is broken: we can read the text backwards; we can circumvent the sequencing of events without changing the key meaning of the play. Defoe's utopia is transformed into an ironical dystopia, the myth of the noble savage is written against the grain: loneliness is no longer an essential privileged status, but a deplorable one. The road to the center is one of failure, through a maze populated by human poses proliferating on behalf of a caricature with substantial identity. If in Defoe's novel events triggered meanings of initiation, the dramatic texture is marked by an endemic degradation. The beings participating in the scenario, some coming from different "stories", are built anamorphically: the Mermaid is a failed Penelope, Friday an usurper, and Robinson a degraded Ulysses.

If we were to analyse the text in terms of drama, and "measure" the difference between the time of *fabula* and time of *syuzhet*, we notice that the choice of the writer goes to isochronous representations, which give the illusion that events take their actual duration. The impression of verisimilitude induced by this choice is corrected by a second reading of the text. First, the dramatic scanning field is based on stereotypical event functions, organized and valued as binary oppositions: departure / return, appearance / disappearance, loss / recovery. However, the progression of events is

demobilized by a number of strategies. One is the allocation of “duration” comparable in size to dramatic nuclei (represented by key events) and to catalysers, which are less important (crocheting of stockings, etc.). In Defoe's text (as in any canonical text belonging to Realism), cardinal functions cover much of the substance of the text, while the details, which are under-represented, serve the purpose of keeping reality together. Could this equal treatment communicate something about the distrust of the (postmodern) man in the “grand narratives”?

Another strategy of derealization is the juxtaposition of events of opposed semantics which neutralize each other. It is true that every event is a significant moment that is open to disjoint possibilities; the canonical text is "forced" to choose a single solution, choose one effect for a cause. Like many other avant-garde texts, Gellu Naum's *The Island* prefers to leave some options open (Adelaide dies or not, Mary and Captain Bedouin split up and remain together), as if the text did not cease to get written alternatively in some other way. In the face of an open option, the reader is free to write the text according to his wishes, dreams, expectations.

Another strategy, that of a burlesque multiplication of an event, symbolically talks about textual semiosis, which is both infinite and limited. Thus, the counterfeit flash backs that counterpoint the analepses from the realist novel, the same event is inserted in the text, i.e., the recognition of the lost offspring (played, in turn, by Randolph, Robinson, Friday, Pierre), by genitors (Adelaide, Mary, Pierre, etc. .), based on similar clues (name / city of origin / mole of birth etc.). A longstanding narrative leitmotif in the realist novel, i.e., looking for the lost father / offspring - it rewritten in a derisory manner. The self-referential reading can make the reader wonder whether these multiplied recognitions are a symbolic mise en scene of a form of dialogism. Could the “affiliation” of characters to forgotten / lost identities not take into consideration the rules of literature? The space in which the characters are built is, in this case, the entire field of literary immensity, a giant palimpsest, where correspondence represents the secret order. The scene cited below is a significant echo of a scene from *The Bald Soprano*:

e.g.

SELKIRKE: You, noble soul! Are you in Edinburgh?

RANDOLPH: Yes, sir. My name is Selkirk.

SELKIRKE: Selkirke? Do you happen to have a red mole on your left shoulder blade?

RANDOLPH: Yes, I do, sir.

Selkirk: Do you have one?

RANDOLPH: I do.

SELKIRKE: Oh, Lord! How old are you?

RANDOLPH: Eighty-nine, sir.

SELKIRKE: Eighty-nine years old? My son! My beloved child! I'm Selkirke from Edinburgh!

RANDOLPH: Dad!

SELKIRKE: I've been looking for you for eighty-six years. Since you got lost, at the fair, that bloody day. What have you done since then?

RANDOLPH: At first, I embraced the noble career of arms. I fought in Flanders. Then, as time went by, I became father of a family. (*I*, p.22)

or

MABOLO: What was your father's name?

PIERRE: Misfortune, sir. A 58-inch shrapnel destroyed his signature.

MARY: What about your mother, didn't she tell you?

PIERRE: My mother was killed by the Bedouins soon after.

Mabolo: Memories of Nice! Eleonore! Sir, do you know who is your father?

PIERRE: I would give my life to know, sir.

Mabolo My son! ... You are my son ... Eleonore ... Nice ... I was a student ... That spring ... My son! ...

PIERRE Father!

