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## PARANOIAS IN THE NOVEL *Sort of* (PA KAO) BY VLADIMIR TABAŠEVIĆ\*\*

*Abstract.* *Sort of* (Pa kao) by Vladimir Tabasević is a novel of poetic texture and ambiguous atmosphere, which achieves semantic multilayeredness through its willful incompleteness. Simple in a plot but complex in a narrative sense, burdened with the narrator's simultaneous disclosure and disguise of his own worldview, *Sort of* demands reader's effort to discern in theoretical-philosophical discourse that covers the narrator's vast psychological ballast. We analyze the novel in light of the psychological vulnerability of the narrator Emil, and the paranoid progression that ends with the psychotic episode in which he becomes the killer. Emil writes his personal history by incorporating everything into a hostile scheme, constantly questioning everyone else's motives, and repeating his truths obsessively, projecting them into others, which is all indicative of a paranoid personality moving toward a psychotic episode and an experience of depersonalization. The novel puts the reader at the same task the narrator is constantly confronted with: he must discern between what is and what is not told, thus delving into Emil's early trauma, narcissistic injury and feelings of ontological insecurity, all causes of paranoid psychopathology.

*Key words.* paranoia, paranoid jealousy, discursive identity construction, discourse control, identity, narrative, intertextuality, psychological separation.

In all three of Vladimir Tabašević's novels – *Quietly Flows the Mississippi* (*Tiho teče Misisipi*) (2015), *Sort of* (*Pa kao*) (2016), *The Delusion of Saint Sebastian* (*Zabluda svetog Sebastijana*) (2018) - the existential situation of the narrator is marked by paranoia, for which the narrator uses the *paranoj/paranojevi* coinage in his language experimentation. Already young Deni in *Quietly Flows the Mississippi* is shaken by paranoias, but the paranoid state of consciousness is the central axis that determines the fate of the protagonist and the romanesque developments in *Sort of*, which missed the Nin Prize in 2016 in competition with Ivana Dimić's *Arzamas*.

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In this brief novel, an important role belongs to literature, not only because of the constant narrator's textual and intertextual play but also because of the importance he attaches to the narrative - the basic unit of a person's reflection on his own life and systematization of experience. In our memory, according to Abot, there is no trace of who we are until a narrative emerges as a kind of re-inforcement that gives shape to that memory (2009: 27). It is therefore natural that in the world of narrative networks (how the human world is presented), the key role belongs to language, in the Heidegger sense of the rule of language over man, its role in defining and redefining identity. If we see each other only through our own wounds, always speak from trauma and go through with others only with what we have already gone through, as the narrator explains, then it means that we do not really see each other - Tabasević's heroes look at the world and people through osseous constructs and so do not live in the present.

*Sort of* is a very simple (in a plot sense) and very complex (in a narrative sense) novel. Young and talented writer Emil is hired by the dying colonel V./Freud to shape his life experience in a literary and artistic manner. However, much more than by compensation, Emil is motivated by girl Ana, the colonel's caregiver, with whom he has a passionate and short-lived love affair, and whom he eventually kills. Along with the story of Freud's life, the novel presents the story of Ana and Emil's growing up, and in all three of them, the focus is on what makes Emil's interpretation (rather than some real order of facts, which remains unfathomable) central. Both Freud and all others are seen by the narrator "in his own words", that is, from his own reference frame he reaches what, as he himself claims, is the only thing that can be reached: your own interpretation of someone else's life. Therefore, Freud, Ana, Ana's father Bubulj, and Emil's parents Zlatica and Ivan, who appear in the final chapters of the novel, are characters "by Emil", a space of the narrator's personality refraction, and only Emil's construction is narrated, the reflection of his construction of reality. In addition, the narrator illustrates with his novel the transposition of life experience into the literary<sup>1</sup>, revealing his own explanatory narrative and constantly engaging with other people's. In the narrative sense, the young writer finds himself in the position of a predator.

