

Résumé: Dans la société de consommation et de l'expansion du monde des médias, la littérature et la critique sont les témoins de la reconsidération des mœurs, de la liberté de la parole, la sécularisation de la population et de l'invasion de la culture britannique par celle américaine avec les valeurs du Nouveau Monde et la manière libertine de penser. Certains sont d'avis qu'aussi bien la littérature que la critique sont arrivées dans un cul-de-sac dans leur développement, d'autres ont affirmé que le postmodernisme est un permanent processus de problématisation ou de subversion des idéologies esthétiques précédentes.

Les traits généraux de ce type de littérature et critique qui suggèrent des variations majeures tout au long de la deuxième moitié du siècle sont: la préoccupation pour la validité de la représentation; le décentrement du sujet et l'introduction de plusieurs soi fictifs; le jeu et l'artifice; l'interrogation sur les bases ontologiques; l'abolition de la grande division entre la culture basse et haute; la médiation et la construction de l'histoire; le remplacement de la réalité par le simulacre. Tous ceux-ci s'appuient sur la nature du postmodernisme comme un enfant curieux, fasciné par le nouveau, et demande le rejet du modèle parental et l'annulation des clivages sociaux. C'est dans ce contexte que les romans académiques, la biographie littéraire, les textes critiques ou métacritiques de Malcolm Bradbury sont apparus. Ils concordent parfaitement avec l'idée de variété postmoderne déclassée par les courants de pensée tels que la critique générique, la politique du corps, la politique éthique, l'intérêt des médias. Ses romans et études critiques visent et décrivent des aspects particuliers du monde moderne, des expériences des individus sans vouloir offrir une vérité ou pensée philosophique. L'intention frauduleuse, l'illusion ou la farce utilisées par l'auteur dans son style ont le but d'assurer le passage de l'individu de l'homme réel dans un personnage littéraire comme une image de la personne et/dans la société. En ce qui concerne son discours critique, dans le contexte postmoderne nous observons des étiquettes nouvelles du critique vu non pas comme un chirurgien qui intervient dans le tissu littéraire, mais comme un analyste qui se dédouble et fait quelques pas avec et à l'extérieur du roman, réalisant ainsi un travail métacritique.

Notre communication analyse la manière dont Malcolm Bradbury s'est conformé à ces exigences et la manière dont les rôles qu'il a joués en tant que romancier et critique sont combinés et complètent les uns par les autres et forment une entité complexe qui présente les principes, mœurs et dilemmes du courant postmoderne de pensée.

Mots-clés : fiction, discours critique, métacritiques, subversion, réalité, métaroman

Abstract: In the newly fangled society of consumption and expansion of the media the world of fiction and criticism witnessed reconsiderations of sexual mores and freedom of speech, a secularisation of the population, and an invasion of the British culture by the American one with its "New World" values and libertine type of thinking. Some said that at this moment both fiction and criticism reached a cul-de-sac in its development, others have claimed that postmodernism thinking is an ongoing process of problematization or subversion of previous aesthetic ideologies. The general features of this type of fiction and criticism undergoing major variations and shifts throughout half a century are: a preoccupation with the viability of representation; the decentring of the subject and the inscription of multiple fictive selves; narrative fragmentation and reflexivity; play and artifice; interrogation of the ontological bases; an abolition of the great divide between high and low culture; a mediation and construction of history; the displacement of the real by simulacra. All these support the nature of postmodernism as an inquisitive brat fascinated by the new, and inquiring as well as rejecting the parental modern while annulling cleavages between strata of society. It is in this context that Malcolm Bradbury's academic novel, literary biography, critical or metacritical works emerged. They fit perfectly the idea of postmodern variety triggered by such trends of thinking as gender criticism, body politics, ethnic politics, queer theory, media interest. His novels and critical studies aim at depicting particular aspects of the modern world, of individuals' experiences, and not at seeking to offer truth or philosophical belief. The fraudulent intent or effect, the deceit and trickery that the postmodern author employs in his parodic style is meant to ensure the passage from man in reality to man in fiction as a picture of man and/ in society. As for the critical discourse, in the Po-Mo context we observe new labels of critic not as surgeon, cutting through every literary tissue, but critic as an analyst who doubles himself and steps within and outside the novel performing a critical and a metacritical act. Our paper analyzes the manner in which Malcolm Bradbury complied with these requirements and the way in which the roles that he played as novelist and critic combined and completed one another in forming a complex entity rendering the principles, mores and dilemmas of the postmodern type of thinking.

Keywords: fiction, criticism, subversion, reality, metanovel

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1. Introduction – the context of the (Bradburyan) postmodernist fiction/ criticism

The incipient fiction of postmodernism, manifest in the 1960s, seemingly the most rebellious on account probably of its novelty, sought to subvert its own structural and formal bases and implied that reality existed only in the reality that described it.

The fiction of the 1970s on the one hand brought a new fiction of insurgency, a type of guerrilla writing and on the other hand it “experimented with previous genres, toyed with literary theory, questioned traditional character-representations of a stable identity, and complicated narrative organizations of space and time” [1] bringing a new wave of emancipation of “the institution of the author” – he/ she lives and sells his/ her books (and himself/ herself) on an aesthetic market, or in an aesthetic supermarket, in which sometimes vocational writers are replaced by careerists. This type of fiction launches a critique against certain aspects of late capitalist society. Novels after 1980 either introduced the yuppie (young urban professional) fiction or they followed the postmodernist comeback to the tradition of history and narrative construction (see especially Bradbury’s *To the Hermitage*), experimenting with concepts such as discourse, metaphor, fantasy, narration, chronology, history, and (loss of) (national) identity, and contesting boundaries between biography and fiction (see Bradbury’s *Unsent Letters*) but in a more “reader-friendly” style. Other times they reached the realms of magic realism in an attempt to escape reality and perform a deeper individual analysis. The novels after the 1980s also brought an acute sense of loss of reality and a plunging into the cyber-punk sci-fi universe of fiction or a reconsideration of colonialism. But if this frame brought a crisis of the novel, this crisis “resulted not in ossification but in rejuvenation” [2]. Bill Buford considers that there is a total freedom in and of the new type of novel of the 1980s, a novel which