(Hugs, cheers) (*I*, p 42)

A single anisochronic duration has another dramatic content: Robinson's dream, a sequence with quasi-anaphoric function.

e.g.

ROBINSON: I hear voices. If someone calls me in the night ...

THE MERMAID: It's me, Roby. You may come, sleeping.

ROBINSON: Then, I'll come asleep. Wait for me ... (He goes to bed again)

THE MERMAID: Roby! Come ... What is wrong with your eyes? Why don't they hear what I'm saying?

ADELAIDE: Listen, Kreutznaer, I do not interfere, but be gentle with women. (He shakes him violently). He is dreaming, can you hear?

ROBINSON: I'm dreaming, dear grandma ... I'm dreaming of those goats.

ADELAIDE: There must be a mistake. I'm not going to interfere.

(She keeps patrolling.)

THE MERMAID: Oh, Roby, your silence is giving me chills ... the mimosas of death.

ROBINSON (indignantly): Why don't you let me dream about those goats?

ADELAIDE: Shh! You'll wake up the others ...

ROBINSON: How could I wake them up? I'm sleeping.

SELKIRK: Go ahead, boy. We're sleeping like a log. [...]

ROBINSON: Can you hear that? She's patrolling. They sleep. And I'm alone with my goats. (*We hear goats bleating away*). Can you hear them? They're looking for me. Both in your breasts and in the others are they looking for me.

THE MERMAID: Oh, Roby! ...

ROBINSON: Yes, yes ... (Crying) The Bedouins have stolen them from me...

THE MERMAID: You don't love me anymore, Roby...

ROBINSON: Me? I do not love you anymore? Are you crazy! Who said that I no longer love you?

THE MERMAID: You're thinking only about those goats...

ROBINSON: I love them, too.

THE MERMAID: That means that you still love me, Roby?

ROBINSON: Me? Of course I love you. And I love you a lot. I take them to pasture in summer. And when the heat is up, they build their bower of young branches. And that entire cool is dripping on your forehead. And they graze ...

THE MERMAID: A, Roby! ... And I'll be waiting for you, too. And I'm faithful ... (*I*, p. 58)

Each dramatic technique included in the text is resized in irony: in classical drama, only the protagonist is entitled to a monologue; in the end of the avant-garde play, the voice "of one (only) survivor" (affectionately called Roby) is lost in the general verbosity; the catastrophe could be avoided by a *deus ex machina* intervention, but it turns out that the machine which comes down from heaven does not bring salvation, because it is a fake balloon; the resolution is not a happy ending, but a failure etc.

The representation scheme is also affected by implementing a new relationship between the word and gestures. In the mimetic theater, *quand dire, c'est faire*, the gesture prolongs the word, it gives meanings to moments of silence. Word and gesture, albeit at different rates, complete the same meaning. In the avant-garde drama, the relationship word / gesture looks different; most times, the event is only a word without becoming action. Theatrical gesture does not confirm the reply, because it is meant to vex, to produce perplexity. It is a game of mutual perversion and of accidents, which allow meanings to deconstruct and to rebuild constantly.

The network of characters defies the rules of actantial canonical syntax. The actantial model is recommended as a theoretical operator apt to found the syntax of the dramatic text, since it places characters at a far more abstract level than that at which they acquire a name and an identity. It is

known that a given text allows several actantial schemes by identifying different subject-object couples whose pertinence is assessed by comparison. Each class of actants can integrate multiple actors, as an actor can meet several actantial classes. If we decompose the plot into successive events (starting from a situation A to a final situation B through a series of mediations), we may obtain partial actantial schemes, which will aggregate into an overall assembly or will remain incongruous. The way in which the dramatic syntax is articulated gives information about the logic of representation. In general, non-mimetic avant-garde drama echoes the attempts to “tame” it by structural methods, since categories of such dramatic action or character / actor are transformed at their very inherent “core”: the events become real, the actors seem disanthropomorphic phantoms. It is still dramatic semiology that teaches us that a character (a quasi-person, with a given name, psychological, behavioral, ethical, cultural characteristics, and –thus- an identity) becomes an actor when taking a “fundamental process”. However, in *The Island* the essential predicates are simulated (the departure is always announced, rarely supported by gestures) or substituted with what Jean-Pierre Ryngaert called “microactions”, pseudoevents which can be interpreted symbolically (crocheting socks can mean the temptation of nothing or the tension of waiting in vain).

