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POSTMODERN PROSE AND FAIRY – TALE RESSURECTION – MYTHICAL MORPHOLOGIES IN ROMANIAN AND EUROPEAN FAIRY TALES

Simona GRUIAN[1]

Abstract: *This paper is focussed on revaling a comparative study on various typologies of characters from Romanian and European fairy-tales. We intend to bring into the foreground the pantheon of mythical creatures of different ancient cultures that were considered the basis in character construction in popular fairy-tales. Another concern of this paper is to compare popular cultural products belonging to the same literary species, as well as a comparative analysis between modern and postmodern cultural products, revealing mythical functions in the postmodern imaginary and traditional perspectives on myths. The mythical ressurection phenomenon is brought into discussion together with re-sacralization and de-sacralization.*

Keywords: *fairy-tale, de-sacralization, postmodern hero, demythisation.*

1. Introduction

Etimologically speaking, the term fairy-tale comes from Slavic *basnŭ*, meaning fable, fabrication that became a traditional species of the popular literature, characterized largely by orality and considered by G. Calinescu "mirror of life in fabulous ways".

Memory and speaking as forms of articulating the interiour space represent ways in which man told his adventures over centuries, starting with first attempts of the archaic man to verbalize his „adventures", as Lucacks mentions in his *Aesthetics*. From this perspective, it is natural to consider epic as the first literary genre in their chronological hierarchy. The European man suffered from an exacerbated „fear of time", as Mircea Muthu observed – and the Romanian man as well, filling this void of time, born from the complex of the territorial independence with narration (either of true facts, real or fictional, as it is the case of the fairy-tale), and this is why diegesis bloomed in the European context. Clarification of structural and typological nature were carried on by Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne (1867-1925) in 1910 and then by Stith Thompson who identified 2 340 different types of fairy-tales. The Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp in his study *Morphology of the Folk Tale* developed a methodological analysis on narratorial structure specific to Russian popular fairy tale.

[1]PhD Student, Department of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

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The „Pantheon" of European fairy-tales began to form itself at the end of the XVIIth century, taking shape through the work of some folklorists and fairy tales writers like Charles Perrault (1628-1703), Madame d'Aulnoy in France, brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in Germany, Alexandre Nikolaïévitch Afanassiev (1826-1871) in Russia. Among the folklorists and adepts of folklore in teh Romanian area we mention Vasile Alecsandri, Alexandru Odobescu (*The Tale of the Emperor's Son with No Luck in Hunting* from the essay *Pseudokynegetikos*), Mihai Eminescu (and *Fat Frumos from Linden*, *Fat Frumos from Tear*, *Cenushotka* – a variant of *Cenusareasa*), Ioan Slavici, Ion Luca Caragiale, and Petre Ispirescu, Vladimit Colin, B. St. Delavrancea.

The mirroring of the myths in literature was due to the fact that literary constructions were based on mythical core through its metamorphosis from a historical epoch to another, or, in Eliade's words: „... myth tells a sacred history, relates an event that took place in the primordial time, the fabulous time of the beginning (...) In other words, the myth narrates how, due to feats of the Supernatural Beings, a reality gained existence, be it a total reality, cosmos or just a fragment: an island, a vegetal species, a human behaviour, an institution. Thus it is always the story of a creation. (Eliade 15) If in *The Golden Bough* (1915) James George Frazer performs with the help of the structural investigation an analogic exercise between the rites of mythical nature, analyzing the primitive religions, the Romanian civilization and teh folklore of the modern society, then Claude Levi Strauss (*Mythologiques*) „analyzes and classifies, numbers and unifies myths and rituals of some primitive populations of a great ethnical heterogeneity, uncovering common patterns in myths, tabu and totemic systems hostile to unification at a first glance".

We want to detect in these pages the phenomenon of bringing the fairy-tale in modernity, towards the acquisition of the universal character of the species, although it includes myth, sacred history, written in the „circular, reversible and recoverable", picturing gods, fabulous creatures, gone worlds that reborn in us every time we become readers of a literary species born with Sheherezada's nights. The mythical nature of the fairy-tale was revealed firstly by Grimm brothers, Wesselski and Propp so that we could affirm that this literary species is adjacent to myth due to two reasons. The first reason would be the one that teh old beliefs were unde rthe patronage of various gods (Roman and Greek mythology) and the second one would be that the term myth itself etimologically speaking has its routs in the Greek „mithos" that means „story". From this point of view myth is „one of the oldest cultural states of the human mind which nurtures almost all subsequent artistic forms". In Jean Chevalier's and Alain Gheerbrant's vision myths „help to perceive a dimension of human reality and shows the symbolical function of imagination in action", regardless of the interpretative system. (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 308)