With his narrative, Emil commits constant violence against other characters, evoking the reader's experience of Gombrovich's novel *Pornography* (relationships between heroes are shaped by a third hero; the expectation of the observer changes the position of the participants in the dialogue<sup>2</sup>), but also - by

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- 1 A careful reader cannot but see that girl Marta, with whom the narrator was close as a child, becomes part of a fictional narrative about Freud's mistress, the "weekend woman," who leaves behind her daughter Marta: though she claims that "all Martas have unhappy fates" (Tabašević 2017: 75), the narrator signals with details that it is one and the same Marta in the double world of out-literary and literary existence.
  - 2 Emil's conversation with father's friend Miloš is determined by Anna's assumption that Emil cares about Miloš's opinion, that is, by Emil's guessing of Anna's assumption. "All in all,

persistently maintaining the story's twolayeredness and thematizing paranoid jealousy – Sabato's *The Tunnel*. "The paradox between the event described and its interpretation creates a gap similar to the one in Sabato's *The Tunnel*: whether Ana cheated on and rejected him is as problematic as Maria's cheating on Castel" (Milovanov 2017: 235). In Sabato's novel, the hero convincingly states that he committed his crime out of jealousy caused by Maria's infidelity, and that the reader delves through the layers of his defensive narrative to the fact that the judgment on Maria can by no means be unambiguous, as represented by the narrator. And Ana is a victim of Emil's paranoid, so-called morbid jealousy - one of the most obvious and dangerous manifestations of paranoidism, which occurs when "there is a threat to the exclusive possession of a partner" (Sims 1989: 95) and rests upon delusional evidence. Tabašević's cogency, just as that of Sabato's narrator, rests upon paranoid logic, with Emil being more aware of his entanglement in his own mental game and with a far greater capacity than Castel to perceive and understand the life position and experiences of the woman he is in love with: her loneliness, her refugee hardships, her lifelong straying. Yet, Sabato's and Tabašević's novel, the former in the modernist and the latter in the postmodernist key, tell a completely different story.

There is no clear boundary between reality and fantasy in storytelling, nor in the narrator's extraliterary context. Emil blends reality and fantasy as he recounts about Freud, his wife and daughter, imagining the lives of women behind whom love letters were left, and even the mailman who did not deliver all letters, writing his own worldview into analyzing their relationships. However, this is not a consequence of self-narrative self-awareness, but of the paranoid consciousness of the indicative vagueness in distinguishing what is in the mind from what is in the world (Kantor 2004: 24).

The novel is composed of three or two parts, depending on whether we judge by the formal markings in the text or the actual state of affairs, since the author gives us double information. The first part contains the unfinished off-side novel *Offside called love*, after which the part marked with Roman number three begins. The omission of Roman two points to an important broken nature of the text, to the loss of continuity in the narrator's voice - the literary text Emil is hired to write is distorted into an ironic, vindictive text about Freud, without clearly distinguishing what belongs to Freud's statement and what Emil's interpretation is. What is certain is that compared to Freud, Emil is in a manipulative position, writing a text for him and a text about him for Ana, absorbing someone else's narrative by his own. In fact, the first part of the novel tells the ambivalent story of Freud and Emil's love with Ana, and that whole ends with the murder.

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no one talks here because of the conversation, but because of someone else hovering over that conversation as a ghost" (Tabašević 2017: 113). Like Gombrovich's novel, *Soft of* rests on the perception and analytical interpretation of others' behavior.

In the third part, the story reveals Emil's childhood, and serves as the appendix to the whole story: it is the story of mother Zlatica about growing up in the poverty in a mining colony and the short-lived love with Ivan with whom she made Emil, and the supposed narration of father Ivan. Through the story of Freud and Ana, the narrator goes deeper into his own truth, and in fact into those narratives that shaped him and predetermined his way of experiencing the world, and thus reshaping Freud's confession.

