# *THE FANTASTIC IN THE FOLK FAIRY TALE*

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***Abstract***: *Folk fairy tales form a distinct category in fairy tales classification, both V.I. Propp and Antti Aarne including them in their classifications. Moreover, they represent the most significant class from a numerical point of view. However, many researchers controvert the fantastic in fairy tales. The present paper attempts to point out all these opinions and characterize the fantastic within the fairy tale.*

***Keywords***: *fairy tale, fantastic, miraculous.*

Fantastic, as dictionary explains, means something "that does not really exist; created, imagined; unreal, fantasmagoric, fabulous ". Its synonyms are "fantasmagoric, unreal, figurative, fabulous, legendary, miraculous, mythical, supernatural, unrealizable, extraordinary".

According to the dictionaries, it should be very simple and natural to put the fairy tale into the category of fantastic writings.

George Călinescu himself defines the fairy tale as "a work of literary creation, with a special genesis, *a reflection in any case of life in fabulous ways*". (Călinescu, 1965: 6).

The great philologist Lazăr Șăinean defines the fairy tale in his work *Basmele române*: "The fairy tale is a form of the narrative genre whose essential character is the miraculous, supernatural, by which it differs from the novel and the novelette from the artistic literature"(Șăineanu, 1978: 140). He continues: „The most interesting part under the scientific report in the field of folk tales is the one in which the fantastic element prevails". (Șăineanu, 1978: 141).

In fact, great theorists of fairy tale, such as V.I. Propp and Aarne, have named the most important category in the fairy tale classification "the category of fantastic fairy tales".

However, studying the theory of the fairy tale, it is not easy at all to give clear and precise ideas about the relationship between fantasy and fairy tale.

This is because philologists do not take the above-mentioned terms as synonyms, finding different meanings for them.

Thus, rigurously, researchers formulate different definitions of these terms, with nuances that pretty much differentiate them:

"Fantastic means [...] the story of miraculous, unrealistic facts, in opposition to the credible narratives, *more appropriate being the name of - miraculous fairy tale, as it is delineated in the science of literature*". (Bârlea, 1976: 42).

Even more than that, some of them - such as, for example, Tzvetan Todorov - subdivides the term "fantastic" into several parts: pure fantastic, stra nge - fantastic,

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miraculous-fantastic. This is due to the fact that in literary works the elements of fantastic, strange and miraculous mingle and interpenetrate each other.

According to Tzvetan Todorov, the pure fantastic is a median line that separates the miraculous from the strange, but there can be no clear distinction, to the left and right of the pure fantastic we meet, before the pure strange pure and the pure miraculous, the two subgenres: the strange-fantastic and the miraculous-fantastic.

"[...] the fantastic only lasts as long as hesitation persists: common hesitation - of the character and of the reader, who are called upon to decide whether or not what they perceive is *reality*, as it appears to the current opinion. At the end of the story, the reader, if not the character itself, makes a decision, chooses betweeen two solutions, thus leaving the ground of the fantastic. If he concludes that the laws of reality are unbroken and that they can explain the described phenomens, it means that the work belongs to another genre: the strange. If, on the contrary, he concludes that, by admitting new laws of nature, the phenomenon can be explained, he enters into another genre - into the sphere of the miraculous". (Todorov, 1973: 59).

Tzvetan Todorov also frames the fairy tale in the sphere of the miracle:

"The miraculous genre is generally related to fairy tales; in fact, fairy tale is nothing more than a species of the miraculous, characterized by the fact that supernatural events do not cause any wonder". (Todorov, 1973: 73).

Of course, the views of researchers in this field are among the most diverse, some on Todorov's side, even though they have some differences (Pierre-Georges Castex, Roger Caillois, Marcel Schneider, Howard Philipps, etc.), while others have a very different view (Charles Nodier, Christine Brooke-Rose, Sergiu Pavel Dan, Adrian Marino, and Mircea Eliade). Thus, as Sergiu Pavel Dan remarks, "... while the Bulgarian-French essayist wants to convince us that the fantastic is nothing but a limit, a borderline between the strange and the miraculous, Mircea Eliade assures us, on the contrary, that the supernatural hides, coming on our path all the way, and if we do not identify it, this is because it systematically *camouflages*. In other words, if for Todorov the fantastic is nothing but a glimpse, a hintful and evanescent suggestion, in Eliade's view, this category would be an inextricable fabric of signs and connections above the threads". (Dan, 2005: 24).