Before starting the journey in the fascinant world of the characters from fairy-tales, we must mention Vera Calin's opinion on the premise of the arhetypal criticism: „that old myths (pagan, Judaic, Christian) have configured through extreme schematic of actions and character convention a true grammar of literary archetypes whose revenue in various crystallization, identifiable in medieval literature, as wel as in Rennaisance literature, baroque, romantic and modern, traced by syntheses of archetypal criticism as in the case of *Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye. (Calin 123)

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The object of our research is represented mainly by a certain typology of fairy-tales – the fantastic ones (excluding the fictionist and beats epic) derived from myth, circumscribed through fenomenology of miraculous and supernatural. Inserting the reader in „illo tempore", „in times when fleas were shoed with 99 pounds of iron" or „when God walked with St. Peter on earth", „when giants and brave people lived"[1] is mediated by narrative art, of a certain compositional structure specific to all European fairy-tales, which appear as a matricial form of narrative formulas of the beginning, content and ending with specific collocations. Technically speaking, the fairy-tale is a spherical construction due to its narrative scheme. Ins and outs from this wonderful space are realized through specific narrative formulas. The fairy-tale subscribes to the collocation „opera aperta" used by U. Eco regarding the mythical nature and the reading process.

2. Mythical Morphologies in Romanian and European Fairy-Tales

European fairy-tales are a unified core with Arabic influences, especially in the Southern Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal on one hand, and Germanic, as well as Russian influences. Adriana Quereze observed in "Fiaba e narazzione" that Germanic and Russian fairy-tales are characterized by common reminiscences of the Indina and Chinese imaginary that penetrated the Balcanic area. This is the reason why in Italy we talk about distinct geographical areas: a Southern one with strong Arabic influences and a Northern one with traces of the Germanic and French mythos. Moreover, in the authour's vision, brother Grimm's influence over the species of the European fairy-tale is characterized by medieval atmosphere, and a sample would be the morphologies we meet in the great majority of these fairy-tales – castles, princesses, witches, phantomes etc. The wood would stand for a sort of „mythical geography", specific to the European fairy-tale in which wood would symbolize the space of metamorphosis „of life in death, of wealth in poverty" as Adriana Quereze points out in *Fiaba e narrazione*.

Concerning the transmition of human values, both Romanian and Italian fairy-tales are characterized by the dichotomy between modesty and meekness[2] and by popularizing beneficence, unconditional help[3].

Arabic fairy-tales have a structural lode concentrated around the journey theme, Meka pilgrimage. During this journey the pilgrims told their stories, Sheherezada's narrations, bedouins' stories and Giuha's stories so that the time would „grow short". Giuha is a Romanian Păcală, comparable to Nastratin Hogea – famous character in Northern Sicily and entire Europe, being considered a linking character between various cultures.

Albano Maria Luisa edited in 2008 the book *Cinderella in Journeys* that analyzes in interdisciplinary manner four versions of Cinderella fairy-tale, establishing four typologies taking into account the variants of the fairy-tale – Giovanbattista Basile's Cinderella-cat, Arabic Cinderella, Chinese Cinderella and Irakian Cinderella. Carla Gianotti brings into discussion in her book Cinderella in Northern Countries. The Tibetan Fairy-Tale is a possible variant of the well-known European fairy-tale[4].

There are three main coordinates of an analysis based on the mythical morphologies from Romanian and European fairy-tales: heroic, fantastic and monstrous/marginality/alterity.

2.1. Heroic

The battle between good and evil as the main theme of fairy-tales requires a

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synthesis of the imaginary at the threshold between Orient and Occident. The Ying and Yang dispute is converted in the European fairy-tale as the battle between prince, knight on one hand and dragon, basilisk on the other hand. As a phenomenology of the fairy-tale, heroic is circumscribed through the process of converting into avatar a typology of the hero, be it the case of Făt Frumos[5], Prîslea, Florea or Pipăruş Viteazul (in some fairy-tales gathered by Lazăr Şeineanu) an exemplary hero in the tradition of the Homer's characters. Of course, the human values that are specific to this literary species – truth, good, beauty, courage, honesty – are advocated with the help of construction of typical characters and archetypal schemes.