There is a constantly visible struggle for power in the novel if we follow Foucault's connection of knowledge, power and discourse, through taking control of discourse. Freud strives, using Emil's literary skills, to release his own truth into the world. Emil, however, by assuming the role of judge of what is true and what is untrue in Freud's version, presents himself as a connoisseur of truth and becomes the one who defines himself and all other heroes, and takes control of the discursive construction of truth. However, Emil himself is a powerless and dependent individual, unable to maintain assumed control. The appendix, narrated from the perspective of Zlatica and Ivan, indicates that Emil's parents are the locus of control. The individual in the world of Tabašević's novel does not even know where it ends or begins in relative to others (just as a clear beginning or end of the novel is impossible<sup>3</sup>, so is the precise boundary between what belongs to others and the narrator himself). The narrator's paranoid progression is testified to by the pronouns he uses - the ironic moments from the beginning of the novel, told about from the position of some "we", prompted by the achieved communion with Ana, are transformed into "I" dominating the narrative, to reach the depersonalized "he".

Tabašević's playing with names - the central heroes are double-named: Colonel V./ Freud, Emil/Mile, Anica/Ana<sup>4</sup> - has a distinct intertextual and ironic role. Emil's love Ana goes from Freud's opponent - her lamentation over letters written by abandoned women tells of her identification with her mother, and of experiencing her mother's feelings that marked her from childhood<sup>5</sup>, making Freud a monster for her - to a personality preoccupied with ideas of marriage and Russia, which are the contents to which her father's ideological contamination directs her. Dr Bubulj, Ana's father, is an advocate of the ideology that produced him, given the enormous "symbolic function of ideology in the constitution of the subject" (Hol 2001: 221), and he himself fight, by writing history books, for the rule over discourse. Ana's betrayal is symbolic, but that is why, according to

3 "So far we have learned that beginning is impossible, as is the end, after all. But, alright, in the breaks between impossible beginnings and ends, it is clear, one lives and die, and so we in these breaks live and die" (Tabašević 2017: 11-12).

4 The criticism noted that Ana's presence in a context involving Freud's allusions to Ana was O. - under this pseudonym, the "case of Anna O," is known the Breuer's treatment of *Bertha Pappenheim*, a defender of women's rights (Milovanov 2017: 235).

5 "A mother's love kisses precisely by forcing you to remember her memory as your own" (Tabašević 2017: 100).

Emil's belief, it is complete: the turnaround of the value system is achieved by the influential parental figure shifting, making Ana a "father's daughter" from a "mother's daughter" (primitive identification with her mother gives birth to a paranoid response to Freud). So Ana loses her substance for Emil and shows herself to him as an ideologized form of existence, shaped by discourses, which is the way in which the narrator presents other characters, including himself.

Along with Zola, in the novel we have Wittman, Joyce, Dostoyevsky, Popa, Baudelaire, Sartre, implicitly<sup>6</sup> even Flaubert (the story of the "weekendwoman" shaped by a discourse on great love alludes to the fate of Emma Bovary), and the name of the hero ironically invokes Rousseau's famous work *Emile, or On Education* (1762), inasmuch as illuminating educational processes play a particularly important role in the novel. Speaking of education, Rousseau pleads for nature and freedom, as the basic conditions in which a man is formed, to carry all the virtues necessary for the future society of equal and free humans. In Tabašević's work, everyone is, without exception, determined by a specific historical event, but history is a perpetual interpretive framework of their own lives - subjects are "positioned but also produced by history" (Braun 2011: 220) - and man is shown to such a degree conditioning being that there is no room for freedom in himself and in the relationships he establishes. Finally, the personality in Tabašević's novel is not a free individual, with free will, but a force produced by a whole set of historical processes, a series of discourses, "the emanation of a system, structure determined by the logic of history" (Isailović 2017: 506). So *Sort of* indeed is, as marked by subheading "A novel of history, love, and other misunderstandings." The equation in the identity conundrum in Tabašević's novel is set so that one is always at a loss: if we do not know our own name, we are formless; if we know it, we are adopted and built up by it - there is no way to get out of the social relations network.

"I called on Ana not to know our names together. Ana, however, suddenly knew her name. She told me suddenly that we were done" (Tabašević 2017: 182). These utterly concise and metaphorical statements contain the whole process that led to break up and resulted in the murder. Given that the narrator's name is a signal of an individual's burden with his parents' expectations - the mother uses her name to write into her son her own desires, marking the role of Zola's *Germinal* in her love with Ivan - and that Emil himself regressed, from Ana's Emil<sup>7</sup> to his mother's son, the murder can be read on the background of the archetypal pattern of failed psychological separation from parental figures:

6 Emil's statement that he "rides on a match whose head is the most prominent point in history" invokes the famous statement of Salinger Holden Caulfield that, in the event of a new war, he would climb to the top of the missile.

