

INSTANCES OF FAME IN POSTMODERN FICTIONAL WORKS AN ANALYSIS BASED ON PHILIP ROTH'S AND MARIN PREDA'S NOVELS

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Abstract:

This article will discuss multiple instances of fame in postmodern fictional works. The authors chosen are Philip Roth, the American author well known for works such as "I Married a Communist", "The Human Stain", "The Dying Animal" etc. and Marin Preda, the Romanian author who wrote "The Moromete Family", "The Intruder", "The Delirium". The novels representing the postmodern literary current in this article are "American Pastoral (1997)" and "The Most Beloved of Earthlings (1980)". Through a close analysis of the main characters and the most important events in the novel, the theme of fame will be observed in multiple instances such as the historical point of view, the sociological point of view, the psychological point of view. The first part of the article will introduce the reader to Philip Roth and one of his most famous novels "American Pastoral" in which the theme of fame suffers a metamorphosis because of the events that take place in the novel and therefore affect the main character. In this part the concept of deconstruction will be observed and conceptualized with examples from the novel, the depiction of the utopic world through the American dream, and finally, the transformation of this world into a dystopian one because of the social issues presented in the novel. The social issues presented are related to true historical events which took place in the 1960's in America. These events are also represented in the micro universe of the main character through the family problems of the main character. The second part of the article will focus on a comparison between the main characters of the novels stated above, Seymour Levov respectively Victor Petrini. This comparison is based on the analysis of their physical and behavioral characteristics and finally, some significant events they are part of. In this section, the concept of dandy will be discussed, and relevant examples will be given to demonstrate that both have traits in this direction. This article aims to prove that the theme of fame in postmodern fictional works is a topic worth studying. It brings new viewpoints upon the American and Romanian postmodern works because of the complexity and multiplicity of concepts that come into its construction. Also, I intend to demonstrate how certain social issues, such as the impact of totalitarian regimes on society, influenced the writers to create works in which the effect of these problems is visible on successful people. The theme of fame in postmodern fictional works in these two novels encompasses myths and literary concepts, creating the impression of the

perfect world for the perfect celebrity. Finally, the authors chose to transform everything into chaos and destroy this seducing illusion, converting fame into disgrace.

Keywords: postmodernism; fame; utopia; dystopia; deconstruction; dandyism.

I. The Theme of Fame in American Pastoral by Philip Roth

American Pastoral released in 1997 is well known for being the most successful novel in Philip Roth's trilogy. All these novels are believed to present social issues, such as street revolutions, traumas after the war and struggles of the postmodern citizens of America in the 20th to 21st centuries. However, in this article I will debate the theme of fame in Roth's novel through an analysis of the events along with the characterization of the main character of the novel: "the Swede". The context in which Seymour Levov appears is expected to be the American dream. An America in which everything is possible, a utopian America in which the main character and his family will live a perfect life. Nevertheless, that is just an illusion, as the America they live in is not dreamlike. Since it is a postmodern novel, the narrator presents a world in which the destruction, the deconstruction, the absurd and the lack of order are *mise en scène*. In addition, the presentation of the perfect world for the perfect family at the beginning of the novel is just a seducing illusion.

The novel starts with the narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, who is believed to be Philip Roth's most famous character embodying the author in his novels and being his alter-ego. The narrator meets Seymour's brother, Jerry, at a high school reunion and discovers that "the Swede" died. In this scenario, Nathan Zuckerman starts to imagine how the life of this handsome, well-built, intelligent, and wealthy boy was. The plot reveals the perfect rural family in a world which is best characterized by chaos because of the racial tension which started riots on the streets of New Jersey. The title, *American Pastoral*, represents one of the most prominent symbols of the novel as it depicts the "American dream" everyone sought in the 1960's. A pastoral is, by definition, a literary work which evokes rural life usually in an idealized manner. Moreover, the main character is depicted as a mythical hero, as the embodiment of perfection, famous because of his exceptional capacities in America's representative sports: basketball and baseball and, also, his extraordinary personality. Even though the character is famous mostly in his neighbourhood, he represents the icon of all the Jew immigrants who were able to create a more than decent life in America after the Second World War. In other words, "the Swede" is the fictional incarnation of the fame of minorities in a world best characterized by uncertainties.

