



Amalia Cotoi

Mircea Nedelciu's Community of *Tratament fabulatoriu*

Abstract: What makes a text a piece of art is the construction of fiction. But what happens when the gap between reality and fiction is theoretically diminished by the so-called (literary) involvement in the real world? Which is, in this case, the possibility to talk about a literary community as a new community? In addition to attempting to answer these questions, I will follow the way in which Nedelciu's literary community reveals something about the common sense and the common words used in social life and political practices at the end of the last century in a country under a totalitarian regime.

Keywords: Romanian Literature; Mircea Nedelciu; Communism; Community; Politics.

AMALIA COTOI

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
amaliacotoi@gmail.com

DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2017.32.19

Using words such as “politics” and “communism” when talking about literature in a post-communist country like Romania, can mean only one thing: a literature infested with socialist messages. In Western theory, on the other hand, the meaning of these two words associated with literature goes further than that.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot are two major French philosophers who, in the line of a new direction in the '80s, talk about the importance of a new approach in the discourse about community. According to them, communism and community could be interchangeable words if we put aside the political meaning of the first one. Both mean the fact of being in common, typical to each group of people. Thus, literary communism represents the sharing¹ of a community in and by its writing or by its literature.² Political community, on the other hand, different from what we have called above “political meaning,” is a literary community “consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing.”³

Published in 1986, in a communist Romania, Mircea Nedelciu's novel, *Tratament fabulatoriu*, which we will quote in the next pages, is one of his most relevant



writings when talking about communities in Romanian literature. Nedelciu prefaces his novel with an essay full of quotes by Marx and by other left-wing Western intellectuals in order to divert the censors' attention from the novel to the preface. With a preface written as an "ideological lightning rod"⁴ of the novel, Nedelciu's fictional world could stay undisturbed and unchanged, meaning that it could speak about whatever the author liked in a world in which "whatever the author wants" has to be in conformity with what the state wants.

What I will be examining in the following pages is the way Nedelciu's *Treatment fabulatoriu* works in relation with what Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot call literary community.

We can notice first that there are two communities we have to deal with. The first one is the one that we'll call "the community of doctor Abraș," the community of the village Fuica, where Luca, the protagonist, arrives at the beginning of the novel, after he got a job there as a meteorologist. Then there is a community only known by Luca, a community placed in a space called "Valea Plânșii," a community coagulated around an old mansion that is currently only seen and reached by the protagonist.

The community of doctor Abraș is composed mainly of his wife Gina, an agronomist, Pascu and his wife, an engineer, Ion Ion, a painter, V., and a professor, Nelu. In the novel, the group of people in the house of doctor Abraș are debating about different topics like, for instance, the importance of literature in society or the border between normal and abnormal. But their major topic of discussion is Luca, the new meteorologist that has arrived in their

village. "Is the place Luca has seen a real one or an imaginary one?" "Is he like us or is he insane?" are the two questions that continuously come to the reader's mind only because the people around doctor Abraș are doing nothing else but trying to find out what's going on with Luca. This is just a smart technique used by the author in order to introduce the other community, in relation and in comparison with the world outside it. So, the "world inside," the community of Valea Plânșii, is firstly a community because it is put in relation with the other community, the community of doctor Abraș. The community is something that takes place through the other and for the other, according to Jean-Luc Nancy. The community of Valea Plânșii exists because Luca shares the secret of its existence and because the community of doctor Abraș, even if it continues to interrogate the existence of the other world, by putting it into discourse, brings it to life.

But the community of the outside world (outside with regards to the inside world seen by Luca) is seen as a community only in relation to Luca. It shares Luca's secret and his secret (his journeys to the other community) functions as a proof of the fact of being in common. Luca becomes part of this community through and in relation to Gina, doctor Abraș's wife. They, her husband and his friends, don't believe what Luca says he has seen, but listen to him only because Gina is interested in him and his stories, says Gina to Luca. Moreover, their intimate relation appears to us like a community of lovers only after all the men in Gina's life are under the same roof when she falls in love with Luca. The presence of an otherness is not a boundary between the character and the break out of his passions,



it is in fact only the exposure to an otherness that can make the character's passions break out,⁵ according to Jean-Luc Nancy. This is what happens in the case of Gina and Luca. Their love affair is a consequence of their meeting in a community, they cannot live outside this community because their passions would not have an otherness and also, that otherness which is the community of doctor Abraș could not be a community without Luca's story and without Luca and Gina's lovers' community.

