

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO RUTA SEPETYS' *I MUST BETRAY YOU* VIA LACAN

Clementina Alexandra MIHAILESCU

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad

Abstract

The XXth century, known among others as a “culture of controversial ideologies,” was a time of accelerated technology and engineering feats, for stimulating the quick recovery of post-war industries in western countries, on the one hand and, of implementing the communist ideology in eastern countries, on the other. For approaching Ruta Sepetys’ novel “I Must Betray You,” where the writer is travelling back to the period of time previous to the 1989 Revolution in Romania, Lacan’s theory based on tackling the three registers of reality: the imaginary, approached in terms of the “spectacular,” the symbolic, referred to in terms of the meanings attached to those things around us, and the real, which paradoxically represents “precisely what is excluded from our reality, the margin of what is without meaning and which we fail to situate or explore” (60) will be employed as a methodological device to decode its intricate meaning. Bohn’s quantum theory will be also employed to enrich the previously mentioned interpretative grid, due to his approach to reality built of levels, “each level being comprised between two levels of reality” (qtd. in Sandu 2011: 164, our translation). Bohn’s highlighting the duality that exists “between the apparent multiplicity and the plenitude of the world” and the concept of “wrapped up order” (in Sandu 2011: 165, our translation) and Patapievici’s opinion that “the substance of the world being identical in every part of it and at any formal level, the differences appear through the degree of the wrapping and unfolding of the plenitude” (in Sandu 2011: 165, our translation) have been addressed in our article together with Bohn’s argument that the implicit order is meaningful only in relation to conscience, having “an ontological substation” (165).

Keywords: Sepetys, Lacan, Bohn, quantum theory, reality, plenitude, ontological substation, disintegration

Ruta Sepetys is an accomplished author of historical fiction that has been published in about sixty countries and forty languages. She has been raised in a Lithuanian American Family. Her books are read by both teens and adults from all over the world. Her novels *Between Shades of Gray*, *Out of Easy*, *Salt to the Sea* and *The Fountains of Silence* have either won or have been shortlisted for more than forty book prizes, being included on more than sixty states award lists. The novel *Between Shades of Gray* has been adapted into the film *Ashes in the Snow*, whereas her other novels are also intended for TV and film productions. She has won the Carnegie Medal proving to be extremely passionate about the power of history and literature to promote ‘global awareness’ and connectiveness. She has also been introduced to NATO, to the United States Capitol and to various embassies. The premises of Sepetys’ dark and frightening book *I Must Betray You* have been her knowledge of the Soviet Union and communism due to the fact that she belongs to a Lithuanian American Family; in the author’s note attached to this book, it is clearly stated that the name of Lithuania “was removed from the maps during the Soviet period” (2022: 305). For such frustrating experiences to be psychologically interpreted in terms of the socially and politically alienated individual who experiences the diminishing of his defence mechanism against all types of psychological pressures, a “credible detector” could be constructed from Lacan’s psychological model.

Lacan claims that there are three registers of human reality: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The imaginary is approached in terms of the “spectacular” (60), the symbolic is referred to in terms of the meanings attached to those things around us, while the real “would represent precisely what is excluded from our reality, the margin of what is without meaning and which we fail to situate or explore” (60), that is, in terms of the meaninglessness, of the absurdity of the world we live in.

Closely related to these three registers is Lacan’s famous discourse entitled “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.” The discourse clarifies the confusion between speech and language. Language is “an abstract structure,” while speech implies a speaker and a listener. Speech generates meaning, gives the speakers recognition of his or her desires, and an identity (in the symbolic order). We assume that the ethical dimension of Lacan’s theory arises from the symbolic register. When an object or a situation (e.g. a social or political context) loses its meaning, the respective object or situation looks as if it were “mysterious” and “uncanny.” Hence,

Lacan's statement "I live where I do not think, and I think where I do not live." This statement perfectly applies to the world described by Setepys' novel.

Lacan also claims that "symbolic structures," for instance the Communist Party or the Communist State depicted in Setepys' novel, "which are not consciously perceived, can organize and govern the workings of a society, and, indeed, the mind of the individual" (70). Last but not least important, Lacan assumes that a "symptom" may be literally regarded as "a word trapped in the body" (51) or, "in the mind," as it is the case with Setepys' characters. Lacan adds that "the unconscious turns words into tormenting thoughts and compulsions" (52).

Moreover, the listening devices present in every room can, at best, be dimmed, yet never completely shut off, the dwellers being sometimes unaware of its being installed in their homes. Being always watched, you have to observe attentively your face, your lips, your gestures and your thoughts. The keyword in Setepys' novel which can be associated with Lacan's theory is 'the listening device.' It equates with a surveillance device and propaganda tool present everywhere so that everybody is totally deprived of his or her privacy, the Party keeping everybody and everything under control. One way of controlling people is poverty, the people having to stay in lines for hours. There were not enough electricity, no coffee, no chocolate, no fashionable clothes. On the other hand, the most powerful members of the inner Party enjoyed all the economic privileges, for instance black Dacia and special shops from where to buy food, clothes, sweets, and coffee.