Thus, this article presents the membership of the novel as belonging to postmodernism through narrative means such as the close presentation of the main characters, the historical context in which the events take place and the depiction of America in the novel. The latter is an important aspect closely related to the construction of the character, especially his identity, and a characterization of the main character.

It is stated in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* that this literary, better said cultural movement, usually refers to “new problems of ethnic and religious diversity”. Also, it became “centred not on any one cultural form but in the problems attaching to the plurality of cultures” (Roth 2004:12). In this case, the story of Seymour Levov is presented in a postmodern context. Therefore, it reveals social issues that started because of the cultural, racial, and religious diversity in America. For example, the Swede and his family are affected by the Vietnam War, even though not directly, they witness events on the television from the war which later will have a significant impact on their lives. Moreover, the riots and scenes evolution on the streets are due to racial diversity as a consequence of the Afro-American people who started to march the streets of New Jersey for their rights. All these events are part of the bigger picture. They represent the anti-pastoral as it is called by David Brauner in one of his articles, *American Anti-Pastoral; Incontinence and Impurity in ‘American Pastoral’ and ‘The Human Stain’*, in other words, the American nightmare which befell the Americans in the 1960’s. The historical context plays an important role in the novel. It reveals multiple perspectives on the postmodern literary current. In addition to this, instead of representing the utopic, perfect world, the narrator chose “to reinstate traditional concepts of literary realism, offering a relatively stable frame of historical references that include both domestic and foreign historical events.” (Löffler 2019: 390). In other words, he exposed the tragedies that took place in post-war American society. Their set in the novel is introduced smoothly because of the way the narrator uses the language to create a metanarrative. In addition to this, the language-centered focus, a well-known philosophical feature of postmodernism, helps with the construction of the historical context.

The horrific depiction of America in the novel is also represented through the family life of the main character. It can be observed that the life of the Levovs is a representation of America in the 1960’s, since their family life is filled with uncertainties, contradictions, and chaos. At the beginning of the novel, the Swede is idealized by the narrator, he is presented as the perfect man and the hero of the neighbourhood who managed to marry the perfect woman. Dawn was beautiful, smart, kind, and even though their religious affiliations were different, they married. The Levovs started a beautiful life together, they moved to Old Rimrock and started to live their

American pastoral or the American dream. Seymour and Dawn had a beautiful daughter, and everything was exactly how it was planned until she turned into a teenager. Their daughter was far from perfect since she started from a fragile age to stutter. When she turned into a teenager, she developed a rage towards her mother and father and used to go to New York to meet with some friends who were revolutionaries. The ideology of the group is represented by the fight against the Vietnam War. Therefore, in a superficial view, the group was seeking peace, however, a conversation between Merry and her father in the novel demonstrates that the ideals of the group were communist:

“You come home with all this Communist material. You come home with all these books and pamphlets and magazines.’

‘I’m trying to learn. You taught me to learn, didn’t you? Not just to study, but to learn. C-c-c-communist . . .’

‘It is Communist. It says on the page that it’s Communist.’

‘C-c-c-communists have ideas that aren’t always about C-communism.’

‘For instance.’

‘About poverty. About war. About injustice. They have all kinds of ideas. Just b-b-because you’re Jewish doesn’t mean you just have ideas about Judaism. Well, the same holds for C-c-communism.’” (Roth 1997: 104-105)

Merry manifested the ideals of the group violently, and she became a terrorist, blowing up the post office in their small village and killing a man. In addition to this, Löffler suggests that: “Merry Levov’s violent refusal to live up to the pastoral ideal and Dawn’s sexual escapism are so fundamentally opposed to the Swede’s desired world picture that they can no longer be imbued with meaning. Each episode, therefore, symbolizes the collapse of a cultural syntax.” (2019: 392). Therefore, from that point on, the lives of the Levovs change abruptly. Even his fame changed from fame related to admiration into fame related to compassion, pity, or even hate for creating such a monster. This metamorphosis of fame will be analyzed later in this paper. The traumatic events in Seymour’s life represent the petrifying incidents in America. He is the representation of the American man even though he is not fully American. His Jewish identity is dominated by the American one. Therefore, his desire for success, wealth, integration, and perfection made him become the epitome of the American society in the 20th century, a society in pursuit of the American dream.