is remarkable for its detachment, its refusal to be affiliated, its suspicion of the old hierarchies and authorities. It is not modernist or pre-modernist or postmodernist or of that debate, but managing nevertheless to be both arriving and departing at once. If I am right that we are moving into a different period of creating prose, it is characterized by a writing which, freed from the middle-class monologues, is experimentation in the real sense, exploiting traditions and not being wasted by them [3].

Bradbury’s work fits perfectly the idea of postmodern variety triggered by such trends of thinking as gender criticism, body politics, ethnic politics, queer theory, media interest. His novels, pamphlets, short stories, satirical stories, parodies and television plays aim at depicting particular aspects of the modern world, of individuals’ experiences, and not at seeking to offer truth or philosophical belief, all in a fiction which deploys devices such as “contradiction, permutation of narrative line, discontinuity, randomness, excessive figural substitution, and short-circuiting of the gap between text and world” [4] and whose generic term could be “to impose”. The fraudulent intent or effect, the deceit and trickery that the postmodern author employs in his parodic style is meant to ensure the passage from man in reality to man in fiction as a picture of man and/ in society. As for the critical discourse, in the Po-Mo context

the critic-as-surgeon cutting out and analyzing diseased or damaged tissue is replaced by the critic-as-homeopath ‘shadowing’ and parallelling the signs of sickness by prescribing natural poisons which produce in the patient’s body a simulation of the original symptoms [5].

2. The novelist/ homo fabulans

Motto:

*What is the difference between God and Malcolm Bradbury?
God is everywhere and Malcolm Bradbury is everywhere but here.
(Malcolm Bradbury, My Strange Quest for Mensonge, p. 91)*

More or less approved of or, on the contrary disproved, the concept of “author” has been largely debated upon and has formed trends of thoughts. His/ her godlike presence or necessity of dissolution in the voices of his/her characters has lead to multiple interpretations (under the form of acceptance or rejection, repudiation or acknowledgement) and to a new “His-and-Her-Meneutics” [6] of the “new” texts. The obituary of the author and the novel alike has been written on several occasions so far, but at the same time there were moments when pulsations of a new life were also signalled and registered by criticism. The new novel brought effusions of the Amis period (both

Kingsley and Martin), the narratological variety of Ian McEwan, aspects of post-colonial literature, and then a freshly young literature dubbed “lad literature” (with reference to such writers as Irvine Welsh or Tony Parsons), “chick literature” (having as leading figures writers such as Helen Fielding and Sophie Kinsella), culminating with a very “young” literature for the young (see J. K. Rowling’s novels).

The postmodern decades brought two criteria of judging the author. The first, analyzes the status of the artist/ writer from the point of view of his/ her confining himself/ herself to the norm and being judged according to the classical criteria or, on the contrary, stepping outside the norm and experimenting with language or the status of the novel itself or novelist himself. Jean-François Lyotard is the one who delimited the role and the position of the postmodern writer clearly by stating that at this point he resembles a philosopher:

the text he writes, the text he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for [7].

They prefigure the techniques that they use, they explicate them overtly or they employ them in a covert manner.

The second criterion regards the manner in which the writer came closer to meet the public’s expectations, the manner in which (s)he promoted a “lower” type of culture, a culture of the people, exhibiting a new manner of viewing the priorities of the contemporary world. Between these two needs to which (s)he had to submit, the writer might feel sometimes at a loss as one of Bradbury’s characters feels – James Walker, does have the lucidity to wonder at his status because on the one hand, he feels torn from the outer reality and on the other hand, he feels he does not have the power to challenge borders:

Was he a writer at all? Wasn’t he a half-writer, a man who had chanced into this as he might have gone into any profession, a man without dedication or intensity? Had he ever given anything to the imagination? Did he take chances, believe in it as a force? Where and how did literature flow into him, and in what way did it seed or grow? (*Stepping Westward*, p. 245).

These doubts emerge because of the denial of the writer’s authority in contemporary times (even if Bradbury was writing these in 1965 he proves to have had wonderful insight into the evolution of things), and because of the disappearance of the credibility of the subject having grand narratives as a fundamental.

It is under these conditions that the concept of author has begun to be discussed not only from a narratological perspective, but also from the perspective of the “popular” nature of the fiction that (s)he wrote. The following chapter aims at presenting two major roles that the Bradbury assumed or has been attributed in relation to his work, having as a practical support both his fictional and critical work.

3. The historical becoming of the artist/ author

Whether we start with the Renaissance or the Enlightenment, moving through Victorianism and modernism, we can clearly observe the central position of the writer, of the author if not as an almighty power to the end at least as a centre of interest. Malcolm Bradbury performs such a chronological presentation of the author in the study *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* in the chapter titled “The Writer Today” (pp. 109–168) dealing with issues such as the place of the artists in the society, their identity and roles, their origins.