So, the listening device is that word "trapped" in the body and mind which unconsciously generates constant fear of being seen or heard, even by one's close relatives (husband, wife, one's children). The 'Securitate' is the institution which has cancelled all privacy, almost all of Setepys' heroes are "doomed" to belong to the Party.

The symptoms associated with the above-described issues (which we know and remember too well) are helplessness, hopelessness, immense sadness, humiliation and 'utter despair.' Everything is dominated by the two political leaders-Ceausescu and Elena, his wife. Both are the prominent leaders of the Party who must be obeyed and worshipped.

The Party members and not only have to love them and to fanatically hate all the western countries governed by democratic instead of tyrannical leaders. Following Lacan, the two leaders (Ceausescu and his wife) can be

regarded as “the egos in the mirror phase,” their task being that of maintaining a general appearance of coherence and completeness, the more painful because it is experienced under such bleak circumstances. All the citizens of Romania, depicted in the novel or, almost all, can be regarded likewise, as “falsifying egos” (29), as egos of the mirror phase, because they live a false experience of their apparent coherence. They live in paranoia, a sort of mental decomposition.

Moreover, their children are bound to similar images, their identity depending on how they assume their parents’ words. Their identification with the “ideal” ego, which in Lacan’s terminology stands for the image, through the heard speech, creates a “kernel of insignia they are unconscious of.” Consequently, children “spy on” and “betray” their parents because they belong in one way or another to the Securitate. Under such circumstances, they all experience alienation in the register of the image.

Since language blocks identity due to the fact that the citizens of Romania find no place in a “structure which is abstract, and, as such, intrinsically alien” to them, we assume, following the same Lacan, that they also experience “alienation in the register of language” (73). Moreover, as Sepetys explains in the Authors’ Note, Ceaușescu understood that in order to tyrannically rule the country he should isolate not only the country from the rest of the world, but the individual citizens from one another, “positioning them against one another” (306). The novelist’s research on the topic of the communist regime in Romania revealed her that, besides “arrests, torture and murder, the Securitate recruited, intimidated and commanded an enormous network of civilian informers” who were told that “informing was a patriotic duty to the country,” whereas others were “promised favours, food for their families” or medicines, as it is the case with Cristian Florescu, the main hero of Setepys’ novel. He is a seventeen-year-old high-school student from Bucharest.

Cristian is the one that constantly strives to integrate such images into the symbolic register, that is into the cultural and linguistic networks he feels attached to. As previously mentioned, he is a teenager in the eleventh grade, fond of English, claiming that “studying English was a commitment to his country.” He argues that “words are weapons. I’ll be able to fight our American and British enemies with words, not only guns” (IMBY: 3). He further adds: “And if I spoke English, I could better understand song lyrics that I heard illegally on Voice of America broadcasts” (3). The word “illegal”

seems to be a keyword in Setepys' novel, appearing twice on page 3, as follows: "Illegal, yes. Many things were illegal in Romania-including my thoughts and my notebook."

Chapter 2 is focused Cristian's visit to the office of the High School Director, decorated with the portraits of Ceaușescu, ironically referred to as "our beloved leader, our hero," only to acquire dramatic connotations when depicted as "maverick of the grand Communist Party of Romania and vampire to the necks of millions" (5). Wondering whether such descriptive items could be regarded as "illegal metaphors," he sincerely concludes "Absolutely" (5). The man standing in front of him, within whose grasp there sat "a file and photo" of Cristian, suddenly revealed his true status, that of an "executioner, black rider, spy," "an agent of Secu, Romania's fearsome secret police" (6). He suddenly recalls his sister's comments on the fact that "there's one Secu per fifty Romanians," and the additional remark "Security agents, they're everywhere" (6). The Secu agents were usually referred to as "the blue-eyed boys," driving black Dacias and watching everybody.

Chapter 3 highlights the reason why Cristian has been called to the Director's office. He finds out that the Secu agent has been informed that he "sold a vintage Romanian stamp from his impressive collection to a foreigner and accepted foreign currency. He is declared guilty for having illegally trafficking stamps and informed that he will be prosecuted" (10). Cristian's actual guilt consists in having interacted with an American teenager, the son of the American diplomat whose apartment is cleaned by his mother weekly, and whom he sold an old stamp in exchange for one US dollar, which he found when he opened the album, making the supposition that it was slipped in without his noticing it. He immediately wondered how the agent found out about it as he never said anything to anybody, realizing that the agent could destroy his family, putting it "under increased surveillance," ruining his opportunity to attend university. Addressing him as "a strong student, talented, an observer" among his peers, the agent "generously orders" (11) him to continue to meet his mother and walk her home late at night, to interact with the son of the American diplomat and, finally to "report details of the diplomat's home and family" (11) to him. Cristian sadly concludes that he should "be a rat, a *turnător*, secretly informing on the private lives of others" (11, the author's emphasis). What really shocks him is the agent's inquiry into his grandfather's health condition. Paddle Hands, as the agent will be referred to throughout the novel, calls it "a generous proposal," concluding that