When trying to compose a typology of actants, the initial and final sequence qualify Robinson the same way; the verbs that combine in these sequences are only verbs of state characterized by semantic features [-Change] [-Agency]: e.g. *My eyes are shedding tears... I*, p.8 / *Robinson is weeping by the tree I*, p 70.

Robinson’s loneliness, sung from the very earliest lines as a dominant state, draws the reader's expectations, also shaped by Defoe's novel. The meaning protention - which means that the information according to which the dramatic scenario focuses on a unique character will “tame nature” - is invalidated in the next scene by overpopulating the island with various creatures: parrots, seals, kids (which is in an *ad hoc* choir of male voices and children voices that sing the Anthem of Providence); a hybrid creature, the Mermaid, is also introduced, which opens the series of court-forging: the Selkirkes, Pierre the Pirate, Friday, the Bedouins, etc; “disturbing” the essential premise of Robinsonism, loneliness, gives ambiguity to the status of the protagonist, with repercussions upon the global significance of the world represented.

If we ignore the isomorphic *incipit* and the *clausula* scenes, any other sequence of the text is constructed by employing at least four classes of actants, which will translate in syntactic terms the dynamics of the plot: subject / object / opponent / helper. The progression of the plot is achieved isomorphically by blocking the developing action through the intervention of an opponent. The imbalance (loss / absence) which results will be resolved / improved by the intervention of a helper. A new event will be created, which is in turn will be blocked, and so on. That is why, we cannot figure out a global acting scheme by simply adding partial schemes; as soon as a relationship is established, it is immediately dislocated in a continuous transformation to nothing. The game of solidarity and actantial oppositions is like a canvas that is permanently woven and then dislocated. Thus, Robinson falls in love with the Mermaid, but Pierre interferes, claiming his marital rights. The two contenders cross swords, but Mary, Robinson’s newly discovered mother, blocks the confrontation (she runs away with Pierre, thus triggering the anger of the family). Robinson tries to hide the fugitives in the secret enclave, the Goat Fold, but the place has been occupied by the Bedouins. Robinson is back, but the Mermaid belongs to another man.

We find that the roles that Robinson plays will be included mainly in two classes of actants, Subject and Helper; in this capacity, he will engage in action expressed by verbs of locative action (in sequences such as “*They’re on their way* (i.e., Robinson) *to the Goat Fold*” p. 24, “*We’re leaving for the coast*” p. 59, “*I’m coming home*” p. 63) and beneficiary (in sequences like “*I’m saving Friday*” p. 15, “*Friday cannot commit suicide because I’ll teach him to dig*” p. 24, “*After I have crocheted stockings, I suggest making an umbrella*” p. 37, “*An endearing discussion with grandmother Adelaide, whom I’m making a leg*” p. 43, etc..)

The plot contains a number of sequences of the ‘search’ type, which engage the actantial roles in a different way. As instances of the same actantial class, the Subject (Mary / the Mermaid) seeks erotic fulfillment; the Object includes, in turn, Pierre / Mabololo / the Head of the Bedouins and Robinson, respectively; Friday, Adelaide and old Selkirke have honor as their goal, while their son,

Randolph, is looking for power. Also, in the Subject-Object relationship, which can have an oedipal reading, the parents (the old Selkirke, the Head of the Bedouins, Mary, Mabolo, Pierre etc.) are looking for their lost offspring (Randolph, Robinson, Pierre, Friday, etc.). It is noted that, despite the politically-correct idea that Robinson is a protagonist (even the single character up to a point), he does not take on the key role of Subject, moreover, all the characters seem to fulfill, at a moment of dramatic becoming, the actantial role of Subject and Helper. The indiscriminate distribution of diegetic roles and functions, together with the discursive “dissolve” of any core event, causes indeterminacy and undermines the semantic “profile”. The textual instances must be considered as a place where meanings overlap. We previously mentioned that different textual instances were given various actantial roles, approved of within the sequences, although it is certain that the theoretical model works somewhat in a mechanistic way on a non-mimetic text (aporia is common, in fact, to most dramatic marginal texts of the 20th century). In *The Island*, the actantial model cannot be correlated with a psychologist approach, because the sizing of characters is not longer commanded by anthropomorphic projection; the inner dimension of characters is vague, the physical and psychological data, far from the usual portrait, are either divergent or labels without consistency. Consequently, the added values of meaning, marked discontinuously, does not lead to a result that satisfies minimum credible claims. If the characters have a psychological boundary, even a vague one, this is due to the information that the cultural memory of the Exemplary Reader take from the hypotext. The Encyclopedia of literature gives a semantic load to character names, providing them a more stable identity than the *flou* one offered by Gellu Naum’s text, because the meanings of the first text are hidden in the texture of the text. In Defoe's novel, the characters, especially the protagonist, relied on a constructive model with a highly referential value. Robinson's adventure has become a cultural prototype; through a sum of happy options, with civilizing effects, by appealing to a number of practical and moral commands, it turns the crisis into an example; the domestication of nature means also the reformation of the self, of human nature.