7 It was important for Emil to tell his mother about Ana, and thus to reveal that he was no longer mother's but Ana's: "I hardly believe in myself. There is, sometimes, just mother. She always exists, in fact" (Tabašević 2017: 31).

the mother's son kills the father's daughter. "As long as femininity is unconscious, dependent on masculinity that depends on it, the mental constellation will be incestuous: the mother is firmly attached to the son, that is, the daughter is attached to the father" (Woodman 2012: 29). Ana's and Emil's relationship changes significantly after the appearance of Ana's father: as soon as Ana becomes her father's daughter, Emil automatically becomes his mother's.

"Here we are talking about the mother with a big M and the father with a big F: the Mother complex and the Father complex, the two largest energy generators in our psyche. Attachment, or lack of attachment to our own parents, fuels these generators of unconscious associations that affect our future relationships with men, women, children and society" (Woodman 2012: 29).

The need to completely separate the child from his parents' values, to transform them towards itself and to live its life as an individual (Woodman 2012: 122) has not been fulfilled by any hero in Tabašević's novel - that is why it has no individual in the true sense of the word: subjects are dominated by discourses and unconscious complexes (Zlatica adores her father, her son is condemned to please her mother), and "Jung claims that what is not consecrated reaches us as fate" (Woodman 2012: 270).

Emil longs for an authentic experience, not its description, although he is painfully aware that language, which is commonly regarded as a medium of communication, is a major impediment to communication and communion, as language is not a verbal sign of thought but the center of human self-formation - man constitutes and is constituted through language, which is here understood in the spirit of Lacan, Foucault, post-structuralists and constructivists; language is the world we are immersed in by birth. In addition to this primary inability to authenticate, the narrator constantly draws attention to the willful manipulation of language, undertaken by both Freud and Ana, which is a consequence of the way he perceives the world, i.e. his paranoid logics. The narrator's paranoid logic flows into the theoretical framework of discursive understanding of identity, which sees identification as a construction that is not natural but conditioned (identities are "positions the subject is forced to occupy" - Hall 2001: 221), so the characters appear as subjects of particular discourses. Therefore, the narrator's mockery of Freud's confession is twofold, given the general inability to be authentic, but also given the strong desire to manipulate the impressions left on others. As Freud believes "I can embalm him with the right words," while Emil "sees him in his own words," the novel *Soft of* is woven of the ambiguous atmosphere produced by the narrator's attitude towards someone else's story, which is theoretically based on a discursive construction of identity, but psychologically on immense suspicion as a central attitude towards life and people.

It is the narrator's a priori premise that human words and gestures always mean something other than what appears on the surface, and therefore he is in

a constant but automatic mental effort to interpret, or reveal: thus he states that Colonel Freud, as an “old bluffer” and “an extremely thoughtful liar”, “falsely drools after his wife” and wants to forge his past. Entertained by over-analyzing and discovering other’s hidden motives, Emil translates human behavior into personal meanings, identifying the hidden motives and intentions behind obvious words and actions. Thus, he is on the constant pursuit of others, looking from the general to the individual, the one that “cannot be deceived” because he “manages to see through others” (Kaneti 1984: 188) and is characterized by “cognitive rigidity and an obsessive orientation to detail” (Alper 2005: 67), which reveal Emil’s “paranoid fear of being manipulated” (Alper 2005: 88). The novel abounds formulations *he thinks that I think, he actually thinks, he lies that he loved*. That is why the colonel *sort of cried*, they both take care of *soft of literature*, people consolidate their identities through ideas (which makes them *sort of ideas*: “weekendwoman” is related to the idea of romantic love, Ana to morality, Dr. Bubulj to nationalism, Freud was related to communism), *sort of love* develops between him and Ana, Ana *sort of fell into the river*.