Cristian will give him information whereas he will give him “medicine for Bunu,” who was suffering from leukemia and thus would no longer suffer. The last passage can be interpreted as an instance of “falsifying egos” (Lacan 2004: 29), as egos of the mirror phase, because Cristian comes to live the false experience of apparent coherence, that of informing for saving his grandfather. Actually, he lives, in paranoia, a sort of mental decomposition, from now on, having a code name “OSCAR,” being a “seventeen-year-old spy, an informer” (12). The last part of this chapter contains the “official recruitment report of Oscar,” the task he is about to perform, being dated 15 Oct. 1989.

Chapter 4 *expands* upon Cristian’s walking home after his discussion with Paddle Hands when, with each step he takes, he experiences “guilt and fear transformed into anger” (14). He is wondering who informed on him and whether he is being followed. For a while, to soothe his pain, he thinks that “perhaps it wasn’t as evil as it felt” (14), because he “would be spying on an American family only, not fellow Romanians” (14). He even contemplates that he “could beat the Securitate,” offering only insignificant items of information on the American diplomat’s family. He even ponders over the fact that he could ‘fool’ his parents, but not Bunu and his sister, Cici. He invents a story about exams and pretends he is upset “because the available spots for philosophy had been cut in half” (15). Why philosophy, we might wonder. Cristian recalls Bunu’s arguments related to the fact that philosophy is some sort of “soul nourishment.” Moreover, his grandfather explained to him that “the state controls the amount of food we eat, our electricity, our transportation, the information we receive. But with philosophy, we control our minds. What if the internal landscape is ours to build and paint?” (15). This last argument convinces Cristian to start writing in his notebook, exactly as Winston, Orwell’s hero from his novel *1984*, decided to commit the highest offence possible and open a diary. Winston starts writing it on the 4th of April 1984, when he is thirty-nine years old, whereas Cristian starts writing on the 15th of October 1989. Both are aware of the fact that this is the only alternative to survive in such a world where any democratic, anti-communist thoughts directed against the Party would bring about death or forced labour in the labour camp.

In Orwell’s novel, it is Emmanuel Goldstein, besides Winston, that has also taken “a place in the symbolic world” (46), in Lacan terminology, which means that he has left “the world of the image” (46). His betrayal is shown on the screen where he is presented as the Enemy of the People. Once a

Party leader, Emmanuel “betrayed” (Vianu, 30) it and vanished after having denounced dictatorship and after having demanded freedom of speech, of the press and, last but not least, of thought, pretending that the revolutionary ideals have been totally disregarded. Sepetys’ novel depicts Bunu as a democrat, an anti-communist, a dissident. Similar to the Thought Police that was hunting the spies, Emmanuel and Winston being included in this category, the Securitate was closely following Bunu, and all his family members. Both Winston and Cristian keep on striving to hide their thoughts, gestures, feelings. For Winston’s society, feelings are forbidden, marriages should be loveless, and thus, Winston, although married, is merely separated from his wife, not divorced. As concerns Cristian, he is eager to fall in love, and he actually does that, growing fond of Liliana. Winston’s strongest form of protest consists in falling in love with Julia. She is twenty-six and lacks any knowledge about a different type of society. Winston thinks of the previous capitalist society, dreams of it, clings to the past, hoping that this will help him to survive. Winston and Julia start meeting. They rent a small room in the prole area, thinking that no one could ever spot them. They are wrong as everyone around them was a member of the Spy Organization, even the kind looking old man who rent them the room and who sold Winston the book for his diary. The small, rented room was also provided with a telescreen to spy on them, which was hidden behind a picture.

Chapter 5 has offered us clues regarding Cristian’s fondness for Liliana with whom he feels like sharing Bunu’s arguments regarding Ceaușescu’s changed politics after his visit to North Korea, when he decided “to bulldoze” the city, “build” ‘the House of the People’ and cement apartment blocks, destroy churches, schools and over thirty thousand private homes, Bunu’s home being among them. Ceaușescu found full support from the so-called *Aplaudacii*, for whom Cristian offers as possible English equivalents “Bootlicker. Butt-kisser. Fawner” (20), proving his preoccupation with improving his command of English.