This is how the writers’ roles are viewed as either “priestly or menial”, performing functions of exploring their creativity, passions and neurosis, exorcising their devil. There was a time in which the writer was completely free, “the highest manifestation of the ever-active spirit”, “the universal man”, the god-like spirit offering the reader a means to escape reality. However, this degree of freedom seemed to evolve gradually towards a slippage into loneliness, self-quest and investigation. He was, nevertheless, given the opportunity of choosing between a turning inwards and a rendering of the outer history. Thus, he became involved in a fight between subjectivity and objectivity from which there was only one winner – alienation. Trying to preserve the spirit of the

liberal art, he sometimes shifted from culture to anti-culture. It is at this point that he seems to have been touched by “the stigmata of social consciousness” and became an *outsider*. His work became a protest against standardization and is less committed to the claims of art. Thus, he became a *common man* who had to embark on a new journey of exploration for a new status. The status of the literary profession was reconsidered, practical and imaginative forms of writing were contrasted within the limits of the cultural frames to which the writer submits. A further step was that from artist to vendor of works, or to member of an organized institution that would offer protection. Writing as a “higher trade” led to the large growth in number of professional artists after the 1800s. The education which they received was a real impetus towards such a career. This did not however degenerate into an inflation of writers for value proved a merciless sieve.

This status changes drastically under the sign of Structuralism and its credo – “everything is language”. The author becomes the exponent of his own language, with its limits and possibilities, its flaws and its epiphanic inventions. More than that, the author seems to dilute, dissipate, disappear, or, as Roland Barthes argues in his essay “The Death of the Author” [8], “die” leaving language to “speak”, “act” and “perform”. It is only in “histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines” that the author still rules, continues the French critic. This is exactly the theory on which Bradbury, more ironically than otherwise, builds his “quest” for *Mensonge*. The book contains the principles of Barthes’ theory (“Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing” he quotes in *My Strange Quest for Mensonge*, p. 92) which serve perfectly Bradbury’s purposes of making a eulogy of absence. With “the removal of the Author” says Barthes, “the text is [...] made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent”. In what better way could Bradbury have “proved” this theory right than making his hero, *Mensonge* (wonderfully anticipated by Doctor Criminale’s case), disappear in such a degree that no physical evidence of his passing in the world could easily be found. It is even his work which is in course of disappearing (or at least pages from the work seem to vanish) causing great difficulty to the monographer. Regarding the book as “a tissue of signs” into which the reader and not the (*Deus-*)Author breathes life, Roland Barthes announces that one type was killed and another one was created – that of the reader. From this point onwards critics and novelists alike have started questioning “not only the notion of the novelist as God, through the flaunting of the author’s godlike role, but also the authority of consciousness, of the mind” [9]. But Bradbury is again caustic and leads the reasoning further by observing that

this new method in the study of literature called creative misreading [...] abolished the authors, and replaced them by readers, who turned out to need a lot of critics to help them misunderstand in the proper way (*My Strange Quest for Mensonge*, p. 15).

For him, the reader, the exterior source (re)writing the novel, might be a secretary, a wife, an old aunt, or language itself might do this, “the average so-called author” coming on the scene only later after he “has showered, dressed and got through his morning *croissant*”. (*id.*, p. 22). Barthes’s “tissue” becomes for the seeker of *Mensonge* a milieu in which “the proper noun, the author, the self, the book, the object, the reader, the referent, the real, were all floating items of signification without a base” (*id.*, p. 23) and the author himself becomes “a totally floating signifier” (*id.*, p. 27) or each character is seen as a “new phenomenon: the intellectual as frequent flyer” (*Doctor Criminale*) – a flyer between destinations and significations.

Whether this disappearance is total or whether the author hides (or gets lost if he cannot make use of his craftsmanship) behind one of the voices in his own novel is still a subject of discussion. Robert A. Morace, following the same line of thought asserts that

if we accept Roland Barthes’ contention that who speaks is not who writes and who writes is not who is, we will form a clearer idea as to why it is necessary to distinguish between the author of the note and the author of *The History Man*. The author of, or in, the note is not Bradbury; instead, it is one of a number of voices to be heard in a dialogic novel whose own Bradburyan author is himself nothing more and nothing less than the uncertain intersection of authorial-narrative voices [10].

Therefore, the writer seems to experience a multiplication of selves with each new character that he creates thus achieving, if his technique affords it, the ideal form of dialogism. One particularly

interesting case is that of Professor Michel Tardieu signing the “Foreword/ Afterword” in *My Strange Quest for Mensonge*. Speaking with the voice of the monographer about Bradbury himself, Tardieu seems to be a second degree self of the first degree narrator who speaks with Bradbury’s voice but is not him. In this case Diderot’s paradox of the actor is perfectly applicable: “the actor must have another self to create the self he or she plays” (*To the Hermitage*, p. 433). In fact this happens because what we read here is a ventriloquised afterword by David Lodge, supposedly having simply translated from French Tardieu’s afterword.

Another question arising at this point is not necessarily whether one will ever bring the author back to life, but what will one do with him/ her afterwards? Shall (s)he be placed on the same pedestal as before on this stage and reanointed? Shall (s)he be a victim or, on the contrary, beneficiary of cryonics? The answers are still to come.

Taken to the extreme in parodic manner either in *Doctor Criminale* or in *My Strange Quest for Mensonge*, this theory is exaggerated. Thus the modern writer becomes “an excess of signs – signs of thought and sex, politics and money, fame and shame.” (*Doctor Criminale*, p. 242) Bradbury speaks in this latter novel of “Homo Significans, or Man the Sign-Maker” (p. 10). Everything is changed or, worse, perverted. Descartes’s famous aphorism becomes, paraphrased in turn by Lacan: “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” in *My Strange Quest for Mensonge* (p. 14), or “I exist to argue” in *The History Man* (p. 98), or even more contemporary-like “I have paper, therefore I am. I have plastic, therefore I shop.” in *To the Hermitage* (p. 12)

The perspective is enlarged by Michel Foucault’s essay “What is an Author?” [11] in which the French critic starts from the question “what does it matter who is speaking?”. The stress is now laid on the “interplay of signs”, on the game that grows beyond its rules. Writing has thus become a sacrifice. In this situation if we observe the effacement of the author and concentrate upon the work, we must ask ourselves, as the French critic does, to what degree the writer identifies with the work. The critic also analyses the problem of the name and the conclusion which imposes itself is that even if, or especially because, we witness a process of dispossession of the author by his very work, we must now take the reversed trajectory of creation and try to see how the discourse creates his maker.

