# *BESTIARIES AND CHRISTIANITY IN DUMITRU TEPENEAG'PROSE*

**Georgiana AVRAM**
**University of Piteşti**

***Abstract****: The present paper is intended to approach the complex reality of the oniric literature, by resorting to a distinct analysis of the individual writings, with emphasis laid on Dumitru Tepeneag' prose, the head of the oniric group in Roumania. His prose is unique and well-known especially through his own bestiary and register of symbols. These two items are to be met along his work with a meaningfull and bookish significance, and this is the criterion that makes his prose original. The symbols used by Dumitru Tepeneag are controversial, because they are Christian symbols, but in an oniric expression and interpretation.*

***Key words****: oniric, symbol, bestiaries, paradigm, image, atheist*.

The literature of Dumitru Tepeneag, once read and re-read, proposes the reader a maze of figures, respectively symbols, of animals that reiterate in each of his prose with new meanings, leading to the well-known syntagm *bestiaries of Tepeneag*. Nicolae Barna in his monograph *Dumitru Tepeneag* proposes the syntagm *authorial bestiaries* and also mentions the important role of imagery alongside bestiaries: "Animal figures are not the only recurrent items that tent to fit in one paradigm. Along with bestiaries a set of images are characteristic to entire work of the writer. The images that reader discovers, and then rediscovers, resumed, here and there, in a novelette, in a novel, where he would not have expected."[1] This connection bestiaries-imagery is inescapable while producing a paradigm, as Dumitru Tepeneag's prose, because it can be spoken about a symbol without bringing forward the symbolical image of the symbol under discussion.

Gilbert Durand, a specialst in this field of literature, exemplifies this aspect, sustaining in *Image's Adventures. Symbolical Imagination. The Imagery* that a symbol is "like allegory, the assignment of sensitivity from figurative sense to *semnificat*, but it is, according to its nature of the meaning, inaccessible, and epiphany, namely it belongs, through and in *semnificant*, to the unspeakable."[2] and the symbolical image is "the transfiguring of a specific representation in a sense for always abstract. So, the symbol is a representation that leads to a concrete sense; the symbol is the epiphany of a mystery. The half of a symbol <*the semnificat*> would be always overloaded by the maximum of concretness."[3] The symbol is in close connection with the oniric literature, as Durand suggests, since one of the concrete dimensions of the symbol is the oniric one, that has its origins in the memories and in the gestures that emerges in our dreams, producing at the same time "the concrete substance of our very intimate biography."[4]

The prose of Dumitru Tepeneag abounds in animal figures from ichthyomorphic and aviomorfic till domestic animals. One of the oldest ichthyiomorphic motifs that proliferate in art at the same time with the beginnings of ancient Christianity is the fish. The significance of the religious texts establishes a connection between Jesus and its role of fisherman proceeds from Ihtus – the Gnostic name of Jesus (anagram of the initials from Greek word that meant Jesus Christ Son of



BDD-A5812 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:55:02 UTC)

God the Savior), that also means fish. At Dumitru Tepeneag, the fish is present in different contexts symbolizing the powerless of the man facing the hostile and grotesque circumstances of society. Man is permanently misfit like the powerless of the fish on earth, out of the aquatic sphere. So, in *Dead Fish*, the fish "was lying half on the gangway where there was ice, half on the wet asphalt of the footpath, with its head to the drain gutter"[5]; in *Vain Art of the Fugue*: "Suddenly, the fish went out from the swaddling clothes, climbed down from the peasant's arms and came towards me; it has two thin legs, without scales", "I was caressing the fish that had nestled in my arms" or "A huge fish was flying over the trees…Behind the fish one could see a bird like an eagle that was following him."[6]