Significant items of information regarding the oppressive communist regime emerge from *Chapter 6*, when Cristian and some of his friends have been invited to a video night to watch movies on a video cassette player. It makes them wonder whether the things they see in videos, in American movies, are real or not. Cristian concludes that “video nights were an escape. Gathering secretly to watch American movies dubbed in Romanian-it felt dangerous and exciting, like winning a forbidden prize,” adding that “the

incredible lives we saw on screen were all make believe” (24). Moreover, as further depicted in *Chapter 12*, “the characters in movies made their own decisions-what to eat, where to live, what kind of car to drive, what type of work to pursue, and who to speak to” (45).

Chapter 7 further expands on the vulnerabilities of the communist regime in relation to the fact that “*the State broadcasts only two hours of bland television per day, mainly propaganda and salutes to Ceausescu*” (25, the author’s emphasis). Moreover, the people’s lack of privacy arises from the fact that “the building administrator reported to the Securitate” (25). Cristian also ponders over his own guilt of having “to report about the American family” (28). Significantly, the only way of entertaining the illusion of liberty consists in the people’s telling jokes, mostly “relayed through a fictional character named Bulă” (29).

In *Chapter 8* Sepetys highlights that “Joking about the regime was illegal and could ferry you straight to the Securitate headquarters. But people told jokes anyway. In a country with no freedom of speech, each joke felt like a tiny revolution” (29). In order to soothe Bunu’s pains, we are told that his family resorted to Western cigarettes, Kents, “used as currency. For bribes. For trade. For the black market,” adding that “if you’re sick and Kentless, you’re out of luck” (30). Bunu’s coughing makes Cristian contemplate the fact that he would give the agent the information that he wanted in exchange for the medicine to cure him. He even thought he could “outwit Paddle Hands,” by “outplaying him” (31).

Chapter 10 tackles the fact that “Rumours claim that Romanian telephones are all constructed with built-in listening devices,” that women were periodically “checked for pregnancy at their place of work,” due to the fact that Ceaușescu “wanted to increase the population, to breed more workers,” because “population growth meant economic growth” (36).

Chapter 11 expands upon other forbidden items, such as “black-market shampoo from West Germany,” that is banana shampoo and real Coke, considered by Cristian as meant to provide them “life’s perfect moments” (41). The chapter contains an informer’s report on the Cristian and Liliana having “*proceeded to a hidden spot where they engaged in a clandestine discussion and the sharing of illegal items*” (42, the author’s emphasis).

Chapter 13 highlights Cristian’s relationship with Dan Van Dorn, the son of the American diplomat, whose house was weekly cleaned by his mother. Their discussions are focused on notes made by Dan for one of his

U.S. colleague's college essays about Romania that comprises both serious and funny issues. The serious ones referred to "*human rights abuses, propaganda, ignorance*," that first offended Cristian, only to soon convince him to start his own notebook. Once arrived home, he tried to tell Bunu some crazy jokes about Ceaușescu having "stolen stuff during their visit to France," or that "they turned Bibles from the United States into toilet paper" (48). His grandfather vehemently forbids him to repeat those jokes, strongly demanding that he should never trust anyone, as "right now there is no such thing as a 'confidant'" (49). Cristian sadly concludes that he could trust no one, not even himself.

Chapter 14 depicts Cristian's visit to Dan Van Dorn's apartment where he noticed the "antique furniture," which looked completely different from the closet he was obliged to live in. Moreover, he noticed lots of books forbidden by the communist regime, that he attentively scanned, making mental notes that were to be delivered to the security agent. He also noticed that Dan had a leather jacket, a Walkman, Air Jordans and the Intel; the last item convinced Cristian that his American friend "knew he was under surveillance" (52).

Chapter 15 further expands upon Dan's family making Cristian wonder "how often did the Securitate access apartments to install devices" (53). He meets Mr. Van Dorn for the first time and has a fine talk about the Romanian language being a Romance language, not a Slavic one, as the American diplomat assumed. As concerns Bucharest, he openly argues that it is not "rough," but "a little dark" (54). Since his mother is still cleaning their toilets, Cristian asks her about Dan's mother who appeared not to be American, but Spanish and, mentioning that the diplomat seems tired, gets his mother's appreciative answer "He's a very good man." It makes him wonder how she would know that if "she was just cleaning their toilets" (55).

Chapter 16 depicts a totally different atmosphere, this time from Cristian's home, where they had to "warm bricks in the stove" for Bunu's bed to feel comfortable. Moreover, Cristian has a sincere conversation with his siter, Cici, offering her a dollar to buy what Bunu needed and sharing with her the Coke offered to him by Liliana. His grandfather seems to have overheard their discussion from the kitchen which makes him wonder "what the microphone picked up from the ceiling."