One further step is that of the *critic* transformed into author (see David Lodge, John Barth, Umberto Eco, Simone de Beauvoir or, of course, Malcolm Bradbury). It is fascinating to see the way in which “the nature and purpose of both fiction and criticism have found their way into the novels” [12]. These writers, from the position of the critic, debate, sometimes overtly and sometimes more subtly, upon typical problems of postmodernist features, devices, functions, techniques concerning the unveiling of language, the author or the contemporary world.

Along with the consideration of the new values and cultures in society a new role is performed by the author. The postmodernist author has become a “*tele-dumb*” (*Doctor Criminale*, p. 12), a “post-Thatcherite cripple” (*id.*, p. 15), a “vague and placeless creature” (*id.*, p. 28), a character drawing on Samuel Beckett’s creation:

a hermit of thought, a tired scribe whose every written word is each day collected and taken away by some higher power, a worn lifespent soul whose every recollection and every bodily juice has somehow been squeezed out and extracted for use elsewhere. (*id.*, p. 22).

It is for this reason that postmodern novels abound in dull creators (Henry Babbacombe, James Walker, Howard Kirk) of dull works so as to show the mental, physical and discursive fatigue of the new creator who, waking up and seeing himself in the mirror can only say: “Christ, you again.” (*The History Man*, p. 97). He is tired of work, tired of history, tired of theorizing, tired of life, tired of possibilities (if we are to use John Barth’s interpretation from the essay “The Literature of Exhaustion”, in Bradbury’s *The Novel Today*, pp 71–85). This ontological fatigue permeates his speech, thought, artistic creation, and look:

He saw that he was back, a damaged creature, with the old familiar problems of the world. [...] a little ghost from the provincial past, tired, deeply out of touch [...] wan, wind-blown, incomplete. (*Stepping Westward*, pp. 57–58).

The retrieving of the status of true author and the surpassing of the state of buffoon-author seems to be able to be accomplished only through a turning towards the past as in *To the Hermitage* where the search for Diderot is valuable because of the value of the “Ageing Sage” (p. 1) himself. That is why, it was noticed that the postmodern author “neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twenty-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back, [...] he aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-modernist marvels”, he “keeps one foot always in the narrative past... and one foot in, one might say, the Parisian structuralist present”[13].

4. The critic

Critical theory has been considered imperative almost for any age, but questions have arisen whether each new age could create its own criticism. Do we experience in the postmodern period a “New New Criticism” [14]? Has criticism combined with fiction in a metafictional discourse? Or has criticism become more fictionalized coming closer to a new type of pop public? After all “there is no reason why literary critics should not turn to autobiography and anecdotalism” [15].

The beginning of postmodern theory seems to have followed the tenet that critical thinking becomes possible through abandonment of universal criteria of judgment and acceptance of heterogeneity. The next two decades seem to have developed another type of grand narrative in which numerous names among which Lyotard, Hassan, Jameson, Hutcheon and McHale take an X-ray of different bodily parts of one and the same patient whose first name is “Post” and second name “modernism”. A large host of other critics gathered in line to follow a trendy occupation – theorizing the postmodern. Terry Eagleton wittily remarks that “Indeed there would no doubt soon be more bodies in literary criticism than on the fields of Waterloo” [16]. That is why a skimming through library thematic charts or a browsing on books.google or the Amazon reveals a hardly anticipated abundance.

After having started with a brief, very “educative” study titled *What is a Novel?* in 1969, Malcolm Bradbury’s work and activity as a critic is divided in three large parts: firstly, he wrote extensive studies on the emergence of modernism (*The Social Context of Modern English Novel*, 1971) and its manifestation on the two sides of the Ocean (*The Modern American Novel*, 1983, revised in 1992 and *The Modern British Novel*, 1992, with a new afterword in 1993, extensively revised in 2001, *Dangerous Pilgrimages. Transatlantic Mythologies and the Novel*, 1995) and studies of the pathway to postmodernism (*From Puritanism to Postmodernism. A History of American Literature*, co-authored with Richard Ruland in 1991; *The Atlas of Literature*); secondly, there are the studies and essays on specific authors (*Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel*, 1973 and *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*, 1988); thirdly, there are the collections of essays (*No. Not Bloomsbury*, 1988). All of these bear the constant marker of Bradbury following and establishing the context for the manifestation of a certain style of thought or condition of living and of registering the direction of the thriving “traffic” in fiction between the continents.

a. *The Social Context of Modern English Novel* received as a “splendidly written study” of the relations between literature and social studies has the merit of clarifying two issues concerning modern literature regarded as a social product or as expression of the society:

the impact of “modern” mass industrial society on the literary consciousness, on the style and substance of literary art itself; and the effect of this same society as the context for literature as a social institution, as the interlocked activities of writers and readers, publishers and critics [17].