2.2. Fantastic

We talk about mythical morphologies as dragons, Iele, ogers etc. Dragon as a specific typology of the Romanian fairy-tale ist o be found in the other world, being taken care of the Dragon's Mother, in castles described sometimes as spaces of opulence: „Beauty that I've seen in those castels couldn't be told: gardens with various flowers and trees, houses covereg in silver that shine in the sun like mirrors; walls covered with faces and flowers, wells that cast water in the air" (Şeineanu, 529). Niculiță Voronca stated that these dragons would be some creatures that live in the sky and govern the weather: „There are some dragons in the sky, God's powers; two of them – one in the East an don in the West. The one from the East is for rain and the other one is for drought and when there is a storm and there is thunder and lightning, they are fighting. Then they release their arrows and you see on the sky their fight. If the eastern dragon wins, there is a fertile year and if the western one, there is a dry year". Such a belief is also present in Armenian imaginary in the character bamed Vishapa and in Slavic belief in demonical creatures that could swallow the sun. Another similar animal is basilisk – a fantastic animal of Mediterranean roigin that has the royal signs: „it looks like a strange rooster, with the beak of an eagle and with crowned head, body covered in scales, dragon wings, lizard tail, sharp voice that thrust trhough the people minds and hearts like sharp arrows, while his fierce look kills everything". Another fantastic bird – *pajura* - similar to the Fire Bird, Magic Bird and other variants is considered a creature with mythical features, belonging to supernatural.

Talking about the so-called demonic side of the nature, Ovidiu Papadima (Zamolxis) refers to several fantastic beings from the Romanian imaginary, among which we point out: Vântoasele (from the fairy tale Limir împărat) – wind's sisters; vărticuşul – „a devil's creature that is always by his side"; Sorbul Apelor – creature that is hiding in streams; Apă –Rea – „a small man with red hair and long sharp beard" (correspondent of the Blue Beard from French fairy-tales); Ştima Apei – whose dwelling is in quiet waters, demanding tribute daily a head of a mortal.

2.3. Monstruous/Marginality/Alterity

In his study dedicated to Roamanian mythology, Romulus Vulcănescu highlights in the chapter Antropogonia mythical mythologies specific to the inland imaginary: *căpcăunii* (ogers), *uriaşii* (giants) and *uricii*. In Lazăr Şeineanu's opinion both *căpcăunii* and *cătcăunii* are „mythical creatures, cannibal monsters with dog faces that are specific to Bulgarians, Moldavian Greeks and Ruthenians. Ogers barks as dogs instead of speaking, they see like ten men together with a single eye and eat each other". This

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ancient mythical pattern ist o be also found in European fairy-tales (*Tom Thumb*), altough the oger is represented in a humanized manner.

Giants are beings that populated earth before humankind and they were „creatures of colossal proportions: giant head, long and ravelled hair, long arms and legs, uneven walk – when they walked, they stepped on a hill and on another one. They were generally peaceful, but they were very dangerous when they became furious" (Șeineanu apud Vulcanescu 255).

Uricii (also named *blajini* – gentle) were opposed dimensionally to giants, small, kind and honest, with a lifestyle of saints". Uricelul represents „a fairy tale character twice smaller" – a possible correspondent for gnomes from European fairy-tales and legends[6]. Another important trait is that of excluding gnomes from human geography, as they „live outside the terrestrial surface, inhabited by people, at the edge, in White Islands of the Saturday Waters, on another realm to which you can reach with the help of a wonderful tree (in the Romanian case this is the fir)". These *urici* are considered as protectors of the human race, through the saint lifestyle, gaining thus the status of *homines religiosi*, helping the sould of the dead to enter the other world. In some regions of Romania there is even a holiday dedicated to these mythological creatures, entitled Pastele Baljinilor.

Gulliver's Travels, *Snowy White and the Seven Dwarfs* are narrations in which this typology of small people appears, and we have to point out the fact that there is a difference between urici and gnomes or dwarfs or lilliputian, as the latter have their origins rather in the Germanic imaginary. In Jean Chevalier's perspective they are „geniuses of earth and soil, deriving in the case of Germanic people from worms that devoured the corpse of Ymir; they often accompany fairies in the Northern people tradition; they symbolize, psychoanalitically speaking, our hidden forces, having the capacity of changing their appearance.

Analyzing the monstruous races of the Middle Ages, which were usually placed at the margins of the world, Corin Braga considers them „true cellars of the European conscience", a place of residues, of pent fantasies, being given the fact that „at the periphery there's the other, the double or the shadow of the European man". This repulsion phenomenon regarding the fantasies of life, the inner shadow we find in the archetypal structure of the fairy-tale, among these monstruosity patterns. We admit that this family is much larger, including centaurs, unicorns and other fabulous animals or fantastic creatures.