II. Four Instances of Fame

From a historical point of view- there is a similarity between the main character and the political celebrity J.F. Kennedy. Therefore, the historical context which represents the topos of the novel is the protest culture of the 50's and 60's. This period is deeply marked by the Kennedy political administration, which sought to stop the spread of the communist ideology. Therefore, Kennedy and his party adopted a policy of confinement during a time dominated by the tensions of the Cold War. Thus J.F. Kennedy became the most famous figure in this context, mainly because he was the youngest president of the United States of America. During his time, America and its citizens lived a tumultuous life, the American dream became a nightmare, and the country was surrounded by protests, riots, and street fights mostly due to racial issues. These events constructed a general feeling of uncertainty and doubts, suggests Kathryn Hume (2000: 5). In addition to this, the narrator, Nathan Zuckerman plays an important role as he represents the author's recollections and thoughts concerning the most significant events in America, such as: the Vietnam War, the assassination of J.F. Kennedy, and the Cold War. Therefore, the assassination of J.F. Kennedy, which in other words, is the death of the American dream, is represented by the destruction of Seymour's dreams related to an idyllic family life. In this context, the main character seems to be in multiple times associated to the president of the United States of America, for example:

“His great looks, his larger-than-lifeness, his glory, our sense of his having been exempted from all self-doubt by his heroic role— that all these manly properties had precipitated a political murder made me think of the compelling story not of John R. Tunis's sacrificial Tomkinsville Kid but of Kennedy, John F. Kennedy, only a decade the Swede's senior and another privileged son of fortune, another man of glamour exuding American meaning, assassinated while still in his mid-forties just five years before the Swede's daughter violently protested the Kennedy-Johnson war and blew up her father's life.” (Roth 1997: 82).

The Swede was the neighbourhood's Kennedy. The construction of the main character in this fragment contains all the traits of the postmodern hero, or the postmodern celebrity. The physical appearance, a handsome hero, from a wealthy family, a dandy, a recognizable and loved figure in the neighborhood, is similar to Kennedy's, who as well was considered a handsome man, a dandy, a macho man, a man who was easily recognizable in America. Seymour Levov was a righteous man who followed the political ideologies of Kennedy, being against the communist ideology. The Swede represents in the micro-universe created by the narrator a great political figure, a famous politician of the United States of America. Finally, his fame

as a character cannot be denied. As a further matter, the assassination of J.F. Kennedy, a tragic and notable event in the 60's, is represented in the novel by Merry's act of terrorism, which triggered a series of tragedies in Seymour's life, as well as the destruction of the Levov family, which, in fact, represents the fall of the American dream and at the same time the decadence of the main character's fame.

From a sociological point of view, the Swede could be considered a famous character in the novel as his social life is a success starting from high school because he was a handsome young man and also a sports hero, and continuing up to the point his daughter blew up the post office. Referring to the prototype of the postmodern hero or celebrity, one of the most important traits is his ability to be a macho man or a dandy. In this case, the "Swede" manages to succeed. Due to his good looks, performances in sports, extraordinary personality, elegance and fame, he steals the heart of the most beautiful girl in New Jersey, a catholic American woman: Dawn, who won the title of Miss New Jersey in her youth. His physical appearance is presented as irresistible from the beginning of the novel:

"The Swede. During the war years, when I was still a grade school boy, this was a magical name in our Newark neighbourhood, even to adults just a generation removed from the city's old Prince Street ghetto and not yet so flawlessly Americanized as to be bowled over by the prowess of a high school athlete. The name was magical; so was the anomalous face. Of the few fair complexioned Jewish students in our preponderantly Jewish public high school, none possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed, insentient Viking mask of this blue-eyed blond born into our tribe as Seymour Irving Levov." (Roth 1997: 9)

The Swede's physical appearance is close to perfection. The words used by the author to denote his complexion's traits are all taken from the semantic field of the myth: "magical, prince, anomalous", also, the fair complexion "blue-eyed blond" suggests that the main character had extraordinary traits as a small percentage of the population of Earth owns such characteristics. However, in the general opinion of the other characters and the narrator, the Swede's success was not only due to his great looks and wealth, but also his personality. The concept of identity must be discussed in this context. Being a Jew immigrant in the American society of the 60's, was not easy for some people. This was due to a great European disaster in the modern history of the world: the Holocaust. It affected all the Jews, installing a permanent state of anxiety among them. In relation to this, Michael Rothberg suggests that: "the 'unforgettable experience' of the Holocaust grounds Jewish identity as much as does the urge to fit in with the gentiles" (2007: 59). Probably this is the reason why for the Swede it seemed to be