Regarded both as a literary and as a cultural study Bradbury’s analysis manages to fix the roots of modernity, establish the causes and the frame for its subsequent development and expansion in the urban milieu, characterize the new cultural type of the artist and follow their main thematic preoccupations and technical innovation. He brings his analytical undertaking to the point of foregrounding the vitiation of a clearly defined “literary” culture and the marginalisation of the writer by identifying the social forces within the English society which led to a crisis of culture in a world which gave way to fragmentation and promotion of the media. Thus, he condemns democracy on account of the flattening of cultural distinctions and the “masses” because of their valuing of art on grounds of its saleability. Though he was accused of sometimes uselessly listing

names of magazines without clearly stating how this contributed to any change in the artistic field, or of not differentiating more clearly between the various stages of modernism that he enumerates, or of not establishing fully the correspondences between sociology and literature or social change and literary change, or, more gravely, of lacking a method in assembling the chapters of his study, and though we may regard the book as perhaps a bit obsolete today, the issues raised in the book were fully en vogue four decades ago, when the theory of postmodernism and postmodernity was only at the beginning.

In *The Modern American Novel* Bradbury, in a short format of 300 pages, manages successfully to trace the evolution of the American novel from the 1890 through the time of the posts in the 1990s. The main criteria of analysis of the novel as “a fairly late (and virtually illegal) immigrant to the new and pristine America” (p. v) are the historical context “on native grounds” (p. viii) and the comparison of the interaction between the American and the continental aesthetics. Thus, organizing his analysis in chapters treating roughly speaking decades of thought and aesthetic manifestation, Bradbury aims at proving that American fiction is on the one hand, “the product of the history, the material conditions, the consciousness, the philosophical modes of perception, of the American culture and post-culture in which most but not all of it had been made” and on the other hand, “the product of a larger history of fiction in a changing international world, as well as in multicultural society which has been particularly open to foreign influence” (p. viii).

Correcting in the second edition some of the flaws of the first edition (the omission or limited recognition of some female or Afro-American writers), Bradbury manages to underpin the full diversity of writers and styles of writing and to mention the historical and cultural forces generating periodic reassessments of the world of fiction. Despite some of the flaws of the first edition (which Thomas Docherty’s review [18] mercilessly registers) such as the excessive mentioning of the apocalyptic feeling brought by the advent of each new decade, the introduction of some biographical data whose relevance is not obvious, the superficiality of some critical commentaries disguised under heavily specialized jargon which makes the book a simple “annotated check-list of American novels since 1890s” [19], an obsessive and hyperinterpretative analysis of some titles of novels, some of which are corrected in the second edition and some of which are not, the study constitutes itself in a document which records the epochal becoming of the American thought. However, despite some evident constants in his study Bradbury renders a vivid picture of the new American world in a single vision of “plain and prairie, technology, science and skyscrapers” (p. 4), of the fascination of the “new American cityscape” (p. 9) and the dazzling diversity, variety and speed of “the American maelstrom” dominated by the “whirl and roar of modern machines” (p. 51) which determined the “urbanizing motion toward the modern metropolis” (p. 2). At the same time, among the achievements of his survey of the American novel we can mention the manner in which Bradbury x-rays the spirit of each new age and marks its specificities.

The Modern British Novel, written in and for an age in which criticism became democratized, not restricted anymore exclusively to practitioners of literature and members of the intellectual elite, but being practised also by common readers on forums and updating sites, is a study which reaches the turn of the millennium. Bearing samples of the lexicon, mannerism and intellectual hauteur of literary theory and displaying in the titles of its chapters fashionable concepts in contemporary culture (the novel(ist) at the “crossroads”, “the floating world” and “millennial days” in which contemporary artists manifest), but generally written in a style addressing the general reader, the study displays Bradbury’s usual despondency towards an encyclopaedic-informative presentation of the British fiction.

Dangerous Pilgrimages. Transatlantic Mythologies and the Novel is an extensive study which, despite being composed of more essays gains coherence through the perspective that is followed in each of them – the manner in which journeys were taken from one side of the Ocean to the other, from Europe to America and the other way round. Thus, from Mark Twain to Henry James, from Charles Dickens to D. H. Lawrence, from Malcolm Lowry to Evelyn Waugh, Bradbury follows the literary destiny as it was enriched by the experience of the voyage, the way in which the European tradition and romance was replaced with the American dream and realities.

From Puritanism to Postmodernism. A History of American Literature (having Richard Ruland as co-author) faces in its turn the difficulty of comprising in a one-volume format more than four centuries of literature with their trends and controversies. If works of this kind, written

before the 1980s, simply had to distinguish “the enduring from the ephemeral” while “providing some historical and cultural contexts for the writers and works discussed” [20], the postmodern times bringing a new view from which writers and their works have to be regarded (among which gender and ethnicity) imposed permanent reconsiderations and readjustments of the critical discourse. The risks which the authors face (and the trap in which they sometimes fall) given the limited spatial frame is sometimes a too general presentation or plain overlooking. Lacking either bibliography or notes it was judged as addressing the undergraduates’ general interest in such a topic.

The Atlas of Literature that was published in 1996 and whose general editor Bradbury was, is an example of extraordinary modern thinking by using iconic representations (actual maps of (parts of) continents, (parts of) countries, regions, cities, boroughs, landscapes) so as to pinpoint physically the manner in which a writer’s mind moved and worked. The result of four years of research, *The Atlas* is also the perfect means to demonstrate one more time the manner in which reality is brought within the pages of novels and between the lines of poems and plays and Bradbury’s opinion that “place, travel and exploration have always been among the most fundamental elements of literature”, the fact that “literature itself is an atlas” and “our poetry, our fiction and our drama is itself a mapping of the world” (p. 8). The work is a literary, historical and geographical document all at once as it presents in eight parts (“The Middle Ages and the Renaissance”, “The Ages of Reason”, “The Romantics”, “The Age of Industrialism and Empire”, “The Age of Realism”, “The Modern World”, “After the Second World War”, “The World Today”) and 79 essays (of which Bradbury signed 24) major literary trends, figures and (sub)genres, major historical events or important geographical coordinates that influenced writers’, poets’ or playwrights’ creations being borrowed more or less obviously in their works. It pinpoints on the map the real places that have become part of literature and the imaginary ones as well as the intricate connections between them. It follows the manner in which various real places have been used and transformed in these creations but also the places that have been fictitiously created, also distinguishing the places that still exist from the ones that do not exist anymore. The work marks at the same time the existence of such locations as houses, theatres or cafés which proved elemental in some literary creations.

