

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Croatian fiction functions mainly within representational models that can be described as „mimetic“. Relevant literary criticism inaccurately tends to define that fiction as „real-life“ („stvarnosna proza“) or „urban.“ Although those mimetic tendencies are in practice differently articulated, a significant part of this literary production tends to establish some sort of relation to the extraliterary realm. Political and social transformations in the nineteen-nineties represent a time of radical historical change, rather challenging for fictionalization.

Considering the complex relation between literature and reality, this research focuses on the contemporary fictions about the „reality of transition“. The research is based on the analysis of thirty contemporary fiction books, mainly novels. Methodologically, the first level of analysis takes as its object the poetics and narrative structures of the texts. This analysis results in common congruent elements and problematics, which then open up to a wider humanities-based interpretive practice, in an analytical move similar to that of Cultural Studies.

Using the epistemological framework of literary theory and the humanities, several problem areas that define *an imaginary of transition* are isolated: narration, identities, construction of space and time, problems of media and mediation.

The analysis and interpretation that follows reveals a complex image of transition in fiction. *An imagi-*

nary of transition is composed by assembling together congruent motives, themes and narrative elements, which are then organized in sets and interpreted from within a more general humanities framework. The subchapters deal with these sets of common elements.

After the initial chapter about the concept of the imaginary, in the ensuing chapters the main focus is on narration. The chapter „Narratives of transition“ introduces primary research material, thirtysome fiction titles, mainly novels in which the narrative of the *identity quest* is recognized as the significant and formative one. Next chapter, „Narrators of transition“ offers the primary typology of narrators and focalisation points. Using the criteria of relation to the complex transitional reality, we can classify typical narrators as follows: (1) *the privileged narrator*, close to modernist narrators, characterized by higher socio-cultural capital, (2) *the loser of transition (socially excluded narrator)* – the narrative position that is actualized in short narrative forms (short stories and multiple or variable focalisation), (3) *the active accomplice* – mainly in the genre fiction and derivatives and (4) *the travestied narrator* – the one that deliberately and explicitly uses the „voice“ of some specific position (dog, child, feral middle-aged woman). The additional type not derived by the same criteria is the narrator of (5) *complex narrations*.

In the fourth chapter the concept of *space* and *the production of space* is analyzed. The term „urban“, used as a dominantly positive label, even for the mimetic type of fiction, is further analyzed and problematized. The production of space in literary fiction shows that provincial spaces, countryside and small towns tend to be formed as Foucault’s *heterotopic spa-*

ces. The interpretation of spatial and identity relations reveal that spaces in fiction are produced as mainly modernistic, identitary, historical, thus not postmodern or supermodern *non-spaces*; they are articulated in fiction as *postsocialist spaces*.

The object of analysis in the fifth chapter is time and the narrative construction of time. Here it was necessary to begin with the description of the narrative composition of each novel and then move to the interpretation. The interpretation shows that in analyzed narratives the time of transition reveals itself as the one of *permanent liminality*. The transition betrays its own teleology, and becomes a permanent state. Furthermore, the transition is the period of a traumatizing suspension of social norms, as in the ethnographic ritual concept of *liminality*; the logic of inversion describes well the processes of transition.

The complex notion of identity is analyzed and interpreted in the sixth chapter within several subchapters. National identities and the important *heteroimage* of Serbs in fiction, social and class identities, generational identities, identitary oppositions and oppositional identities are the topics of analysis in those subchapters. The interpretation reveals that the dominant identity position of focalizing and narrating the transition is the one of *middle-class* identity. Dominant middle-class narrators find themselves in the state of constant rearticulation of their position, in the narratives about personal identity quests, and thus can be recognized as the identities of *liquid modernity*. Middle-class narrators tend to articulate themselves within the network of relations to *the others of transition*. The others can be representatives of the ideological voices of the nationalistic paradigm and

even chauvinist attitudes while dominant middle-class narrators take the position of democratic non-aligned representation. The others can be both so called *losers* and *winners* of transition – socially excluded people as well as the class of Bauman's „successful consumers“. The others are often representatives of non-urban values and this complex representation is revealed both as an important research topic as well as an epistemological problem.

A broad notion of media is the topic of the last analytical chapter. A relation between the fictional and real media field reveals that the context of new private media is often a theme in novels. Problems of *mediation*, *hypermediation* and *the hyperreal* are discussed in several subchapters, opening the dialogue between postmodernist and Marxist theories. The last subchapter deals with the problem of representation or mediation of „the real“ in contemporary fiction using several examples of „transition as a hallucination“.

The last chapter offers a synthesis of *transitional imaginary*. The chapter introduces the problem of the *literary field* and offers an interpretation of the articulation of the field in new transitional context. A look at the synthesis of *the imaginary of transition* opens new foci of interpretation: the questions of „the real“ and the mimesis, relation between modernism, modernity and postmodernism. Finally, it points to the need for a reconsideration of the academically neglected problem of middle-class identities in socialist and postsocialist societies, and opens the broad question of ideology at work in transitional processes. It can be hypothesized that the transitional narrative identities, mainly constructed from a *point of view* of middle-class citizens, approaches and conceives Croatian transition as some

sort of ideology in progress. The ideological mechanisms of hegemony and Althusserian *interpellation* in the complex context of neoliberal capitalism and transition are described in the final remarks of this thesis.