tremendously important to achieve and maintain a high social status—and to be known more as an American rather than a Jew. The Swede’s success is believed to be achieved because the main character, in pursue of his “American pastoral” dream, lost his Jewish identity on purpose and adopted a strong American identity. Therefore, Seymour, behaved like an American, dressed like an American, spoke like an American, lived like an American and dreamed like an American, however, not like any other American, but like an American who was part of the bourgeoisie. In this sense, Timothy Parrish stated that the main character was more “an American rather than a Jew who lives in America” (2007: 138). He also suggests that because of this abandonment of his identity for American success, the main character triggers his daughter’s rage which is directed not only towards the Vietnam War and the racial issues in the country but also towards this American success culture that the Swede pursues and obtains. (2007: 138). Moreover, the concept of fame from a sociological point of view is visible from the first pages of the novel:

“The elevation of Swede Levov into the household Apollo of the Weequahic Jews can best be explained, I think, by the war against the Germans and the Japanese and the fears that it fostered. With the Swede indomitable on the playing field, the meaningless surface of life provided a bizarre, delusionary kind of sustenance, the happy release into a Swedean innocence, for those who lived in dread of never seeing their sons or their brothers or their husbands again.” (Roth 1997: 9)

This is how the main character is described in the first part of the novel. His name was well known in their small community and that from his teenage years Seymour Levov was the hero of the neighbourhood because of his performances in sports, starting with football, continuing with basketball and also, baseball. Regarding sports Stanley Eitzen suggests in one of his works *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport* that because of the mythization of sports in modern American society, there is a general belief among Americans that “all sports are essentially pure and good, and that their purity and goodness are transferred to those who participate” (2016: 4). In this context it is also believed that because of sports great characters are constructed. Another view upon sports is presented by Katia Rubio in one of her works *The Heroic Imagery of the Contemporary Athlete*, suggesting that: “Recognized as a fundamental element of education, an elementary form of socialization or even a professional activity, sport is identified by elements such as skill, excellence and overcoming, becoming another reflection and product of an imaginary highly regarded as heroic.” (2018: 20). Therefore, the main character seems to be mythologized in his description; his traits are extraordinary, pursuing the reader into believing

that this is not a usual human being. He had the power to attract the attention of the small community he lived in and to make them forget about the traumas they had been through because of the war. He had the power to seduce the entire neighborhood with his great looks, sports skills and impeccable character. To support this argument Luca Bifulco and Mario Tirino state in their article *The Sports Hero in the Social Imagery. Identity Community, Ritual and Myth* that sports heroes, both sporting and human biography, usually present exemplary characteristics and “their deeds shape narratives full of mythical resonances and dramatic connotations” (2018: 10). Thus, the fact that the whole neighbourhood was in love with him: “Yes, everywhere he looked, people were in love with him” (Roth 1997: 9) evokes the myth of Narcissus which represents a great symbol concerning the theme of fame in literature. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, the Swede’s description decays gradually. From the hero of the neighbourhood, he becomes the father of a problematic teenager, then the person who raised a monster, and ultimately just a blamed man. In this context, the narrator ends his final speech as follows: “What on Earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?” (Roth 1997: 423).

From a psychological point of view, the concept of fame could be linked to the concept of deconstructivism in postmodernism. The concept of deconstruction is explained in Jaques Derrida’s work *Of Grammatology* where multiple perspectives are presented upon this subject. This concept has its roots in the word “destruction” as in the first published version of *De la Grammatologie* the author used this term instead of “deconstruction” (Spivak 1997: 42), Spivak states in her translation of Derrida’s work. Moreover, it is believed that this strategy of deconstruction is usually linked to some “small but telltale” (Spivak 1997: 30) moments. These moments appear in the novel gradually, as Merry started to disrespect her parents and disobey them even from a young age. One example of telltale moment which started the deconstruction of the text could be when Merry, while being a child, asked his father to kiss her the way he kisses Dawn. The Swede’s reaction in this scenario was violent and denoted disdain. Derrida also suggests that deconstruction is about “the lack of sovereignty [...] the ‘will to ignorance’ is simply a matter of attitude, a realization that one’s choice of ‘evidence’ is provisional, a self-distrust, a distrust of one’s own power, the control of one’s vocabulary” (Spivak 1997: 63).