The work passes beyond the status of a history of literature because of the strong and heavily documented visual support registering these correspondences not only through the maps but also through a series of photographs that present epitomes of certain ages and trends (from Shakespeare to Bob Marley), but also photos of architectural constructs (buildings, bridges), paintings, book covers, film frames that have become bearers of markers of the age they stem from.

b. Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel opens with a chapter in which Malcolm Bradbury attempts to prove the necessity of the preservation of a permanently open view upon the form and methods of the novel. While praising the novelty of the genre he tries to impose a perspective in which the novel can still be appreciated for its realist properties – “the novel is disposed to both realism and fictiveness.” (p. 31) He underlines the need to reestablish the credit of the notions of character, plot as the novel will remain, in his opinion stated in this study from 1973 and preserved in general terms until the turn of the millennium, a liberal and moral reflection of the social reality.

The selection of authors discussed in his essays (among whom Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, Malcolm Lowry, C. P. Snow, Iris Murdoch and John Fowles) proves the numerous ways in which the possibilities of the novel can be expanded, the way in which inner reality and outer reality can blend in a homogeneous whole this standing as a proof to the openness of this form of fictional exploitation.

The study ends with a slight revision of one of Bradbury’s controversial studies first having appeared under the title “Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach through Structure” in *Novel* (Fall, 1967). Now revised as “The Novel and Its Poetics”, the study bears however the same argument of a “structuralist” poetics – every novelist has an *a priori* novel in mind as he composes his verbal one. In his opinion the “prefigured” novel is not a product of language and what has precedence is a “particular complex matter” which does use words as a medium and gets verbalized because “certain things can be held logically and temporally antecedent to those words.” (p. 283) Next, though Bradbury admits that “the novel prefigured is not the same as the novel achieved” he stresses that there is “an interaction between what is prefigured and the obligations of the

achievement [that] ‘create’ a novel” (p. 284). The novelist, in Bradbury’s thesis, has always in mind prior obligations such as compositional commitments and rhetorical modes and devices that he is intent on using, all this guiding, conditioning and restricting him on his way towards the accomplishing of the novel’s final form. Thus, in this undertaking, structure becomes “the substantive myth of a novel”, “a plot-like compositional achievement” for this structure (comprising “the making of an action in a social-moral environment itself invented, as well as the rhetorical effects of point of view, tone, technique”) bears the novelist in the realm of persuasion

where the novelist undertakes so to shape and use the fictional transaction as to elicit, from himself and the reader, the highest sense of meaning, relevance, significance, of variation and richness, but also of concord and elegance, he can in a work of such magnitude (p. 285).

A year later from the first publication of this material (and three years later published in volume), David Lodge writes in response to Bradbury’s study a piece entitled “Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach through Language”. Bradbury’s good friend brings a different again double perspective of critic and novelist to the matter. On the one hand, Bradbury regarded as essential that the novel should have

a chain of interlinked events unified by persuasive discourse and by coherencies arising both from materials in life and features of language which take on for the author a character of interconnectedness and thus synthesize those elements sometimes distinguished as a ‘material’, a ‘style’, and a ‘vision’ (p. 281).

so as to achieve its persuasive ends. On the other hand, Lodge does not stop at pointing out that a novel’s main scaffolding is the “life-stuff” but goes beyond and states that it is language that determines its evolving interplay and shape. Bradbury’s “antecedent, referential story that controls and dictates the written work” [21] has no existence for Lodge “‘outside’ language” [22].

Bradbury’s study does seem today rather narrow and almost illogical given his subsequent play with language both in fiction and in some critical essays fact which seems to prove precisely the opposite of his initial status – that we are linguistically determined beings and that language in fiction is most of the time the fulcrum of narrative (action and technique), the engine (or microchip) that gives the commands.

5. Between critic and novelist

One of the dominant features of postmodernist writing is the manner in which both literature and literary theory (or critical commentaries) have responded to and were an expression of the social (political, historical, religious) and cultural movements and changes. The new aspect is that they have become interchangeable territories of theories and terminology – criticism (by turning towards the more popularly-felt aspects of life and away from the haughtiness and stiff academism of structuralism and deconstructivism) and fiction (by developing the much flaunted principle of self-reflexivity and self-analysis, that is by introducing the reader in the laboratory where the experiments of fiction are conducted) have merged and led to the emergence of a new type of writing. This process is more obvious in the case of those hybrid-creators who are both critics and novelists (or poets, satirists, pamphleteers for that matter). Their works create an interesting phenomenon of self-reflection and endorsement or, on the contrary, contradiction. Critics expound their theories in the practice of writing and writers express in metafictional language or in what was termed “theoretical fiction” [23], their theories in the creation of one novel or another.

The conscious choice between the discourse of fiction and the abstractions of theoretical works takes into consideration the possibilities of expression in each field. This analysis of opportunities and advantages of expression is the reason for which many theorists prefer fiction “for its subtle mechanisms of persuasion, for its ability to explore ideas or historical forces as they are lived by individuals” [24]. Another reason for choosing fiction over criticism may be a question of image. There have been questions asked whether or not it is not more popular being a writer than a critic. One way or another the cases of such figures as Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, Virginia Woolf, John Barth, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, Iris Murdoch or Simone de Beauvoir, to mention only some names, can be long discussed in a chapter that follows the work of the writer-critic type of creator.