The only reality the reader reaches is the inner world of the narrator, and Emil is isolated and overwhelmed by the negative emotions he barely controls. Emil’s tone, the great irritability and anger with which he talks about others but also about himself are indicative, and occasionally we face his eclectic absence of compassion. In Chapter Five, which is a transcript, the reader learns that Freud went to the partisans at the age of seventeen: through the abundance of motives, another, tragic dimension of his fate can be seen, but the reader, prepared by the narrator’s earlier remarks and evaluations, receives this story with significantly reduced empathy. Emil’s deductions miss the real people they are targeted at because they lack an understanding of the individual’s life position from within. Noticing beneath the personal story the impersonal structures determining the lives of the characters (talking about individuals as human types, and of their groundbreaking life events as typical situations), the narrator builds an ironic deviation. Thus, he dissolves all other people’s stories in his a priori scheme of things, and by telling about the killing capacity of others and claiming it to be universal truth, he, in fact, at the same time reveals and disguises his own worldview. Demonstrating that no one is in relationship with reality, nor in real dialogue with the other, but solely with his a priori ideas, which are tailored by someone else’s hand and beyond our will, Emil recounts the solipsistic character of the epoch, the constant killing of the other as the other - all are characters, through others, are in a relationship only with their own demons. Everyone he comes in contact with are the object of the narrator’s insight<sup>8</sup> - that is why Emil

8 He interprets his father’s self-isolation as giving importance to oneself: “he wanted to make himself famous by this self-exile (...) Pictures and painting are just a mere motive” (Tabašević 2017: 110).

does not get to know anyone, but refracts his core beliefs through others. His I “relates only to himself and the objects he alone sets” (Leng 1977: 81), so that he is always in relation only to his assumptions about the other, which he persistently empowers.

Through his love for Ana, Emil focuses on writing a “revenge novel” - “I did not sleep for days when Ana told me that Freud told her he feels like *having fun*” (Tabašević 2017: 27) - but in resists before his intentions under the pressure of inner demons. The narrator’s syntax and idiolect - neologisms, inversions, allusiveness, associative linking of words by sound and vividness, great summarization of statements, often through poetic imagery - assure us of the main character’s talent, but also of the large range of his feelings that occur on *or-or* principle and are located at the ends of the spectrum. The hero is extremely emotionally unstable (disturbed, vulnerable and suspicious) and gives the impression of constant psychological boiling. Violation of the linguistic norm is both the nature of the talent and the signal of the breach of the norm he will commit as a killer. He is “in pain”, “barely believes in himself”, feels “under the weather”, is suspicious, in constant anticipation of disaster, with occasional suicidal thoughts. “At least to me, spring is always terrible and there is no joy that would eliminate the fear that something like a chasm into which we will fall hides behind that beauty, and that there, in that chasm, someone screams helpless” (Tabašević 2017: 87). In addition, he trusts no one, not even Ana, and the hostile experience of the world is reinforced and not destroyed by Ana’s confidentiality: “how should I know she does not give herself to him” (Tabašević 2017: 29). Anger speaks from him, anger he often uses to hide his own vulnerability: so, at the beginning, he says, “Birds are an undisputed crap and lie, just as many other things” (Tabašević 2017: 22), which is a statement with a completely different emotional charge when much later we learn about one of his childhood traumas, his attachment to a bird that his stepfather willfully releases from the cage.

The novel demonstrates the therapeutic effectiveness of the artistic work: with a strong focus on building material, its rethinking and artistic shaping, Emil maintains his mental health reining by creating his own double. “Emil could not sleep, but even this man in him, that fire, never slept” (Tabašević 2017: 173). Rationalization, aestheticization, and imagination are important defense mechanisms by which the hero reins a psychological disaster. “I wanted to take revenge on him for everything, in the way I only knew and as I was in a position and obligation - by writing and with a strong will to destroy someone by writing” (Tabašević 2017: 30). Emil, as a schizoid individual, moves toward a psychotic episode, as evidenced by the experience of depersonalization after the murder<sup>9</sup> - a psychological disaster and the destruction of the narrative are not just simultaneous but also identical processes.