In addition to this, the text created by Roth is a relevant example for the concept of deconstruction in postmodernism, since the events that take place in the novel denote the lack of sovereignty, the characters and the events cause anxiety and distrust within the reader. Regarding the control of one’s vocabulary, the author created Merry’s stuttering specially to denote that there is no control over language. Deconstruction also can refer to

dismantling “[déconstruire] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way.” (Spivak 1997: 63). Thus, Merry’s speech is reinscribed in the text in another way later in the novel, when she is part of a religious sect called the “Jain”. After rebuilding her life by transforming from a terrorist into a religious extremist who breathes through a mask in order not to harm the microorganisms around her, her stuttering disappeared, and her speech is now flawless. This event could be linked to Paul de Man’s statement that deconstruction involves rebuilding. (Spivak 1997: 42). The Swede’s and Dawn’s fame is the central element when it comes to the concept of deconstruction in the novel, because it transformed their innocent daughter into a fearful terrorist. This fact is also stated in the novel by Merry’s therapist who believed that the girl’s stutter and her violent actions were because she feels lonely and not understood in her own safe place, at home, and in the heart of the family. Therefore, the fame of the Levovs is the trigger of the destruction of their lives. Gabriela Glăvan suggests in one of her articles named *Tragic Innocence in Philip Roth’s ‘American Pastoral’* that: “The bomb she [Merry] detonated carried a political message that was a subjective one, too” (2012: 243).

The message transmitted through violence could also be interpreted as pointed to her parents. It could be a message which reflects her own thoughts about their social success and fame, for she never felt like she belonged in that family because of her stutter. The stutter is also a sign of revolt towards the concept of success and fame in their family. Because of it, Merry cannot achieve her mother or father’s perfection, therefore she cannot achieve their success and fame in their micro universe. In addition to this, she has recourse to violence therefore she gained a different kind of fame, negative fame. Due to her acts of violence, she stained her parents’ reputation and their own fame transformed into a negative one too. Instead of being loved and well-known for their beautiful family, their gorgeous looks, their perfect home, and for their wealth, they are now well-known for raising a monster. Fame is not associated in this case to admiration and love, but to pity or even hate. Therefore, the statements that Merry is “the anarchic center of the novel” (Parrish 2000: 91) and “the major disruption of the hero’s American Dream” (Safer 2006: 87), which can also be seen in Gabriela Glăvan’s article too, is proof that Seymour’s daughter is the element of destruction which transforms the utopic description of the Swede and his own universe into a dystopian universe, characterized by a negative fame and tragic events. Therefore, the American pastoral imagined in the beginning of the novel easily transforms into an anti-pastoral, the fame transforms in disgrace and the illusionary and at the same time seductive description of the character as a hero, as a mythological figure transforms into a delusion. The metamorphosis of fame

into degradation occurs gradually in the novel starting before the culminant point in the novel.

III. Victor Petrini and Seymour Levov's deconstructed fame

The Most Beloved of Earthlings is a 1980's novel written by Marin Preda. The novel presents the life of Victor Petrini, a Philosophy professor at the university, in the historical context of socialist Romania, and it shows the horrors of the communist period in which intellectual people who were against its ideology were imprisoned. In this context, Mihaela Păun suggests that the main character of the novel, Victor Petrini is "the exponent of intellectuals, in a totalitarian and repressive regime which annihilates his quality of remaining human in all the situations, but who finds in love, the hope, the rescue resort" (2018: 764). Therefore, Petrini is an epitome of all the intellectuals who were persecuted in the communist period in Romania. In this sense, it can be suggested that the main character does not agree with, or even abhors the ideologies of communism, a fact suggested in Seymour's Levov association to J.F. Kennedy. The novel presents some of the worse communist practices of that period in Romania, for example: Petrini "was grabbed from his house and taken to the dungeons of the 'Securitate', subjugated to questioning, and sent, without trial, to a labor camp, being sentenced to ten years of forced labor." (Praisler et. al. 2021: 27). In addition to this, the totalitarian regimes, communism, and Nazism share similar ideals and ideologies, they overlap partially, therefore, due to the atrocities of this kind during communism and the Holocaust during Nazism, both characters share the same repulsion towards the totalitarian regimes. The similarities between the two characters continue according to Michaela Praisler who states that: "The drama of the main character develops fast; his social and professional status is cancelled in an irrational and absurd manner, and he turns into a spectator in the life of a personage that becomes acquainted with Hell." (2021: 28). Additionally, Victor Petrini's life changes abruptly, exactly as the Swede's life does, they both live the same horror of having intruders in their homes, in the case of Petrini, the people of 'Securitate,' and in the case of the Swede, the police. The only difference which triggers Hell in their life is the news, while Victor finds out that he is arrested, Seymour finds out that his daughter must be charged for blowing up the post office. Their lives fall apart from those moments on. Thus, the worlds presented are chaotic, absurd and they both are in full destruction.