In Malcolm Bradbury's case it can be said that his character may have adapted easier to the style of fiction for it allowed him the liberty of sarcasm and irony, parody, pastiche and pamphlet in painting a picture of contemporary life in various (usually academic) circles. At the same time this still gave him the possibility of developing a critical analysis of the literary phenomenon in general, or the creation of a specific novel in particular through the voices of his professor-characters or through his own voice transferred in the fictional universe. The critic's contemplation of the literary phenomenon in general is also doubled by what Linda Hutcheon calls the narcissistic self-contemplation of the novel. But this is not, in fact, a limitation to a contemplation of one's self (as is more likely the case in modernism where one "me decade" followed after another) or of one's work exclusively – it is rather a contemplation of the logic and ideology of narrative generally and of other novels in particular. The defection from critical theory towards this type of analysis or, in other words, the export of critical expertise in the novel grants the novel a critical function which manifests within a performative process not merely under the form of constative narratological analysis.

The inescapable process that takes place in Bradbury's works is that fiction and criticism have assimilated each other's insights, producing a more libertinistic, canon-breaking type of criticism and a new, more theoretically credible and argued novel. Postmodernism generated this double, reciprocal contamination and movement of the critic's attempt to write in a more accessible, fictional style and of the writer's aspiration to assimilate the perspectives of criticism into the narrative process. This boundary type of writing uses energy sources from both the critical and the fictional discourse and creates a more appealing type of writing for a reader who discards a grand narrative type of criticism and an opaque, hermetic type of novel. Malcolm Bradbury developed to the fullest this type of theoretical self-awareness within the novel making unhindered use of his sarcastic remarks towards some critical trends which he considered exaggerated or outdated. In the age where "the making of..." has been transformed in television shows, Thackeray's *Behind the Curtain* has been resurrected in a new ingenious language.

However, a definite or definitive verdict cannot be given on the issue of whose authority and personality prevails in the case of writer-critics. On the one hand, it can be considered that it is a chicken-and-egg problem and on the other hand, it can be said that the discourses are indissolubly intertwined and combined in a new type of writing which is not doubly coded, but becomes a second type of nature. The writer does his job and then involuntarily or consciously depersonalises and brings into view the critical voice. This process is not new of course – traces of self-analytical writing can be found as far back as Sterne, Fielding or Thackeray, but it is the degree of transparency that has increased and (apparently) the author's omnipotence in controlling the fictional universe that has decreased. The illusion-breaking technique had to take a critical distance from the object-text and the main means of giving a manifestation to this conspiracy was parody. It is not sophisticated, academic, technical language that explains the making of fiction but humorous, inciting parody. David Lodge reflects this process of the critic acting as ventriloquist and speaking for the writer too, or the other way round and discussing Joyce he observes that

novelists are and always have been split between, on the one hand, the desire to claim an imaginative and representative truth for their stories, and on the other hand, the wish to guarantee and defend the truth-claim by reference to empirical facts [25].

The double status of Malcolm Bradbury as writer and critic allows him to develop a double discourse which exists through the combining of metafiction and metacriticism. They both perform a self-conscious investigation of their own development, they both simultaneously assert and subvert the authority of their referential mode. Thus, Bradbury the critic undermines the authority of the writer and Bradbury the writer mocks at the critic's pedantry and obsession for periodizations and taxonomies fact which limits his freedom of interpretation. From this perspective it would seem that the conflation or the mutual contamination of criticism and fiction would only bring a gain for the critic by granting flexibility and popularity to his discourse.

For the fine, subtle ironist and jovial parodist that Bradbury was the defection from criticism to the novel is understandable – after all he could not fully subscribe to his death as author since he considered himself very much alive. The postmodern novel was the ground for him to play

with the chain of cause and effect or with the principle that assessment and contradiction of that assessment can exist in one and the same work. This is the process of use and abuse, installation and subversion that Linda Hutcheon introduced in her studies. Such postmodern writings question the concept of authorial identity and the degrees of subjectivity while, of course, asserting them fully. This type of transferring the linguistic and analytical, interpretative, comparative habits of the critic into the writing of fiction “is a way of acquiring the weight of academic philosophy, theory or criticism without conceding to the boredom of those discourses – or without loss of sex appeal” [26]. If this is done intuitively (though in a highly elevated manner) in the case of purely bred writers such as James Joyce, Martin Amis, John Fowles, Ian McEwan, critics, with very bulk or very thin studies bearing their signature, are highly perceptive of these changes and use them at all levels to support their critical theories and subvert those of other critics or the other round. It was actually claimed that critical language in novels can even be perceived as intertextual use and not necessarily metafictional.

6. Conclusions

Malcolm Bradbury seems to have chosen his side: even in his critical studies his interest in the novel as the ultimate species in which he could express himself fully was ubiquitous. He always declared his pleasure in writing novels (seconded by satires and short stories) fact which gave him the possibility of stepping outside the confining limits of serious, grave objective theories and enter the realm of a different type of critique of the contemporary society:

The writer privileges imaginative writing, as he must; his path outruns criticism and transgresses theory, however much, as a thinking citizen of his time, he must absorb its meanings (*Saul Bellow*, p. 19).