Also, the critic Lucian Strochi believes that "a fairy tale cannot be fantastic, the phrase fantastic fairy tale is, in the best case, null and void". (http://lucianstrochi.ro/2016/01/21/fantastic-si-basm-fantastic-si-feeric/)

Synthesizing, most of the scientists who have approached the subject share the opinion that the supernatural in the fairy tale is a type of the miraculous. If we report it to the fantastic, it is very important to specify that the fantastic in the fairy tale is of the conventional type.

This means that the fabulous, miraculous is predictable, as a kind of convention between the storyteller and the listener.

Also, the miraculous in fairy tale is, in its turn, fabulous, because the characters and the action do not have a correspondent in the real world, being exclusively the fruit of imagination.

The elements that make fairy tale such a writing are specified in great detail by the theorists of fairy tale, both foreign and Romanian.



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Among the Romanian writings dealing with this subject we recall the most important ones, such as:

- *Basmele române*, a very extensive study of philologist Lazăr Șăineanu, a work that is of refenece until the present day and which requires a huge documentation work.

- *Estetica basmului*, another reference work written by George Călinescu, very important also in the field of fairy tale research.

In fairy tales we meet, as George Calinescu says, *a wonderful world where everything is possible*. In the fabulous world of fairy tale, the real is mixed with the fabulous:

"A particular feature of the Romanian fantastic fairy tale is precisely the inextricable mixture between reality and what we call fantastic". (Constantinescu, 2008: 28).

However, the mixture is a natural one, conventionaly accepted by a reader. He knows that fairy tale is a figment, but it accepts it as if it were real. This is done using the specific narrative formulas - starting, median and finale -, genuine category marks for fairy tale.

In Romanian fairy tales, the most common initial formula is „A fost odată ca niciodată, că de n-ar fi, nu s-ar povesti... ”.

Starting formulas introduce the listener in the fabulous world of fairy tale and at the same time inform him that everything is just a figment. The action of fairy tale takes place in an imaginary time and in an imaginary place. These are uncontrollable, as Nicolae Constantinescu remarks - a time of all possibilities.

The fairy tale is interrupted here and there by short lyrics, which take the listener out of monotony, considering that the fairy tales were spoken most of the time at evening sittings of village women and in this context sleep could appear: „Un cărbune/ Ș-un tăciune/ Spune, băiete, spune!” or „Se luptară/ Se luptară/ Zi de vară/ Până-n seară.”

Median formulas have the role of keeping the listener's attention. That is why they are rimmed. The storyteller makes a change from prose to verse, knowing that the audience is pleasantly surprised and their attention grows.

Hașdeu calls the median formula an accident. It is mainly found in Romanian fairy tales, less in other nations' folklore, and does not represent, in his opinion, something typical. Formulas may be missing in some versions of a fairy tale and be found in other versions of the same fairy tale.

The stereotype of fairy tales makes them end with a typical formula such as: „Și încălecai pe-o șa/ Și v-am spus povestea așa.”, or „Și încălecai pe o căpșună/ Și vă spusei o mare minciună.”, or „Și au trăit fericiți până la adânci bătrânețe, iar de n-or fi murit, trăiesc și astăzi”.

The final formulas take the listener out of that fabulous, miraculous world of fairy tale and bring him back to real life. They are very varied, we find them both in our country and at other nations, both in lyrics and in prose.

As Lazăr Șăineanu notices, some of them express regret for the happy times of fairy tale, others, on the contrary, express the conviction that today we are happier. Most of the time, the final formulas are ironic, urging the audience to go there to see with their own eyes that they are true (but "there", as we have learned since the beginning of the fairy tale,



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does not exist, the action of fairy tales unfolds in a place and at an imaginary time, nonexistent).