Chapter 17 highlights Cristian's conviction that Luca, one of his colleague friends, informed the Securitate on him because he was the only one

who knew about the American dollar. He considers he has always been sincere with Luca despite the fact that he knew that everyone has become almost paranoid, mistrusting everybody, not daring to join together in solidarity because they did no longer know who to trust and who might be an informer. Moreover, mistrust is said to cause “multiple personality syndrome and rots relationships.” Consequently, people came to be “speaking in whispers,” being one person at home, whereas “in the street, and standing in lines at the shops, you’re somebody else” (60). Cristian’s “dormant anger stirred a scream” inside him that he didn’t know existed due to the fact that he was convinced that his friend was betraying him. When they met, he “punched” his very best friend, refusing to listen to him.

Chapter 18 depicts Cristian’s being handed a piece of paper, with the address of a “host location” (63) by his school director. The Agent Paddle Hands asks him questions about the American diplomat’s family, about their house, whether he has noticed a desk, what was on it, demanding him to join Dan to the American Library and make notes of what he is reading. Before leaving the house, he is asked to write down an “official, handwritten statement” (64), about his discussions and visits to the Van Dorn’s apartment. The official report that followed reported on Cristian’s altercation with Luca and recommended increased surveillance on him.

Chapter 19 expands upon the metaphor the “darkness of communism,” negatively approached in relation to the lack of “schedule for electricity” that made most of the people living in Bucharest face the low temperature in their apartments that rarely rose above 12 degrees, even when electricity was on. The positive approach to this metaphor emerged from Cristian’s visit to Liliana’s apartment when electricity went off and when the two colleagues experienced the purest form of commonality and connectiveness.

Chapter 20 comprises items of information regarding Cristian’s family standing in line for hours for absolutely everything daily. If his father is quiet and inaccessible, hardly talking with anyone, Bunu is always talkative, commenting on the fact that they had more food during World War II, adding that “they’ve got brainwashed, standing in lines for hours, grateful for rotten beans” at the terrible cost of “self-worth” (76). Equally significant is an elderly gentleman, that his grandfather used to play chess with, who demands Cristian to deliver a message to him about their being watched, additionally

mentioning that he should avoid drinking coffee as it is not as tasty as expected, a message that Cristian failed to understand, for the moment.

Chapter 21 brings into bold relief Cristian and Dan's discussions about video players and video camera that allowed the Americans to make their own movies, with real people that are freely interrelating, eating plenty of real food and about planning a visit to the American Library where Cristian pretended, he could practice his English.

Chapter 22 tackles Cristian's comments with his mother about the American way of living and her demand that he should stop interacting with foreigners so as to avoid being questioned by the Securitate. She even adds that he shouldn't dream of things that are forbidden to them, that both her and her husband are tired, constantly working, standing in lines, never home, never together, and that there is nothing they can do about it. Angry and upset, Cristian replies that she is wrong, adding that they are controlling them through their fear (83). Her retort is strong and angry: "Don't you *ever* say things like that," rhetorically asking him: "Do you want to end up like your grandfather?" (84).

Chapter 23 expands upon Cristian sitting in his closet and making notes because he regards 'processing' as a means to evaluate and sort things out. He recalls his school classroom with Ceaușescu's portrait used as "disciplinary tool" when he was younger through the suggestion: "Mind yourself. Beloved Leader is watching. He sees everything, you know" (86). He also recalls how one of his colleagues, whose last name was Nistor one day came to school, refused to sit down and, in a fit of anger and despair, began to vibrate and his entire body quaked with convulsion until he gave up and shouted: "I'M AN INFORMER" (87). That event makes Cristian contemplate the fact that there were probably many others among his colleagues, teachers, secretaries and administrative stuff. As concerns *Chapter 24*, it further hints to Cristian making suppositions regarding the possible informers from his school.

Chapter 25 brings about a different atmosphere, charging Bunu with hopes due to the politically restructuring events in Eastern countries, called Perestroika. Cristian sadly argues that Ceaușescu would not allow that to happen in Romania because "it dilute his authority" (93). Bunu convincingly speaks about the infested atmosphere in Romania where the agents and informers keep multiplying. He argues that "They are in our streets, in our schools, crawling in the workplace, and now they've chewed through the walls

into our apartment” (94). He deliberately adds that there is an informer in their apartment, that medicines have appeared, sadly wondering “at what costs,” further wondering what medicines he has swallowed, if they were good or poisonous (94).

Chapter 26 comprises Cristian and Liliana’s speculations about what they would like to become: she dreamt of working in a library because she was fond of books, whereas he would like to become a writer. His newly revealed profile makes Liliana assert that “writers are dangerous,” adding that “you are a brooding, philosophical Virgo. You are not a follower. Even your hair’s a revolution” (96). The next chapter comprises Bunu’s comments on the “efficiency of tyranny,” in the sense that the political leaders of the country need no weapons to control them as their “fear is more that enough,” making them feel as “an animal in a trap” (99). Romania seemed condemned to perpetually face tyranny. Cristian is wondering whether he could somehow communicate with Van Dorn, introduce his notebook on his desk “to ensure he knows the truth about Romania and shares it widely by sending his notes to Washington and reveal how America has been outfoxed by Ceaușescu” (100).