On the other hand, Bradbury also felt the incredulity into which the metanarratives or the grand narrative of/ within criticism had fallen and the commodity that the critical work had transformed into and preferred authorship as a status that would never truly disappear despite various critical theories and despite the change of philosophical, social or narratological theories. In a review to such a critical study (“The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief” [27]), Bradbury leaves aside intellectual prudishness and admits the decrepit state into which criticism fell in the age of the free access market and during globalized selling of knowledge:

We live – we’re proud to do so – in a non-judgemental, an equalising, a levelling, a willingly and articulately self-dumbing age. We won’t say elite; we’re ideologically under-critical. Criticism has left the public arena for the closets of the university; and there it has become something else. Disliking judgement in the old sense, it has now become literary theory: tribalised, compartmentalised, heavy with professionalised discourses, a variant of philosophy subservient to all the fashionable ideologies. The contemporary criticism kit, of post-Marxism, post-feminism, post-colonialism, new historicism, race and gender reading, can be ordered from any local campus. Newspaper criticism has mostly become journalism, part of the great game of listing and merchandising that passes now as ‘culture’. We have just a few large players – shall we say George Steiner, John Carey, Peter Kemp, Peter Ackroyd – who perform as public critics used to: as ideal proxies, ultimate intelligent judges and readers, displaying what we might surely expect of a critic: literary learning, comparative standards, a power of intelligent judgment, a primary belief in the worth of the literary arts.

Bradbury himself analyzed this double sidedness of his in a more direct manner in an essay (later comprised in *No, Not Bloomsbury*) entitled “Writer and Critic”. He regards the status as a rather peculiar combination and taking into consideration at least one aspect which we have already mentioned – the declaring by the critics of the death of the author – we understand the dilemma in which such practitioners are:

I am, I find, usually described as ‘the writer and critic’. The description is perfectly true, and I use it of myself. I am a writer of works of fiction and books of literary criticism. But latterly I have started to speculate rather more about this twosome. Aren’t they a rather odd couple? What kind of marriage or live-in relationship do they have? Is it happy or sad? Who cooks and who sews? Who does what and to whom? (p. 4).

Bradbury is, of course, playful even in this type of writing which is not necessarily a theoretical presentation of each profession's advantages and disadvantages, rewarding aspects and drawbacks. This double status of writer and critic is bound to have suffered serious alterations, to have lost its "grand", absolute credibility as long everything in the world of literature and criticism has changed: "poetry is exhausted, the drama is dying, and the novel is already dead. The word is in crisis, the signifier has lost its signified, and the battlefield is strewn with corpses of creation." (p. 6)

He had felt clearly the loss of credibility to which the critic had fallen a victim and he felt that a more realistic attitude is that of bitter scepticism that the contemporary novel allowed for. Of course he also defends the status of the critic and he admits that the new shifting of power from the writer to the reader has to have given some importance to the critic as an interpreter and re-writer of the text even if he is said to be the one who brings out the difference within the work by demonstrating that it is other than it is. Ultimately, we can say that Bradbury preferred fiction as the perfect territory in which one could contradict himself and not be asked to reconsider: "As far as my practice as a writer is concerned – which is in the end far more interesting to me than my practice as a critic – I do believe that writing is very large made out of contradiction" [28].

Notes

- [1] Peter Childs (2005): *Contemporary Novelists. British Fiction since 1970*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 10.
- [2] *Idem*, p. 275.
- [3] Bill Buford, "The End of the English Novel", in *Granta*, 3, 1980.
- [4] Peter Childs, Mike Storry (1999): *Encyclopedia of Contemporary British Culture*, Routledge, p. 421.
- [5] Dick Hebdige (1988): *Hiding in the Light: On Images and People*, Routledge, p. 209.
- [6] The term is used, in highly playful manner, by Bradbury himself in *My Strange Quest for Mensonge*, p. 39.
- [7] Jean-François Lyotard (1984/ 2005): *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Foreword by Fredric Jameson, Manchester University Press, p. 81.
- [8] Roland Barthes (1968): *The Death of the Author*, in David Lodge; Nigel Wood (2000): *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader*, second edition, Longman, Pearson Education, Inc., New York, pp. 143–150.
- [9] Patricia Waugh (2001): *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Taylor & Francis e-library, p. 24.
- [10] Robert A. Morace, *The Dialogic Novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, p. 70.
- [11] Michel Foucault (1969): *What Is an Author?*, in David Lodge; Nigel Wood (2000): *op. cit.*, pp. 173–187.
- [12] Robert A. Morace, *op. cit.*, p. XIV.
- [13] John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment" *apud* Hans Bertens (1995/ 2005): *The Idea of the Postmodern. A History*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 78.
- [14] Leslie Fiedler, *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, vol. II, Stein and Day Publishers, New York, p. 462.
- [15] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Publishing, p. 5.
- [16] Terry Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- [17] Robert N. Wilson: "The Social Context of Modern English Literature by Malcolm Bradbury" in *Social Forces*, vol. 51, no 1, September 1972, p. 119, University of North Carolina Press.
- [18] Thomas Docherty: "The Modern American Novel by Malcolm Bradbury" in *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 36, no 144, November 1985, pp. 607–609, Oxford University Press.
- [19] *Idem*, p. 608.
- [20] Henry Claridge: "From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature" edited by Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury – American History and the destruction of Knowledge: Innovative Writing in the Age of Epistemology" in *Review of English Studies. New Series*, vol. 45, no 178, May 1994, pp. 291–293, Oxford University Press, p. 291.
- [21] Arlen J. Hansen: "Realism and Perspectivism" in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 8, no 1, Autumn 1974, pp. 93–96, Novel Corp., Brown University, p. 94.
- [22] David Lodge, "Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach through Language" in David Lodge (1971): *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism*, Routledge, p. 59.
- [23] Mark Currie (1998): *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 51.
- [24] *Idem*, p. 51.
- [25] David Lodge (1990): *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*, *apud* Mark Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
- [26] Mark Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- [27] Malcolm Bradbury, "The Broken Estate: Essays in Literature and Belief" in *New Statesman*, vol. 128.
- [28] John, Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, Methuen, London & New York, 1985, p. 31.

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