REPRESENTATIONS OF OTHERNESS IN EGINALD SCHLATTNER' S *THE BEHEADED ROOSTER*

Luiza Caraivan[*]

luiza.caraivan@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper analyses some forms of otherness discussed by Homi Bhabha, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Jean Baudrillard in their works. It also takes into consideration the works of Eginald Schlattner, focusing on the novel The Beheaded Rooster, where these forms of otherness can be identified.

The concept of otherness is connected to multiculturalism and nativism (as defined by Kwame Anthony Appiah). The process of 'othering' is also examined, as it has also been employed to underline differences and to distance the Self from the Other, causing exclusion or marginalization. However, the paper will also evaluate the 'value of difference' starting from Michael Chapman's remark: "Difference, or différance, does not confirm division, but transforms 'othering' from negative to positive premise"[1].

Keywords: multiculturalism, racialism, otherness, Transylvania.

Otherness is typically defined by difference, and recently it has been associated predominantly with marginalized individuals, who are excluded from the dominant group, who are disempowered, silenced, isolated due to various deviations or to social, religious, political and sexual differences. The preoccupation and fascination with the Other can be traced back to the beginning of human history and thought. As Simone de Beauvoir underlines, "the category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient

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[*] Lecturer PhD., "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce, Timişoara.

[1] Chapman, M. 'Postcolonialism: A Literary Turn' in *British and American Studies,* vol. XIV. Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2008. pp. 7-19.

mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality – that of the Self and the Other. [...] Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought"[2].

The concept that the self requires an Other to be complete and to understand itself has been expressed by many philosophers, psychoanalysts, sociologists, anthropologists and writers of all times.

The origins of the word 'otherness' (and its ambiguous use) seem to have been introduced at the beginning of the 19th century by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who was among the first to consider the other a constituent in self-consciousness: "Each uses the other as the means by which it achieves self-consciousness. This initially takes the form of desiring the death of the other"[3]. He accentuates the separateness between self and (an) Other, the alienation created between the two.

The concept is also used extensively in existential philosophy and in psychoanalysis. Jean-Paul Sartre's character Garcin, in the play *Huis clos* (*No Exit,* published in 1944) states that "L'enfer, c'est les Autres"[4]. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*[5] draws attention to the fact that women have been 'othered': "she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other"[6]. In the 1950s, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan made the distinction between the 'Other' and the 'other'; the other designates someone who resembles the self, such as the colonized people who are identified as the periphery that is different from the centre. The Other is the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity. As Sean Homer

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[2] De Beauvoir, S. "The Second Sex. Introduction" in W. McNeill, K. Feldman (eds.) *Continental Philosophy: An Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. p. 161.

[3] Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit* (translated by A. V. Miller). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 521.

[4] Sartre, J. P., *Huis Clos.* New York: Routledge, 2000, p.95.

[5] published in 1949.

[6] De Beauvoir, S., "The Second Sex. Introduction" in W. McNeill, K. Feldman (eds.) *Continental Philosophy: An Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. p.161.

explains, "the lower case other always refers to imaginary others. We treat these others as whole, unified or coherent egos, and as reflections of ourselves. They give us the sense of being complete whole beings"[7]. At the same time, the Self desires the other. In fact, this concept of otherness is the one used by post-colonial theories. On the other hand, there is the Other (capital O) which is the "symbolic order, it is the foreign language that we are born into and must learn to speak if we are to articulate our own desire" (70). Thus, otherness can be understood both on a psychological level and on a social level, as the binary self/other organizes every individual existence.

In the 1990s, The Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas also argued that the Self cannot exist without the Other and, furthermore, the value of the Other must exceed the value of the Self:

"I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an 'I', precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that make me an individual 'I'. So that I become a responsible or ethical 'I' to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself - to abdicate my position of centrality – in favour of the vulnerable other"[8]. "In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other"[9]. Conversely, the Other also requires the Self to redefine its existence.

When referring to the concepts of Self and Other, Lévinas[10] also speaks of "uniqueness" in order to express the "otherness of the other. The unique is the other in an eminent way: he doesn't belong to a genus or doesn't remain within his genus".

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[7] Homer, S. *Jacques Lacan.* New York: Routledge, 2005, p.70.

[8] Richard Kearney, Paul Ricœur. *Dialogues with contemporary continental Thinkers.* Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1984. p. 89.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

[10] Lévinas, E. *Entre Nous.* London: Continuum, 2006. p. 177.

In 1993, Jean Baudrillard proclaimed the beginning of "an era of production of the Other". The Other will no longer be killed, devoured, seduced, faced, loved or hated, it will be produced. In any case, "otherness is lacking and, since we cannot experience otherness as destiny, one must produce the other as difference"[11]. Consequently, "we can only remember that seduction lies in not reconciling with the Other and in salvaging the strangeness of the Other. We must not be reconciled with our own bodies or with our selves. We must not be reconciled with the Other. We must not be reconciled with nature. We must not be reconciled with femininity (and that goes for women too). The secret to a strange attraction lies here"[12].