While Petrini is famous for being an intellectual, a rigid and lucid person, and a sincere spirit, the Swede is famous for being an iconic image of the successful man in America. Throughout the novel, Petrini tries to make a retrospection on his life, seeking to discover his rights and wrongs. He is also the narrator of the novel; therefore, everything is seen through his own eyes

and perceptions. In the novel, the physical appearance of the character is presented through an auto description:

“Aveam figura frumoasă fizic, dar urâtă din expresie. Aveam sprâncene groase de timpuriu bărbătești, dar puternic și anevoios desenate, ochii mari și negri [...] dar totuși limpezi și deschisi, nasul și barba prea voluntare, gura bine desenată, dar lipsită de cea mai vagă senzualitate (care zacea totuși în mine), obrazul tras laminat, ascetic, deși numai ascetic nu eram.” (Preda 1987: 80)¹

Concerning his looks, he is a handsome man, although his description is paradoxical as his peculiarities seem not to be precisely beautiful. Even though his physical appearance does not seem to resemble the Swede at all, Victor Petrini's soul is as good and as pure as the Swede's. Victor Petrini's relationship with his daughter Silvia is another similarity regarding the two characters. He is a good parent to Silvia, kind and loving as a father, exactly how the Swede is in relationship with Merry. When Victor looks at his daughter he is overwhelmed:

“Căldura dulce a corpului ei mi se transmite și mă turbură, și o pace adâncă se lasă asupra mea, o încordare ascunsă se despletă în mine, neliniștea, privind această minune care nu sperasem să arate astfel, mă părăsi.” (Preda 1987: 35)²

Thus, the love for his daughter consumes him, exactly how the love for his daughter consumes the Swede because even though he finds out that his daughter is a terrorist, and killed four people, he still loves her.

Another similar characteristic between these two characters is the dandy side, while the Swede can be considered a dandy because of his looks, because of his fame and because he marries the most beautiful girl in the neighbourhood, Victor can be considered a dandy because of his nonchalant attitude towards women, because he falls in love quickly, and he engages into relationships with multiple women, Nineta, Căprioara, Mathilda and Suzy. One of them is, in fact, the wife of one of his best friends. Dandyism appeared in the regency period, the period in which Beau Brummell was a

¹ “I had a beautiful complexion, but ugly in expression, thick and before their time masculine eyebrows, strongly and slowly sketched, my eyes big and black [...] but still, clear and wide open, my nose and my chin too outlined, my mouth well sketched, but lacking sensuality (which was still within me), my cheeks skinny and deformed, ascetic, although I was not at all ascetic.” (Translation mine)

² “The sweet warmth of her body comes to my mind and troubles me, and a deep peace embraces me, a ghostlike strain haunted my entire body, the restlessness, looking at this miracle who I've never hoped to look like this, she left me.” (Translation mine)