9 “And dear Bubulj has completely gone mad because of his wet Ana, clutching some young man’s neck as if it is a battledore” (Tabašević 2017: 151).



“The term schizoid refers to a person whose totality of experience is split into two essential senses: first, we have a split in his attitude towards the world, and second, there is a disorder in his attitude towards himself. Such a person is not capable of experientially experiencing himself ‘together with’ others, or of feeling ‘at home’ in the world, but, on the contrary, feels desperately alone and isolated; moreover, he does not perceive himself as a whole personality, but rather as ‘split’ in various ways” (Leng 1977: 9).

The narrator lives in complete isolation, his memory “does not serve him the best” (Tabašević 2017: 139), and the importance of memory for the feeling of personal identity is known, so by writing Emil captures Mile in himself, and the breakup of the narrative also marks the hero’s breakdown.

The novel *Sort of* puts the reader before the same task the narrator constantly faces. It is enough Ana says that she is not hiding anything for Emil to begin to think that she is hiding something: this is “how I understood people and the way language gives them away” (Tabašević 2017: 117). The reader has to discern between what is and what is not said. If he is careful, he does not miss the fact that the hero’s animosity towards Freud is conditioned not only by what the hero expresses (the colonel’s attitude towards Ana), but also by what becomes visible in his emerging novel: it is through the motif of an empty cage in the house whose owners were banished that the narrator shapes the story of the war of Colonel Freud and his colleague Robert Perišić in accordance with his traumatic war-torn childhood, mediating by a negative officer staff image his critical attitude towards the war in Yugoslavia. There is a strong critique of machismo in the novel *Sort of*, as represented by these two officers. Robert and Freud’s conquest of women is portrayed on the one hand as a denial of homosexuality and, on the other, as an expression of the will for power and mutual male competition (the struggle for power stands equally behind the conquest of women as behind the conquest of discourse), devoid of true vitalism and hedonism. It is not the excess of life that drives the heroes through love adventures, but the lack of life force and vague self-compassion. The nineties wars, as Emil portrays, meant for the two officers only the acquisition of new images and identities, the filling of the identity gap. That is why their war roles are portrayed as masks - in this warfare process Emil paints as a process of alienation, both heroes give voice to the “killer within”. “So much were Robert and Freud fed up with leaving behind only women and females, that it was time to leave behind some corpses, and to stand out skilled also in the art of death, apart from the art of life” (Tabašević 2017: 79). Actualizing historical events as a resolution of identity crises, Emil testifies to the “lost narrative sense of history as a series of logical connections between moments in time that reveal a scheme of special individual or national destiny” (Donell 2000: 48), a recognizable postmodern conception of history, often mediated by paranoia.

Emil/Mile is a misanthrope who constantly projects his negative feelings into others (hence in his version of events everyone else interacts with one

another through projections), or domesticates them through creation. Love, affliction and passion - which are the motives behind the “weekendwoman” – are interpreted by Emil as a bug, and he declares the affirmation of a self-image as the central motivation of all love relationships. Love is nothing but a network for soul-hunting<sup>10</sup>, even though it exists as a potential of self-realization: “the only important thing is that Ana loves in me what I am not aware of at all, and that can certainly end soon if someone like Ana does not take it for herself, and then, I will never know if it was in me in the first place” (Tabašević 2017: 94-5).

In his revenge novel, Emil tells a possible truth about Freud: from the standpoint of facts, it does not matter whose version will be told, Freud’s or Emil’s. More is learned about reality by discovering the energy and will behind the chosen version of the story, and Emil’s version is overwhelmed by the superior feeling that he is the one who successfully discovers the real behind the appearing. While Freud portrays his escape from the countryside as rebelliousness, Emil, using the ironic paraphrase of “shepherd renegade,” speaks of it as a pose.

The psychopathology of paranoia is linked “to the attitude of the individual towards an object” (Blum 1994: 97): the loss of a permanent object and a desperate effort to reestablish connection with it is characteristic (Blum 1994: 98). Suspicious of the fact that he is worthy of love because he was deprived of his mother’s attention in childhood, which is a narcissistic injury and “increases aggression” (Blum 1994: 100), the narrator has a strong feeling of ontological insecurity.