Aviomorphic images are considered for many times benefic elements of the human being. Bird always meant man's dream of his Icaric wish of rising, of breaking his dependence of earth. The presence of the wings at man in the prose of Dumitru Tepeneag reminds the reader of flying and Florin Manolescu emphasizes this idea: "There are cases in which this theme is metaphorically and pictorially dealt with (…), but for many times we deal with a much complicated symbol that has as purpose to put-up-to-date like in the life from dreams, the great archetypal myths, with their overwhelming, eternal and deep aspirations."[7] The bird that is prevalent in Tepeneag's prose is the eagle, the oniric symbol that rules the earthly reality producing resurrection of humanity. The expound about the eagle that impressed Dumitru Tepeneag is the one of Ion Vartic from *Apostrof* review (Year XII, no.5, 2001): "The presence for always and for all over Dumitru Tepeneag's prose, the eagle is a epiphany of transcendence, of death, of possible redeeming of the sky that comes downwards on earth."[8] The eagle appears in *Europe Hotel*: "huge blue eagles were flying over us"[9]; in *Maramures*: "A tall and blond-haired woman dressed in a bride gown that hardly pulled along an enormous cage where there was an eagle(…)The eagle was black as pitch, with a yellow eye-ball in the centre of the violet iris. He was immobile in his cage"[10]; "in *The Necessary Marriage*: "an eagle over there look there the teacher showed"[11]; in *Vain Art of Fugue*: "he was rising up his arm as if he protected from the claws of a bird of prey, of a huge eagle that threw its beak towards its eyes"[12]; in *Novel to be Read on Train*: "In the cage the eagle. The bird seems bigger now, the cage too little. (Already? Yes, yes…) The eagle tries to spread its wings"[13]; in the novelette *The Crying*: "Then an eagle came down from the sky on his shoulders and he pulled up the pot so that the bird could drink"[14]; in *Waiting*: "that tall, blond and long-haired woman dressed in a white sweater and blue pants. She had a cage with an eagle chick."[15]

The peacock, another aviomorphic symbol, can be resembled with soul, and as a Christian symbol represents immortality, as it is known that its body never decomposes. The same interpretation is developed at Tepeneag: "The flock of peacock wasn't flying over the city, instead, from a yard appeared a peacock, gracefully and solemnly stepping to met me" or "there were peacocks flying over the city"[16]

The lamb (sheep), another sanctioned Christian symbol, represents Jesus and at Tepeneag, the kindness that doesn't resists to manipulated society. The novel *The Necessary Marriage* uses all over this symbol: "flock of sheep invaded the yard and the pupils are running the lambs", "the sheep is very obedient and nicely adorned with red, yellow and blue ribbons" ; "on a plate the head of a lamb smirked with its intact eyes and tooth", "the sky with small clouds like some lambs."[17]

The lion, not less important, appears as a symbol with four virtues: master, enlivening, vigilance and ability. In the prose of Dumitru Tepeneag it is used as a permanent watcher, it is the eye that sees everything: "sometimes it stood on tiptoe,



BDD-A5812 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:55:02 UTC)

ready to fly, and then the lion growled. I saw its smirked mouth, as if he laughed"[18]; "The lion in my right asked me in whisper where the spectators were?"[19] In *Arges* review Tepeneag says about the symbols of eagle and lion: "The word lion or the word eagle have image, even if this is quite abstract or pale (depends on author, but also on reader). If lion was used as a symbol (and it was thank God), the context could serve as a cage; and in this way, the symbol, does not impress, is vaguely perceived, intellectually speaking, it is even forgotten…It becomes a simple hint, a discreet directive. Of course, if it is strong, it imposes its tonality like a sharp or a flat. The author must know well what he wants he must be on the lookout."[20]

The trio made up from eagle, fish and lion, as it appears in *Pont des Arts* ("a eagle carrying a fish in its claws flying over a lion that looked up"), unifies in a whole the sky, the aquatic and the earth.

As it could be remarked, Dumitru Tepeneag's prose abounds in symbols, but moreover, in religious symbols. According to this subject and the names of the four Evangelists who are to be met in *Novel to be Read on Train* it is significant that within church, more exactly, in the altar, appear on Holy Epitaph the four Evangelists, each of them having a symbol: Mathew-angel, Mark-lion, Luke-ox and John-eagle. In this way analogical is the following fragment from the Old Testament of prophet Ezechiel: "While I was looking here comes from North a stormy wind, a big cloud and a wave of fire that spread to all parts shinning rays; and in the middle of fire it was shinning like a lamb in the glow. And in the middle I saw something that looked like four beasts, and their look resembled with human face. Each of them had four faces and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight; and the hooves of their legs wee like the hooves of veal legs and sparkled like the bright brass, and their wings were agile. Under these four sides they had human hands under the wings and all four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were touching one of other, and while they were going, the beasts did not turn around, each of them went straight off. What about their faces? – All of them had a human face in front, all four had a lion face at right, all had an ox face at left, and all four had an eagle face in the back."[21] In the Bible lion is a metaphor for courage, power and force. The prophecy that tells the lion will stay together with the lamb puts in contradiction the ferocity and kindness of the two animals.