central figure, having the following characteristics: “A nobody who made himself a somebody and who gave the rule to everybody” (Hielkema 1989: 14). This vision better represents Victor Petrini, as he constructed his career on his own. In contrast, the Swede had a lot of help in his career from his family who owned a gloves factory which already made them wealthy. Even though, Oscar Wilde created another type of dandy, the dandy as a fashion icon besides everything else, Baudelaire states that the dandy is: “the man who is rich and idle, and whom even if blasé, has no other occupation than the perpetual pursuit of happiness” (Baudelaire 1964: 26). This definition of the dandy is the most representative for Victor Petrini, as this character is just a man, who became extraordinary because of his intellectual abilities, therefore being a university professor, and a man who is in a continuous search for happiness. In his opinion, true happiness is possible only if one achieves true love, in addition to this, the main character is in a permanent pursuit of the perfect partner. The novel is famous for its final lines “Daca dragoste nu e, nimic nu e” (Preda 1987: 317)³, which refers to the myth of happiness through love. Victor Petrini can be considered an incomplete icon of Baudelaire’s depiction of the dandy. In *Baudelaire’s Philosophy of Dandyism*, Rhodes states the following: “Dandyism, he (Baudelaire) declares, is the quintessence of the intellectual and the moral mechanism of life” (Rhodes 1928: 389). Victor Petrini is an intellectual and his ethics and decency as a man can be noticed easily in his lifestyle in the beginning of the novel. He has a decent life, he is more preoccupied by books and philosophy, occasionally having different affairs with women. When he was taken to prison, his life principles stood the same, he devoted his time to philosophy, but this time Victor decided to find meaning in his own life. Baudelaire also suggests that the dandy owns the attributes found in the poet, the priest and the soldier. In other words, the man who writes, the man who preaches and the man who sacrifices others or himself. (Rhodes 1928: 390). These qualities can be found in Victor Petrini as well, even though he does not write, he thinks like an intellectual, he thinks, rethinks and overthinks about his condition as a man. He blesses the people in his life, usually making them feel special and unreplaceable. He sacrifices himself in the cages of the prison, representing the epitome of all the intellectuals who were imprisoned in the communist period in Romania. Oscar Wilde’s vision of the dandy relates to both characters, the Swede, for he is always dressed up in fancy suits, as a businessman, he is elegant and charming, and Victor Petrini, as he is a good-looking man too, his auto description does not put accent on his clothing, however, the events in the novel, more specifically his relationships with multiple women denote that he was charming too, or even a womanizer.

³ “If there’s no love, there’s nothing.” (Translation mine)

Consequently, Victor Petrini is a mixed dandy, a baudelairean type of dandy and also a dandy with Wilde's characteristics. He is also an incomplete dandy, because he does not have all the characteristics presented neither in Baudelaire's picture of the dandy nor in Wilde's. The dandy phenomenon is visible in both of the novels through the analysis of the main characters, Seymour and Victor. This concept is transforming as well. If in the beginning of the novels the main characters represent a type of dandy similar to the one shaped by Oscar Wilde mostly, during the novels this fact changes. The characters start sharing different traits, they both depict in the end a melancholic dandy, similar to the one created by Baudelaire. This type of dandy is finally the epicentre of symbolization.

The title might suggest a person loved by everyone, the same as the Swede. However, it refers to a line stated by Suzy Culala, Victor's last lover, in which she asks: "Ce mai faci tu, cel mai iubit dintre pământeni?" (Preda 1987: 199)⁴ This is an ironic appellative, as the main character is far from being loved by everyone, in fact, he is tortured by everyone he loves. This makes me think about Seymour Levov's life, he is tortured by the loved ones as well, his wife Dawn is unfaithful to him after their daughter, Merry, blew up the post office, he is also tortured by his own daughter who seems to hate him and everything that he does. Both novels present characters who from being loved convert into being rejected by the most important people in their lives. Both represent the concept of the dandy in literature, being macho men, having beautiful lovers and wives, both live in a world defined by chaos, uncertainty. The society they live in managed to destroy the human being, if at the beginning everything seemed to be in order, throughout the novels nothing seemed to make sense anymore. The theme of fame is representative for both novels due to the way in which these characters were constructed, however, the fame achieved by Victor Petrini for having a prosperous career as a university professor, and by the Swede for being the neighbourhood's hero and achieving his American pastoral dream, transformed precipitously into an infernal existence for them both.

To conclude, the theme of fame is presented in both novels in a similar manner. It metamorphoses gradually during the course of the events. Additionally, the events that occur and affect the main characters mark the fame's changing, and also the characters' description in the novels. The historical context and the way it is presented like a metanarrative implies that the novels belong to postmodernism. From a historical point of view, the events that take place in the novels depict the totalitarian regimes and their ideologies that participate at the destruction of the micro universes in which the main characters live. The decadence of the narrative world and the

⁴ "How are you, the most beloved of earthlings?" (Translation mine)

characters' depiction in the novels represent the concept of deconstructivism, a representative feature of this literary current. Its presence emphasizes the idea of metamorphosis regarding the characters' position, that of being famous. Their fame alters, becoming, in the end, only pity, disappointment and disgrace.

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