Regarding the initial and final formulas, B.P. Hașdeu, a follower of the oniric theory, states that they resemble the beginning of sleep and the awakening, that these stereotyped formulas corresponding to "the two ends of the dream."

Another element that makes the fairy tale a fantastic writing is represented by the characters. In the world of fairy tale, the real intermingles with the supernatural and the characters – either they are often endowed with supernatural powers, or receive help from beings or things with miraculous powers.

The characters of fairy tales are always divided into good and bad. A bad person never has good qualities, nor vice versa. Good characters are put in antithesis with evil ones and from this duspute good always comes out victorious. Thus, the fairy tale has a happy ending which is profoundly moralizing.

The negative heroes of fairy tales have, without exception, supernatural powers, but they are overcomed by positive heroes, even though they often happen to be normal people, but they receive aid from beings or things endowed with supernatural powers.

Thus, Prince Charmings fight with dragon who have kidnapped princesses. They are normal people - mostly Prince Charming may be the little son of the emperor who has three sons.

The hero has precious features: he is full of humanity, brave, has the sense of justice, is beautiful and young. Even if he is not always a son of an emperor (in some fairy tales the hero can be a poor boy), for all these qualities he is rewarded during the story, when, in order to overcome the negative character, receives help from beings or objects with supernatural powers (the ant's queen, the queen of the bees, the hungry horse, the naughty sword, the charmed handkerchief, and many others) and also at the end of the story, when he usually marries the emperor's girl.

Speaking of fantastic elements in fairy tale, we also have to remember the magical numbers, the importance of colors and the secondary characters with supernatural powers that populate the world.

Thus, the sacramental numbers are met all the time in fairy tales: the Emperor has three sons or three girls, the journey made by the hero lasts three days and three nights, as well as the battle of the hero with the dragon; the dragon has three heads, the hero has three talismans with supernatural powers that he uses to win the fight against the negative character, and the examples can continue. We also have to add the fact that in some fairy tales we see the multiples of three: six, nine, twelve, or we can see the number seven, sometimes the number forty.

Regarding the colors in fairy tales and their symbolism, we can say that the characters - especially the emperors - are often named after the color nomenclature, as Lazăr Șăineanu expresses: Green-Emperor, symbolizing good and justice, or the Red-Emperor, symbolizing a demonic character.

In connection with the secondary characters with supernatural powers in fairy tales, we can remember that they play the role of helpers of the hero in his struggle with the negative character. They have symbolic names: Păsărilă-Lăți-Lungilă, Fomilă, Setilă, Sfarmă-Piatră, Strâmbă-Lemne, Statu-Palmă-Barbă-Cot etc.



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Sometimes we find in fairy tales secondary characters with supernatural powers who help the negative character in his fight against the hero: Muma-Pădurii, Vâlva-Băii, Jumătate-de-Om-Călare-pe-Jumătate-de-Iepure-Șchiop, Ursitoarea-cea-Rea. As we have already mentioned, in fairy tales good always overcomes evil and the end is always a happy one.

It is worth mentioning a few words about the place where the action of the fairy tale is taking place. We have already remembered that this is an imaginary place that cannot be located somewhere on the map. In some fairy tales, we encounter very vague indices, such as ”the Southern Emperor” or ”the North Neighbor”, but nothing more than that. It is, however, very often connected with the place where the action takes place, another fantastic element: ”this realm” and ”the other realm”. The House of the Dragon, The House of the Ogre, the house of negative characters in fairy tale is usually in the other realm.

We end the article with a quote by Lazăr Șăineanu, in which, in just a few words, all the characteristics that make the fairy tale what it is are summarized: a profoundly moral and moralizing writing, which takes place in an imaginary world and in an imaginary place, a fabulous, miraculous, fantastic world:

"The townspeople and the villager are both miraculous seekers, and they like to transport themselves to the unknown regions of fantasy and create there a kind of ideal homeland where earthly injustice is compensated by a sense of universal justice, through the triumph of good over evil and the superiority of intelligence over brutal force ". (Șăineanu, 1978: 13-14).

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