Similarly, Kwame Anthony Appiah worries about a possible "manufacture of otherness" for "those who will not see themselves as Other"[13]. Appiah also signals the dangers of raising awareness about the issues of identity and difference "partly because the rhetoric of alterity has too often meant the evacuation of specificity; partly because too many African intellectuals, captivated by this Western thematic, seek to fashion themselves as the (image of the) Other. We run the risk of ersatz exoticism, like the tourist trinkets in the Gifte Shoppes of Lagos and Nairobi"[14]

In order to escape the label of 'Other', Appiah appeals to nativism, that is viewing nations as 'organic communities', "bound together by [...] the shared norms that are the legacy of tradition, struggling to throw off the shackles of alien modes of life and thought"[15].

[11] Baudrillard, J.,Guillaume. M., *Figuri ale alterităţii*. Paralela 45: Piteşti, 2002, p. 127.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 132.

[13] Appiah, K. A. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1993, pp.156-7.

[14] *Ibidem*, p.72.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 72.

Finally, postcolonial theories use the term 'otherness' interchangeably with 'difference' and 'othering' in connection to race (Franz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Abdul JanMohammed), natives (Homi Bhabha), women, multiculturalism and minorities, the politics of identity and representation (Edward Said), and when interrogating alterity (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri). The process of othering has also been employed to identify differences and to distance the Self from the Other which may cause exclusion or marginalization from the group. The result may be a creation of stereotypical images, or multi-generational hatred and violence. Yet, acknowledging otherness has more positive than negative outcomes: national identities are preserved, the 'silent' and effaced Other has made claims to speak (women, natives, minorities, deviants, subalterns are able to speak for themselves) reorganizing the world order in radical ways. Michael Chapman[16] underlines 'the value of difference': "Difference, or *différance* (Derrida 1978), does not confirm division, but transforms 'othering' from negative to positive premise". On the same note, Pia Brînzeu[17] notices that difference becomes possible when combining "involvement with detachment", when adapting "the images of otherness to suit self-images, completing the more frequent stereotypes of the natives with a new set of attitudes brought from abroad". The articulation of otherness is possible "in concordance with social or minority perspectives, with the on-going negotiations that seek to authorize cultural hybridities, with the persistence and/or re-invention of tradition, the restaging of the past, and the consensual or conflictual engagements of cultural difference". As Homi Bhabha notices, the Other "is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously

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[16] Chapman, M. 'Postcolonialism: A Literary Turn' in *British and American Studies,* vol. XIV. Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2008, p.9.

[17] Brînzeu, P. 'Postcolonialism or Postcolonialisms?: The Dilemmas of a Teacher' in B*ritish and American Studies,* vol. XIV. Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2008, pp. 25.

'between ourselves'"[18]. The features assimilated by the self from the other and vice versa are used in a cross-racial and cross-cultural interpretation of the other in accordance with the self's needs.

According to Abdul R. JanMohamed, "genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions and ideologies of his culture"[19]. He maintains that such a negation or 'bracketing' is impossible due to the fact that individuals are culturally formed and they cannot negate themselves. Although narratives rarely change the way the Other is perceived, they often attract attention to the ones that are ignored, silenced or exploited. Literature is the means to designate the Other, to find the answer to the question who the Other is nowadays. Ania Loomba considers that there is an interest in recovering the Other ("recovering subaltern voices") and in reconciling it with the Self because we are "invested in changing power relations"[20]. Thus, if subaltern voices are to be heard and listened to "we need to uncover the multiplicity of narratives that were hidden by the grand narratives, but we still need to think about how the former are woven together"[21].

Postcolonial theory and literature has also searched for answers to questions such as the following: what does the Other mean in these times? Should 'Self' and 'Other' be viewed inevitably as accentuating differences? After identifying the Other, is 'comprehension of Otherness' possible or is knowledge of the Other just a form of colonization, of authority, even violence?

The Beheaded Roster by Eginald Schlattner – A Reading

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[18] Bhabha, H. *Nation and Narration.* London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p.4.

[19] Janmohamed, A.R. 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature' in *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1, Autumn, 1985, p.84.

[20] Loomba, A. *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism.* London and New York: Routledge, 1998 p.243.

[21] *Ibidem*, p.241.

Eginald Norbert Schlattner is a German writer of Romanian origins. He was born in 1933 in Arad and he was raised in Făgăraş. His experiences as a young German boy growing up together with Romanians, Hungarians, Jews, Armenians and Gypsies are described in his three novels that were written and published between 1998 and 2005. His three novels *Der geköpfte Hahn – The Beheaded Rooster* (1998)*, Rote Handschuhe - Red Gloves* (2000) and *Das Klavier im Nebel - The Piano in the Mist* (2005) deal with issues related to 20th century Transylvania and describe multicultural communities torn apart by the Second World War or by the Communist regime in Romania. The first two books have also been turned into film scripts and are well known on the international literary market.