In addition to Luca's entrance in the mysterious community, which cannot be identified in the real world of the village Fuica, stands a woman, named Nușă Păpușă, who is seen by Luca on a hill, near a flock of sheep. In comparison with Gina, Nușă Păpușă is only a fragmentary apparition, never a person in flesh and blood with whom Luca speaks, but her appearance at the boundary between real and imaginary makes Luca curious to find out more about the world he enters. Trying to find out if she truly exists and if so, who she is, is she married, Luca exposes himself to the new community. The singular being is "exposed, presented and offered"⁶ to other singular beings,⁷ he (Luca) communicates his passion, shares his curiosity and activates the context of being in common.

If in the community of doctor Abraș, the encounter between the characters happens always in the house of the doctor, in the community of Valea Plânșii, there is no such thing as property. Everything is for everyone. A proof of this fact is the lack of necessity of money. When Luca wants to pay for his drink, the waiter says that they don't use money there. "The objects of the colony, the land and some houses are important only because they can be used and

not because they belong to someone. They don't sell them and they don't buy them from each other,"⁸ says Luca in the letter to his ex-lover, Ula. The joy of their existence comes from the communion of mind and not from the acquisition of things or labor exploitation⁹. Even so, they are all doing research for a certain Marius. Invoked in their stories by all the members of the community, Marius appears only once in the community Luca visits. He has given away his property to the community, but has nevertheless asked a few men to research the past of his ancestors. He is what Luca calls a demagogue, a man who speaks not to describe the world, but to change it¹⁰. If at his first meeting with this world, Luca was surprised by the lack of secrets, by the fact that everyone shares everything with everyone, even with Luca, who is a stranger, step by step, people seem to think that Marius has a secret. But he's not the only one. The doctor of this community, doctor Șarba, talking about the implementation of a new system regarding family, in which incest could be allowed, asks himself if it could be possible to implement this system when some members of the community forbid him from knowing apparently innocent things about them¹¹.

This is not the only artificial thing we find out about this community. This is a community where nobody dies, where if a fellow is sick, after entering this colony, he will be cured. But to be allowed in this community, even if it does not imply special conditions, means the changing of the name of the person who enters. The members of the community make a suggestion and the newcomer accepts it or not. But even if he doesn't accept it, the name has to be changed.



While the “world outside” this world, the one of doctor Abraş, is questioning the existence of the world Luca describes, the “world inside” is aware of the existence of the world outside their world. A proof is the attempt of some of the members to escape, even if only temporarily, from the community they built. For the good of the community, Marius has decided to put a guardian at the border between the two worlds. Even so, the members of the colony continued to travel to the nearby city and, though everyone worked for their products, those members were selling them as if they actually owned them and, even more, leaving a community where everything was for everyone and money was not used, they, these deposited great amounts of money at the bank.

They were all sick, thinks Luca at one point. Their economy worked perfectly, their operating principles seemed viable, but they could not reach the present. The present to them is a sickness, an illusory satisfaction,¹² that's why they prefer to re-search the past of Marius' ancestors, in this way they can live in a past that allows them to be free, and also, to project the future they want, through the reconstruction of these stories.

“The character, says the author, in one of his many intrusions into the text, is an instrument through which a man – who writes or who reads – refuses to accept the Universe as it actually is, a way of refusing the world for creating anti-worlds, in order to rethink the future, immortality and, why not, to change the present from this perspective and with the help of this new position, a position of strength.”¹³ If we take this character as a member of the community of Valea Plânşii, we are allowed to say

that his attempt to create an ideal world can be seen only in relation to the characters of the other world, where the crowded buses and the small encounters between men on the streets generate agoraphobia. Luca lives in the community of doctor Abraş, escapes to the community of Valea Plânşii, but his actual world is the so-called “Fitotron,” a plant growth chamber with a double calendar (May in one part and August in the other), a metaphor for Luca's double lives.