“Emil sits in awe, filled with the corner. Some voice in him, in me, says sometimes you will be crazy, Emil, you are small, sometimes you will be crazy about everything, because of your distant father, the picture, sometimes you will simply start to hate your bird too, and for that voice, Emil, I, think that it is the voice of the god who finally came forward” (Tabašević 2017: 171).

The trauma of growing up with a cruel stepfather and a distant mother caused Emil’s feeling that the world was a hostile place: “I was just a trailer my mother dragged with her with the end of her heart, the bottom, the tail I used to hold onto with my fist as small as a small pineapple” (Tabašević 2017: 170), “because Emil was primarily a place of denial of the past” (Tabašević 2017: 171). The early loss of love objects, which is first-order trauma, makes Emil a person full of negative emotions and distrust of the world and people; he remains “locked in his own way of thinking” (Zigel 1994: 19), constantly affirming it. Therefore, we can understand the whole range of Emil’s statements about others as a projection - for example, Emil’s statement about Freud: “He was one of those bastards who, feeling sorry for themselves by a particular, carefully chosen story about themselves, give themselves

10 “Love is the first business in the world. In love people put interests, kill and hate each other because they are reduced to one another” (Tabasevic 2017: 67).

the reason to despise and torment others” (Tabašević 2017: 33). Ana’s infidelity is symbolic, because her role is symbolic: Ana is a narcissistic object for Emil by which the hero seeks to “maintain or renew contact with a persistent object” (Blum 1994: 107), but also allies with her in her hostility to the world (Blum 1994: 104) and therefore ending the love affair means complete failure for the hero.

However, Emil’s identification is also related to the mother; he seeks to understand what she has experienced, is filled with her feelings (Kogan 2001: 49), and her central life experience is abandonment. His lack of self-confidence is also testified to by the expectation of being betrayed: jealousy persisted in him even before the occasion and torture came up with the question “does she secretly give herself to him because of the apartment she is waiting for” (Tabašević 2017: 24) - so suspicious that Ana would be taken by some water polo player, that Ana prefers Raskolnikov.

“I hate Anna, who, sort of, betrayed me. (...) Ana, who has betrayed me in the heart of my thoughts called paranoias (...) My thoughts on how Ana could give herself to that bastard upstairs, with a light that is quieter than his funeral will be, therefore, my thoughts on it are indeed some paranoias” (Tabašević 2017: 25).

Emil lives in a self-referential world he constructed himself, representing in the same way the worlds of others. Claiming that “*only paranoias exists*” in him (Tabašević 2017: 149), Emil marks a paranoid discourse as a hallmark of the epoch - thus pointing to the widespread belief that the greater truth about the other lies in things that are accidentally bumped into rather than in what is obvious<sup>11</sup>, reveals that Bubulj’s nationalist discourse (and he is the paradigm of a historian who subordinates science to ideology) relies on a conspiracy theory about hidden origin he reconstructs from history books.

Emil’s paranoid logic relieves him of the responsibility for his own life, which he attributes to growing up and the structure of the world. By presenting himself and his heroes as role models of the human species and a cause for reflection on the state of spirits in the world (and his consciousness as an exclusive trait), Emil uses a defensive narrative strategy (intellectualization, rationalization) similar to that used by the Dostoevsky’s hero of *Notes from Underground*. Emil writes his personal history fitting everyone into a hostile scheme, with constant suspicion of everyone else regarding their motives, and repeats his truths obsessively, projecting them into others. Thus, he proclaims his psychological truth anthropological, and sees individuals entangled in paranoid-narcissistic play all around him. After all, as the motto of the novel, Tabašević takes a quote from Deleuze and Guattari: “It is *not* the slumber of reason that engenders *monsters*, but *vigilant and insomniac*

11 “There is this indescribable stupidity in the man that causes him to believe that greater truth is contained in the things he bumps into than in those available to him, and especially if those things are letters and, if they also have that kind of patina found letters have (...)” (Tabašević 2017: 97).

rationality.” It is Deleuze and Guattari, with Lyotard, that joined the contemporary narratives of cultural paranoia, or the narratives of identity representation in history (O’Donnell 2000: 43), which is the great theme in Tabašević’s novel.