The next chapters depict step by step the events meant to bring about the end of Ceaușescu’s tyrannical leadership. Van Dorn suggests Dan and Cristian, who intended to go to the American Library, to consult the latest number of the American political magazine *TIME*. On the other hand, the informer’s report, added to the end of *Chapter 28*, comprises the advice for the Securitate agent to be “cross-referencing with other Sources,” as Cristian Florescu “is pursuing private communication with Mr. Van Dorn” (104). The headline of the issue: **THE BIG BREAK Moscow Lets Eastern Countries Go Its Own Way**, inserted in *Chapter 29*, makes Cristian’s pulse tick, look over his shoulder and quickly reconsider the big picture where the image of a Hungarian flag revealed that the country was no longer ruled by communism. The boys’ visit to the American Library is immediately reported to the Securitate agent who inserted a full description of them reading *Time*, tearing a page about Bruce Springsteen out of a magazine to be handed, as a present, to Liliana, his girlfriend, who was very fond of that issue.

Relevant items of information about the people from Bucharest experiencing fear and surveillance emerge from the next chapters in relation to Bunu’s having traded the Kent to have the radio repaired in order to be informed about the political events taking place in different countries, to Liliana’s considering him an informer and a liar because her father has been

reported to steal from the Party bones for feeding the dogs, to the accusation brought against his daughter for having a real Coke. Cristian tries to convince her that he never informed on her and that he really likes her. There are depicted “the crossroads of reality and nightmare” experienced by Cristian in connection with Liliana who refused to see him. His pain, noticed by Bunu, brings about his empathetic comment: “to feel so deeply, that’s the very essence of human being. You give me hope” (126). The official report added to *Chapter 35* contained the remark that “consideration should be given to Oscar’s family and its viability as a continued source” (132).

Chapter 31 expands upon Poland, Hungary and Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria having broken away from communism, whereas Romania is still condemned to face tyranny. The fear of being listened to dominates the atmosphere from Cristian’s family, his mother being mostly frightened, suggesting the turning off of the radio for its being too stressful. Rumours that Romania’s star Olympic Gymnast Nadia Comăneci has “defected,” making it over the border into Hungary and then to the United States, makes Cristian wonder whether Mr. Van Dorn has helped her get out of Romania. We also learn that Cristian left his notebook hidden under some books on the American diplomat’s private desk, the manuscript being entitled **SCREAMING WHISPERS-A ROMANIAN TEENAGER IN BUCHAREST BY ANONYMOUS** (152, the author’s emphasis).

Chapter 44 comprises a significant item of information regarding the fact it was not Dan Van Dorn who put the dollar into his stamp album, dollar that led the Security to recruit him and plunge him “into moral misery,” but somebody else, making the boy reconsider all the other people who could have done that. Cristian’s anger and despair reaches culmination when he returned home and found his grandfather beaten to death by the Securitate. At the funeral, Bunu’s chess mate and best friend highly praises him, mentioning the fact that his thoughts and ideas made the Securitate agents label him “a dissident,” call him to the Securitate headquarters several times, offer him coffee containing radioactive poison that caused symptoms mirroring leukemia. All these happened because they wanted “to set an example” and frighten the young students who would “want to ride the tide of revolution” (158).

Cristian’s anger increases daily and is easily noticed by the informer who reports on his accusing Luca for having informed the Secu agent on both him and Liliana. He is encouraged to outfox the Secu agent by Doinea

Cornea's initiative of writing an open letter addressed to Ceaușescu in tiny type on cigarette paper that was "delivered to Munich and broadcast on Radio Free Europe" (165). Moreover, a small piece of paper had been pinned by Bunu to the inside of the doorframe of his room with precious pieces of advice for Cristian to "remain quiet, unseen, to listen to Radio Free Europe and search within himself for courage, patience and wisdom." Motivated and encouraged by Cornea's gesture, Cristian decides to leave his notebook hidden under some papers on Mr. Van Dorn's desk, highly aware that "writing negative things about Romania was illegal, defying the Securitate was also illegal" (171), but determined to give Romania a voice to be heard on Radio Free Europe, together with other writers, poets and journalists that seemed to be fighting against the regime, as reported on that radio. To his surprise, the Springsteen article, meant to be offered to Liliana, offered by Dan, disappeared from his closet which convinced him once again that "the Secu was coming and going from their apartment."

Since Dan van Dorn left for the United States, Cristian was no longer of use, so the official report added to Chapter 53, revealed the fact that necessary measures were to be taken against him together with an accelerated plan of using his mother for closely observing the diplomat as diligently as she had done before.