We are bound to say that the experimental resizing of dramatic poetics does not make *The Island* a negative rewriting of hypertextual meanings, doubting them as an alternative. As an ironic rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Island* wants to blow up the ideological conventions that used to build the world of reference, in order to impose the new Exemplary Reader another model of the world. Umberto Eco has shown how our judgments about “reality” and “unreality” of a literary construct are judged against the encyclopedia we operate with, if we change the Encyclopedia, adopting the one of another culture or that of another era, the understanding of world itself changes. The game of literature staged by Gellu Naum is trying to build other mental schemes, whose filters might make eccentric world appear as possible, competing with reality, and the “reality” that the human reason cherishes so much is made to appear poor and insufficient. The utopian project of the man-made paradise is denounced. The loneliness (evoked in the first sequence in false accordance with the hypotext) actually coexists with individuals marked by caricatural twins, who invade the space of the exile. The dysphoric feelings caused by the shipwreck that the character-narrator describes in Defoe’s novel are replaced by feelings of inadequacy (the spiritual center of the island, the Goat Fold was invaded) and erotic failure (the Mermaid is a failing Penelope). As to the deictic relationship between Robinson and Friday, this is sized ironically: as an accomplice to adultery, Friday is a usurper.

What is actually a character in drama? A first hint comes even from the dual nature of the dramatic text, a literary object and on-stage reality. The character is the same, always identical to itself, alographic from the text, both also autographic, embodied by an actor who cannot, even if he wants to utter the same lines, repeat the same movements on stage. The character in drama is a melting pot that brings together many beings: a real person borrows the attributes of a paper being, which, in turn, carries the ghost of the writer. We must not forget the etymology of the term, which teaches us that the character (derived from *persona*) bears a mask, and is a being in disguise.

As previously mentioned, the character is a complex sum of sentences. The set of signs that constitute is heterogeneous; the dynamics of the text changes its permanent profile. The attributes given by the carrier of meaning receive extra meanings by involving the character in events. By negotiating the meanings of the text, the reader introduces its own expectations, values, judgments, by

virtue of identification mechanisms, the character also receives meaning from the person who is reading / watching.

The equation is complicated when the character remodels another literary character, who gets built out of the dialogue of multiple instances. We previously noticed that the name of the character offers a contract of intertextual reading, for although the “character is built throughout the reading process by summarizing various diegetic roles that they take, this construction is based on a proper name already “loaded” culturally. On behalf of a successful reading process, The Exemplary Reader is bound to take into account the cultural encyclopedia, but the bundles of meaning “derived” from the two text machines, Defoe's novel and the surrealist text, diverge.

The particular attention paid to this effect comes from the feeling, perhaps paradoxical, that this character is emblematic of the existence (in real life / in poetry) of Gellu Naum. Robinson contains the idea of crossing and search, he has become a common name, condensing symbolically a generic condition, the human being destined to solitude. Robinson is also a character isolated from the civilized world - like Gellu Naum - the one who restores the trajectory backward, from nature to culture. As a literary character, Defoe's Robinson is frozen in an obsolete version. The new Robinson, reinvented in a playful way, will have a similar fate, too. And yet, beyond these representative conventions, beyond thematic and ideological stereotypes introduced in a way that escapes quantification, the significant feelings that created meanings remain. Perhaps Robinson is staging at his best the dialogic structure of each person, his essential loneliness and multiplicity. Maybe literature is a dream in a chiasmus or a metaphor with a potential of infinite spinning. Perhaps, after all, each of us “lives” within a character.

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