



The Fiction of Space in the Extreme contemporary Iranian Novel*

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IN the introduction to his essay entitled *Aux sources de la nouvelle Persane*, Christophe Balaÿ, referring to the Constitutional Revolution in Iran, writes: "in the 13th century AH, that is to say towards the end of the 19th century from in the Christian era, Persia suffered a shock comparable to the Arab conquest: that of Western culture. The resulting rupture was serious and deep, and it is no exaggeration to see the distant consequences of it in the current upheavals of Iranian society. (Balaÿ, 9)

On the literary level, in addition to the upheavals imposed by the sociohistoric events of this beginning of the 20th century on Iranian literature, it seems that the shock evoked by Balaÿ was among other things, at the origin of a certain cultural introspection essentially targeting the question of identity. Hassan Mir-Abedini, historian of Iranian literature in his *Hundred Years of Narrative in Iran* (1998), highlights above all, the social novel and the historical novel as two preferred modes of expression of an imagination haunted by the problem of identity.

With this in mind, if this study focuses on a limited set of recently published novels, it is above all to find out how the young generation of Iranian writers appropriates the cultural background of their nation. The attention paid to "space" fiction is justified by the fact that the first readings of five works of fiction that constitute our body of study testify to the

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primordial status accorded to the City therein, in this case, Tehran. From our point of view, this observation is able to constitute a rapid access route to the creative imagination of these works, however, we must not forget that the thought of the City, is a thought of the system which especially includes the sociological fact. In fact, it seems to us that the young generation of Iranian writers, heir to a complex history, but also of a "city" rewritten several times (given its tormented history), is led to question its relations with the "space", as a crossroads for history, politics, sociology, but also aesthetics and ontology.

Our study differs, however, from these two approaches to the study of space: from imagology it differs because it does not seek at all to make a history of the narratives made about Tehran; either to reveal a certain "looking I". Far from that, we seek to verify whether the fiction in Tehran is subject to the same discourse. As a result, the "veracity" of representations of space is impertinent to us.

Likewise, our study distances itself from those who claim to be geocritical, because it is not interested, unlike the latter, in studying the identity of Tehran.

Geocriticism in fact seeks, as Westphal states in "pour une approche géocritique des textes", to scrutinize the "fundamental mobility of human spaces and the cultural identities they convey" in order to study what it considers the "interaction" between human spaces and literature. Moreover, to respond to such an objective, geocriticism opts for a chronological reading of space, which leads it among other things to "tear space away from the monology of the unique gaze" and to adopt, as "basic principle", the "confrontation of two perspectives: one indigenous, and the other allogeneous, which correct, feed and enrich each other."

However, in our work, it is not at all about the analysis of the possible relations between space, in this case Tehran, and (Iranian) literature; studying their possible interaction. Nor are we seeking, as geocriticism prescribes, to "draw up the fictional cartography" of Tehran, to take spatial data from a set of narratives in order to be able to constitute a spatial "referent" on the subject of this city.

Our study of space fiction, anchored in theories of the imaginary, would have the sole objective of detecting the constraints that govern space fiction, in this case Tehran today. It is a study of the imaginary (of fiction) of space and not a study of space in itself, in its different appearances.

Besides, and apart from Jalal Sattari's essay *The Myth of Tehran*, it seems that the study of the imaginary of the Iranian capital has indeed not aroused

the interest of researchers. However, despite the importance of the Iranian mythologist's essay, the fact that Sattari is not particularly interested in "language" (that is to say in the enunciative categories of the texts studied), has determined us to opt for discourse analysis as a method of text analysis. This method, based essentially on the linguistics of the literary text, will help us to see how, in the novels, which constitute our corpus, to say the space condition and modulate the enunciation of the texts. It is indeed the examination of this hypothesis according to which the fiction of space is subjected, in modern Iranian literature, to a series of discursive constraints with identical characteristics.

Discourse analysis for the literary text, as applied by Dominique Maingueneau in his *Linguistics for the literary text* (2005), his *Discourse analysis, introduction to readings from the archive* (1991) and his *Literary speech, Paratopy and scene of enunciation* (2004), is based on the basic idea of the interaction of the utterance and the enunciation of what is said and the manner of saying.

The five Iranian novels that make up our body of study have been chosen based on the importance they place on the question of space. The latter, far from being a mere decoration of facts and actions, is, in these novels, able to be considered as a main protagonist. The space there is indeed that around which the adventures are tied; that from which the imagination develops; and what stands out across the narrative. We will see how the will to say space leads in these texts to a series of constraints, both thematic and enunciative.

Keywords— Tehran, Space, Imaginary, Enunciation, Discourse analysis.

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