Chapter 55 expands upon the beginning of the bloody revolution in Romania, that started with a protest in Timișoara when people were demanding freedom and when the repressive forces intervened shooting the Romanian innocent citizens. Meanwhile, the university students from Bucharest have started mobilizing. Cristian is shocked to find out that his sister Cici is working with the Securitate, when he finds the Bruce Springsteen article together with a lot of foreign currency and Kent cigarettes in her locked box. On hearing her talking with an American citizen that came to look after her dying mother fills him with discontent assuming that she was also betraying that person.

One of his friends, Starfish, who has also been also a close friend of Bunu, offers him some pages regarding **Human Rights Violation in the Eighties first published July 1987 by Amnesty International Publications, London**, revealing torture and ill treatment of all those that opposed the communist regime in Romania. Noticing Cici getting out of a black Dacia, Cristian directly accuses of having become an informer. She invokes the fact that "they promised medicine and a passport" (212), if she cooperated with

them. Moreover, he finds out that she “framed” him, putting the American dollar in his stamp album so that “they could blackmail him” (213) and turn him also into an informer, with the same promise that Bunu will get the necessary medication to stand pains. He discloses her that Bunu knew about her betrayal and accuses her of having “killed” him and all his plans. The Secu official report added to Chapter 62 reveals that he is considered a “liability,” that he must be “dealt with,” demanding his name and photo to be distributed at once.

Meanwhile, after Ceaușescu’s failed speech in the Palace Square, thousands of people gathered there, yelling “down with Ceaușescu,” on December 21st (217). For further tackling the reality depicted by Septys in *I Must Betray You*, we propose David Bohn’s model of ‘holographic plenitude.’ According to Aristotle, the basic concept of reality has to be “an undivided reality” (in Sandu, 2011: 164, our translation). To Bohn, reality appears to be built of levels, “each level being comprised between two levels of reality” (qtd. in Sandu 2011: 164, our translation). Bohn further highlights the duality that exists “between the apparent multiplicity and the plenitude of the world” and introduces the concept of “wrapped up order” (in Sandu 2011: 165, our translation). Patapievici argues that “the substance of the world being identical in every part of it and at any formal level, the differences appear through the degree of the wrapping and unfolding of the plenitude” (in Sandu 2011: 165, our translation). Patapievici argues that the wrapping and the unfolding take place simultaneously and any intuitive support offered to the process of unfolding has to take into account that “it is not spatial, and that it itself admits the form of plenitude as its intimate structure, (that is the supersystem), system-subsystem consisting of parts, depending on the condition of the whole, according to the rules of wrapping (unfolding),” (quoted in Sandu 2011: 165, our translation).

Bohn’s implicit order unfolds in a multidimensional world “whose dimensions are infinite” (in Sandu 2011: 165, our translation). He also argues that the implicit order is meaningful only in relation to conscience, which, according to Bohn has “an ontological substation” (165). Bohn opines that there is no predictability for a single quantum event as concerns its production or nonproduction (165). Patapievici’s argument regarding Bohn’s approach to the quantum events is focused on the fact that “if we want to find out when each individual neutron disintegrates” the answer offered by quantum

mechanics is that “the process of disintegration is spontaneous and admits no causal explanation” (in Sandu 2011: 166, our translation).

Furthermore, if we take into account Agocs’ concern with Bohn’s quantum theory and its relation to the Buddhist concepts of analysing the individual’s mind and reality, it appears that “the evolutionary processes are a self-sustained circular flowing of energy that generates the feeling of the Self” (qtd. in Sandu 2011: 167).

The feeling of the Self experienced by Sepetys’ characters can be set in relation to Bohn’s arguments that the implicit order is meaningful only in relation to conscience, that there is no predictability for a single quantum event as concerns its production or nonproduction (165), that, “if we want to find out when each individual neutron disintegrates,” the answer offered by quantum mechanics is that “the process of disintegration is spontaneous and admits no causal explanation” (in Sandu 2011: 166, our translation).

Consequently, *movement*, regarded by Bohn as being discontinuous, in the sense that “the action consists of indivisible quantum,” with the implication that “an electron can pass from one state into another without passing through an intermediate state” (in Sandu 2011: 167, our translation) brings us back to the 1989 Revolutionary social and political movement. Moreover, Bohn’s preoccupation with the connection between the physical and the mental world implies that they are both perceived as “separate aspects, being revealed to us either through perception or thought” (qtd. in Sandu 2011: 167). To Cristian, Sepetys’ protagonist, the significance of the last days of Ceaușescu’s communist regime are revealed firstly through perception and then, through thought.