The Beheaded Rooster presents the day of 23rd August 1944, in Făgăraş, Transylvania when the story teller is 15 years old and has a graduation party while remembering various childhood moments and analyzing ethnical behavior within his family and his neighbourhood.

Red Gloves is a critique of the political trial that took place in the 1950s in Brasov, Romania, the state against some Transylvanian writers.

The Piano in the Mist tells the story of a German manufacturer's son from Sighişoara (Schäßburg), who lost everything after the Second World War when his father's factory was nationalized.

Our analysis focuses on the multicultural and multiethnic community from Transylvania, on its traditions and legends that have survived the communist regime. Thus, the novel *The Beheaded Rooster* tells the story of a fifteen year old boy who tells the story of the day of 23rd August 1944, as he organizes a party for his school mates. At the same time he becomes aware of the atrocities of the war and of the priceless collection of memories that he has gathered from his community. Although the 2nd World War interfered with the ethnical harmony of the Transylvanian community, turning former friends into enemies, the party manages to bring together Germans, Romanians, and Hungarians. However, the

fragile equilibrium is shattered by an air raid and by the king's speech announcing the fact that Romania becomes an ally of Russia. The beheaded rooster is a constant reminder of the threat faced by the Transylvanian community which is divided between the ancient Grűss Gott and the newer Heil Hitler.

In the multiethnic, multicultural Transylvanian community, the 'real gentlemen' greet in several languages. However, the perfect image of communities living in peace and understanding is not entirely harmonious. The German community does not speak Romanian unless it is compulsory, gypsies swear, and the Hungarians are considered a little bit better than Romanians, yet they are all on a lower social scale than Germans. The obsession of ethnic purity is obvious in all the contacts maintained by the German community. Education makes everybody equal, yet differences reinforce inequality: "Grandma didn't believe people are equal. [...] No, not even Germans are equal, not even in our town."[22]. Tolerance and ignorance are two key words, although there are ethnic tensions and conflicts which are neither silenced nor exaggerated. The Transylvanian community is clearly structured and it is very difficult to surpass social differences or to transgress the boundaries imposed by unwritten laws.

Multiculturalism is obvious: "In Fogarasch you cannot take one step without greeting people in different languages"[23]. "My parents used to speak Hungarian. They would do this whenever they talked about something that we didn't have to know"[24]. There is a place where everybody is equal, where the heavenly harmony and fraternity can be seen: "every afternoon, in summer, at the beach by the riverbank, where you can meet the whole Fogarasch, without any clothes, as in paradise and probably as in the new Jerusalem. All kinds and races, each class and

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[22] Schlattner, E., *Cocoşul decapitat*. Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2001, p.78.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 24.
[24] *Ibidem*, p.39.

craft, all levels of age and sex gather together here in a complete reconciliation[25]. Yet, racist remarks are usual in this multicultural community, as people have to acknowledge their status: "My grandmother didn't have Jewish relatives, but she wasn't a hundred percent German, due to her Hungarian origin. To be Hungarian was a hundred times better than to be a Jew, it was different, completely different"[26]. "We didn't understand that grandfather wanted to say that my father used to greet everybody so kindly only because it was about having clients, and thus, making a profit. We couldn't have imagined such a thing because my father was a gentleman"[27].

In fact, the other in the Transylvanian community is defined by difference, as Derrida defines it and a partial understanding of otherness can be obtained only by admitting a negation of the self. The moment when the German community realizes it is no longer the center of the city, no longer on top of the social pyramid, that is when the acceptance of difference takes place. Unfortunately, the Second World War violently marked the concept of otherness and acceptance of the other was second to exiling and minimizing the different members of a community. Schlattner's novels are memories of a community that has almost disappeared and that is struggling to regain its identity as marginal other rather than a center in Transylvania and Banat.

Conclusions

Postcolonial studies have marked the beginning of a new era in the history of ideas, bringing the marginal other to the center of attention and taking the center to the margins. In this respect, many writers, both

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[25] *Ibidem*, pp. 108-109.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 25.
[27] *Ibidem*, p. 36.

novelists and critics have insisted on the importance of the former other who claims to redefine identity and a new status in the 21st century.

Eginald Schlattner's *The Beheaded Rooster* is an important novel for Romanian literature, although it was written in German and translated in Romanian. The fact that it uses memory to preserve a community that has redefined both identity and boundaries is significant for the Romanian literary world, as 21st century writers no longer rely on memory but on personal experiences of the moment. We should also mention the fact that two women writers from Romania have written novels in German, novels that are as significant as Schlattner's novels: Aglaja Veteranyi and Herta Müller, the latter being a Nobel laureate. Thus, the features assimilated by the self from the other and vice versa are used in a cross-racial and cross-cultural interpretation of the other in accordance with the self's needs.

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