To summarise, there are two communities. The first, whose commonality is represented by Luca's secret and by the love affair between him and Gina. The other one, instead, is apparently a community where everything is shared with everyone, even with a stranger such as Luca. In the first community, people talk almost all the time about the mysterious other community that Luca has found, even in their intimacy Gina asks Luca what the girl he saw there, Nuşa Păpuşa, looks like. In this other community they talk, for instance, about avoiding any religious sentiment, which is an exercise for inner freedom. They talk about their community as one where labour exploitation is prohibited, but for the good of all, one is in charge with the forest, one with the herbs, another one is in charge with the electric power station. So, although their speech tries almost all the time to glorify their freedom, even if it mostly seems a utopic one, their facts and the stories they share with Luca are evidences of its absence.

The community of Valea Plânşii is solely a community of demagogues, above which the greatest demagogue is Marius. “Marius is not the boss,”¹⁴ they say, they are all equal, the only difference between



them and Marius is that he gave away his propriety and now his propriety belongs to the community. But they all work for Marius, they all live in the past of Marius's ancestors and based on this past, they are going to write some future stories which Marius has to approve. Marius has a taste for common living, says Luca, he always hated the fellows who have something and do not share with everyone. He wanted a world in which everything to be for everyone and that world is the community of Valea Plânșii.

Communism as understood by socialists carries an idea and a project, while the community, the literary communism, marks/notes/attests a given fact, states Jean Luc Nancy. From this point of view, we can talk about *Tratament fabulatoriu* both as a project and as a given fact, both as a policy of state and as a policy of literature. This "overcoded fiction,"¹⁵ as Cristina-Eva Șandru names it in an article in *Phantasma*, tells, in fact, the story of the real world, of the relation between man and society, as Mircea Nedelciu says his prose should

do.¹⁶ The community of Valea Plânșii, a community that prefers the past and the future to the present, a community where everything is in common, a community where everyone talks about equality when everyone is a subordinate to Marius, is, in fact, the description of the Romanian socialist community of the last century. While the things that mark their communion make them a literary community, the Marxist ideology carried in the description of this community renders Valea Plânșii truly communist. Political both as relating to the system of government and to a literary community that makes by its sharing a conscious experience,¹⁷ *Tratament fabulatoriu* is the story of a double community, a historical and a literary one at the same time. A world where a political reality and a literary virtuality, as I. Negoïtescu states in *Contemporary Writers*¹⁸ come together and talk in a manner that is both esthetical and political, where political is understood both in terms of government and of conscious sharing of the experience of a literary community.

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NOTES

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Comunitatea absentă*, Idea & Design Print, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 64.
2. *Ibidem*, p. 49.
3. *Ibidem*, p. 64.
4. Mircea Nedelciu, "Avertisment la editia a II-a" in *Tratament fabulatoriu*, Alfa, București, 1996, p. 309.
5. Jean Luc Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 85.
7. *Ibidem*, p. 85.
8. "Obiectele coloniei, pământul, cele câteva locuințe sunt importante numai în măsura în care pot fi folosite și nu pentru că ele aparțin cuiva. Nu și le vând și nu și le cumpără între ei." (from the original text)
9. Mircea Nedelciu, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
10. *Ibidem*, p. 213.
11. *Ibidem*, p. 210.
12. Mircea Nedelciu, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
13. "Personajul este inșa și un fel al autorului de a nu accepta că el este chiar atât de urât, redus mintal, lipsit de voință, umil și laș pe cum i se mai întâmplă câteodată să observe că este. Personajul este un instrument prin care omul – care scrie sau care citește – refuză să accepte universul așa cum este el, un fel de a refuza lumea pentru a crea antilumi, deci a gândi viitorul, nemurirea, de ce nu, și de a schimba prezentul din această perspectivă și cu ajutorul acestei noi poziții, o poziție de forță" (from the original text).
14. Mircea Nedelciu, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
15. <http://phantasma.lett.ubbcluj.ro/?p=720&lang=en>.
16. Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă. Generația 80 în texte teoretice*, Paralela 45, București, 1999, p. 245.
17. Jean-Luc Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
18. I. Negoiteșcu, *Scriitori contemporani*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj, 1994, p. 316.