On pages 220-221, Cristian perceives his former “emptiness” being replaced by “closeness.” It is further depicted as “a true camaraderie. We all felt it. We saw it in one another’s eyes. It was freedom-and it was glorious.” The picture of the amount of people gathered at University Square comprised “pregnant women, adults with children on their shoulders, countless students” and the “sound of crowd roared,” demanding liberty. On the other hand, when darkness fell, information started to circulate that “plainclothes agents” are everywhere and that people should be careful. Near the Intercontinental Hotel Cristian helped demonstrators “build a barricade using a tumble of chairs and tables.” His friend Luca wondered whether the people should not be told to take their kids home. The answer is suggestive and impressive: “It’s fine. They won’t shoot kids. It’s important for all ages to demonstrate. The world

must see that everyone wants change” (221). Before the army sided with the demonstrators, Luca, jumped to protect Cristian, and a bullet tore through his right shoulder, whereas “the world went black” for him. When Cristian woke up he found himself in a police van in order to be taken to the Police Station 14 and then to Jilava, the worst Romanian prison. He suddenly remembered that the papers from Amnesty International were in his coat pocket and was eager to “shove the papers” down his pants.

Instances of the “crumbled plenitude” (Bohn, qtd in Sandu 2011: 166) abound in the next 20 pages, in obvious opposition with Bohn’s approach to the substance of the world as “an uncrumpled plenitude, which replaces the crumbling through a levelling of interdependences” (166). Although the movement is depicted by quantum mechanics as discontinuous, with the implication that an electron can pass from one stage to another without passing through an intermediate state, according to the same theory, each individual neutron disintegrates spontaneously and without any causal explanation” (Patapievici, qtd. in Sandu 2011: 166). Cristian experiences various levels of interdependences, even if all the demonstrators were considered “political prisoners” (235). The interdependency levels range from meeting Liliana in there and revealing his strong feelings for her, to their being asked to pledge obedience to Ceaușescu and his wife, by getting down on their knees and kissing their portraits, to pulling the papers from Amnesty International from his pants and using them as a shovel lest he should be killed.

Their being taken by van to the juvenile prison on Florian Aaron street next to the U.S. Embassy occasions Cristian, as a result of Liliana’s argument that they will tell the guards that he escaped the van at Jilava, the opportunity to sneak behind the van, hide behind a building, so as to be able to finally send someone for Liliana and the other teenagers and get them out of prison, when circumstances permitted.

Although his conscience “pecked” (249) at him, Cristian starts walking toward Liliana’s building, comes across Starfish, asks for help, enters her building, informs them that Luca has been shot, changes his clothes, avoids going to his place so as not to be obliged to stay in there. At Colțea Hospital he finds Luca in critical condition, but still alive (258). Other instances of the “crumbled plenitude” and other levels of interdependence can be tackled in relation to Ceaușescu’s fleeing, to the army siding with the demonstrators despite the “teams of terrorists assisting the Secu assassins”

(263), to Cristian's calling up his parents, informing them about Liliana being in danger on Aaron Florian, about her brother, Luca, being hospitalized at Colțea Hospital. Equally significant are the items of information regarding Cici's attempt to help Liliana get out of the juvenile prison and his reunion with Liliana. The climax emerges from Radio Free Europe presenting pages of Cristian's letter entitled *Screaming Whispers: an American Teenager in Bucharest*, authored by Anonymous, a very "poignant account from Romania" (277), given to an American diplomat as a Christmas present.

The Epilogue tackles Cristian's postrevolutionary life experience in terms of his being married to Liliana, of having become an English teacher, of Liliana managing a bookstore, of Luca having emigrated to England with his parents. As concerns the uncovering of the truth regarding his family involvement with the Securitate, it took him more than twenty years to have had access to the Security Archives, CNSAS, and discover that his mother and sister had been recruited as informers, Cici being a double agent, for the Americans, "trying to secure a better life" (289) for her family, not working against him, but actually trying to help him. A memorable shred of evidence regarding how painful to be recruited by Secu might be emerged from Cristian's encounter with his former classmate who had the breakdown and screamed about being an informer, during one of their classes, and of how sorry he still feels because no colleague did anything to comfort him; moreover, being in the same position, he should have helped him, particularly because both of them have been recruited by the same agent. After their meeting Cristian went to the cemetery, stood at his family gravesite with a manuscript. We learn that he has spent years "panning for truth," interrogating his memories, "correcting false narratives, and pondering the fact that when betraying others, we often betray ourselves" (291). He highlights his experience with his students who ask him questions about the revolution, how they share stories, how he has changed the names, just in case. The sad conclusion reached by Cristian is that "years pass and eventually, time becomes the unveiled of truth" (201). He refers to the painful shift in comprehension as "the rite of the passage," rendered concrete in his accepting the students' suggestion to "write a book about it" (291). The book is dedicated to his grandfather, Bunu, hoping that other people will read it too. Last but not least, he decides to pay a visit to the Security agent that has recruited him, Paddle Hands, being "ready for answers," ready "to put the past behind him" (292) and restore the plenitude of the world.

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