*Sort of* is a succinct novel of poetic texture, which achieves semantic multilayeredness with its willful incompleteness. We will not be mistaken in thinking of Emil’s writing as both a containment of a psychological disaster and building of a psychological defense system and seeking to restore stability after the breakdown in which he committed murder. Emil tells the story of how he killed Ana, but the function of the temporal indeterminacy of the narrative is to create an ambiguous atmosphere: is the writing of the third part interrupted by the murder, in which case the crime gets the status of an incident, or does the narration begin after the murder and has a strong defensive function? Minimizing murder through narrative technique, Tabašević was able to learn from Camus: in *The Stranger*, a major problem for the interpreter is the inability to make sense of the temporal order of the story, although the logical conclusion is that Meursault can write his confession only from prison. Meursault describes his days before the murder, showing what it really was manslaughter; in the same way Emil contextualizes Ana’s murder, placing it alongside the imaginary fate of Freud’s daughter, or his father, and mentioning what he did only when the murder comes in the order of the story, showing the apparent absence of empathy and guilty conscience. If Meursault is the hero of the absurd, Emil is the hero whose “paranoid and narcissistic traits appear in a dangerous mix” (Kernberg 2001: 89), and who, by his philosophy, builds a system of defense: claiming that we are all killers, only that life opportunities enable someone to live in a socially acceptable way, Emil presents his crime as an incident, as a consequence of the constitution of a human being.

The incompleteness of the novel is motivated by the representation of identity itself, as *Sort of* “dramatizes the prevailing form of the identity’s inability to be rounded up - the problem of being is transformed into a problem of knowledge, which is indeed a paranoid construction” (Eisenstein 2003: 146). Paranoia is illuminated here as a reaction of epochal proportions to the layeredness, “schizophrenia of postmodern identity” (O’Donnell 2000: 11).

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ПАРАНОЈЕВИ У РОМАНУ *ПА* КАО ВЛАДИМИРА ТАБАШЕВИЋА

РЕЗИМЕ

Роман *Па као* Владимира Табашевића саткан је од двозначне атмосфере коју производи приповедачев однос према туђој причи, теоријски утемељен на дискурзивном конструисању идентитета, а психолошки на огромној сумњи као централном јунаковом ставу према животу и људима. Приповедач Емил, ангажован да књижевно-уметнички уобличи туђу исповест, исписује не само осветничку верзију туђе приче, иронијски је онеобичавајући и онемогућавајући читаоцу да се јасно разабере у томе шта припада чијем гласу у роману, него се, преко приче о Фројду и Ани, све дубље спушта у властиту истину, а заправо у оне наративе који су га уобличили и предодредили његов начин доживљаја света. Једина реалност до које читалац доспева јесте унутрашњи свет приповедача, а Емил је изолован и преплављен негативним осећањима које једва контролише. Тако све туђе приче раствара у својој априорној схеми ствари, и казујући о убилачком капацитету других и тврдећи да је то универзална истина, заправо у исти мах разоткрива и маскира властити поглед на свет.

Указали смо на приповедачев схизоидни расцеп, те процес параноидне прогресије, психотичну епизоду и искуство деперсонализације које проживљава пошто је убио Ану. Анино убиство тумачимо и на фону архетипског обрасца неуспешне психолошке сепарације од родитељских фигура, када га је могуће прочитати као испуњавање схеме у којој „мајчин син“ убија „очеву ћерку“. Субјектима у Табашевићевом роману владају дискурси и несвесни комплекси, пре свега комплекс мајке и оца. Нећемо погрешити ако о Емиловом писању мислимо и као о обуздавању психолошке катастрофе, али и као о грађењу система психолошке одбране и настојању да се поврати стабилност након слома у коме је починио убиство.

*Кључне речи:* параноја, параноидна љубомора, дискурзивно конструисање идентитета, контрола дискурса, идентитет, наратив, интертекстуалност, психолошка сепарација.