With reference to Valeriu Cristea's affirmation about *Staging and Other Texts* that the prose from this volume is "violently atheist, but a non-conventional one"[22], Dumitru Tepeneag in the same interview makes this significant confession: "It's true that I'm an atheist. But this doesn't mean I didn't read from cover to cover the Old and New Testament that are at the bedrock of European civilization along with Greco-Roman mythologies. All over culture is impregnated by these myths. Not only literature, but also the languages of different literatures. Well, above all symbols, I consider the symbols of Christian religion to be more subtle. And more oniric!"[23] The writer also sustains that the symbols should not be chancy or arbitrary and in the middle of oniric group: "the symbols of Christian religion have no direct connection with the oniric theory. Their contribution is either by chance, or by the wish of challenging. It's true, as I have already said these subtle symbols are very tempting for an oniric writer."[24]

Another element of religious stamp represents the Christian names (Maria, Magdalen) of the feminine characters that are to be met in *Staging and other Frames, Through Key Hole, Remembrance, Vain Art of the Fugue, Novel to be Read on Train*. Dumitru Tepeneag answers again to this challenge: Christianity confers the woman a much important place than the other monotheist religions. That it is obvious! Woman



BDD-A5812 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:55:02 UTC)

makes Christianity steady and so makes to the mankind. Jesus sacrifices, disappears, more precisely the man from Jesus sacrifices. So, Maria and the Magdalen guide on Christianity. They become hints for the apostles, because these two women are fairly considered to have been closer to Jesus than his disciples. Maria is of divine by birth and this it what means the unblemished outlook. And this could not be overlooked by the disciples who where without their Teacher. As apostles they guide on theory, ideology. Since Maria and the Magdalen are permanently introducing in a concrete way the love for fellow creature and the grace as a religious fundamental truth(…) Women are at the same time more subtle than men and more concrete, and as characters more oniric!"[25]

In the prose of Dumitru Tepeneag bestiaries has an essential role in what makes this literature unique, being instrumental in making the atmosphere specific to wakeful state by introducing in an expert manner these animal figures. These symbols are permanently reiterating, inserting the inevitable felling of obsession and at the same time they give life to oniric literature.

***NOTES***

1. Nicolae Bârna, *Dumitru Ţepeneag*, Ed.Apostrof, Cluj, 2007, p. 93
2. Gilbert Durand, *Aventurile imaginii. Imaginaţia simbolică. Imaginarul*, Ed. Nemira, Bucureşti, 1999, p. 17
3. Ibidem, p. 18
4. Ibidem, p. 18
5. Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Prin gaura cheii*, Ed. Allfa, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 45
6. Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Zadarnică e arta fugii*, Ed. Albatros, Bucureşti, 1991, p. 49, 83,102
7. Florin Manolescu în *Prin gaura cheii*, p. 592
8. Dumitru Ţepeneag, "*Ei bine, dintre toate simbolurile, eu găsesc că simbolurile religiei creştine sunt cele mai subtile. Şi mai onirice!" - interviu realizat de Georgiana Avram* în *Revista Argeş* ( Anul X, Nr.1, Ianuarie 2010), p.26-27
9. Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Hotel Europa*, Ed. 100+1 Grammar, Bucureşti, 1999, p. 37
10. Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Maramureş,* Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 159
11. Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Nunţile necesare*, Ed. Allfa, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 41
12. *Zadarnică e arta fugii*, p. 42
13. Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Roman de citit în tren*, Ed. Institutional European, Iaşi, 1993, p. 113
14. *Prin gaura cheii*, p. 150
15. Ibidem, p. 215
16. Ibidem, p. 128
17. *Nunţile necesare*, p. 106, 103, 17, 31
18. *Prin gaura cheii*, p.175
19. Ibidem, p. 236
20. "*Ei bine, dintre toate simbolurile, eu găsesc că simbolurile religiei creştine sunt cele mai subtile. Şi mai onirice!"*, p. 26
21. *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, Ed. Institutul Biblic şi de Misiune Al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucureşti, 1994
22. Valeriu Cristea în *Prin gaura cheii*, p. 549
23. "*Ei bine, dintre toate simbolurile, eu găsesc că simbolurile religiei creştine sunt cele mai subtile. Şi mai onirice!"*, p. 26
24. Ibidem, p. 26
25. Ibidem, p.27



BDD-A5812 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:55:02 UTC)