3. Short Introduction into the Postmodern Mythical Ressurection

Along with modernization in society, these mythical morphologies from fairy-tales were affected by the demitization phenomenon. We are witnessing the degradation of the sacred and falling into profane, aspect that is obvious in literary fairy-tales due to creation of fantastic characters that compete with those from the popular fairy-tales - Strâmbă-Lemne (god that governs the wood), Setilă (a hypostasis of Bachus), the giant Munte Vânăt, Scutură-Munți[7], Păsări-Lăți-Lungilă, Sfarmă-Piatră etc. so that modern criticism talks about the multiple genesis of the fairy-tales, about reciprocal influences and structuring a coherent typology of this literary species.

We may talk about a reconfiguration of the sacred, a re-mythologizing in Vattimo's perspective, that is a facet of redescovering and repositioning sacredness in consumer society. From this point of view, Basarab Nicolescu's approach supposes the sacredness concept as a hidden third that can support the lever between science and religion, being able to „weave" the unseen strings between the domains of disciplines.

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This is also a precious advocacy for transdisciplinarity. The transdisciplinary vision would become in modernity one of the premises of universal culture, the only one capable of picturing the entire landscape through the synthesis of the parts. We adhere to Braga's idea about a hidden third in unveiling or curdling the European culture in the attempt of consolidating the European identity. The European imaginary emanates from the fairy-tale's, legend's well and the source has to be found quickly.

The postmodern prose is nothing else but an attempt of bringing into modernity the past world. We deal with mythical scenarios resembling fairy-tale along with the predilection for quotations, intertextuality, which are integrated in the new narrative structures as in the case of Russian dolls.

The fairy-tale hero becomes in postmodern prose a character whose feature is mainly defined by postmodern „superman of masses" (Eco, 6). Concerning the issue of the myth degradation and de-sacralization Blaga states that Nietzsche is „responsible for this degradation and tryes a distinction of the concept when it attributes to the primitive spirit, creator of myths and specific attitudes, profound organic reactions in the presence of some feelings that can't be translated logically", pleading at the same time for revival of the „peasant Christianism". Eco's superman has its source in Nietzsche's superman or Duma's, Edmond Dantes', although with new meaning in postmodernity, becoming a „product" destined to a mass of readers „built according to the new commercial formula, called novel as a contradictory story in which ideological aspects and logic of the narrative structures, as well as dialectics of the editorial market are in an intermission like a problematic node difficult to disencumber" (Eco 6). The postmodern epoch needs models and these are to be found from the ancient typology of the hero Indo-European fairy-tales.

In *Postmodern Condition* Jean-Francois Lyotard mentioned a fact specific to postmodern era – „distrust in meta-stories", this being a consequence of the rapid science development. The literature domain becomes a realm of various experiments, whose primary feature is the spectacular ingredient and difefrent imaginary combinations. Another relevant facet is the fact that „narration function loses its actors, the great hero, great dangers, great adventures and the great aim. It is dispersed in a lot of narrative lingvistical elements, as well as denotational and descriptive etc, each of them including pragmatic valences sui generis" (Lyotard, 16).

Tolkien's novel The Lord of the Rings represents an example of writing in which ancient Northern myths are reconfigured. The author's technique consists in using „fragments" (myths) from Northern mythology in modernity so that the book becomes a puzzle of the ancient Northern imaginary. The influence of Celtic and especially of Northern mythology in Tolkien's works is obvious: talking trees, dwarfs, giants, fire and ice elements, ancient creatures that live in the earth, even the names of the characters. On the other hand, Tolkien is profoundly influenced by the Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf, Völsunga saga, famous for the magic ring motif and the poem book Kalevala that may be at the origin of author's idea of the Middle Earth. Tolkien's work develops an obvious competition for consummers of this type of literary genre, imposing a new typology for the hero that serves the tastes of consumer literature. Frodo is detached after all from the heroes of the fairy-tales and medieval legends, being a product of the consumer society, a superman of the masses destined for the new commercial

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formula. Fantasy literature, comics, as well as digital games neglect the „weak discourse", consecrating Frodo. On the other hand, Frodo surpasses the typology of the classic literary hero, because living under the power of the ring contributed to revealing not only his qualities, but also fears, flaws and frustrations. Previously a representative of an insignificant species, Frodo becomes the representative of the idea of power complex, being given the fact that the core of the work is a fascinating metaphor of possession.

It would be interesting to bring into the foreground the myth of the hero salvator specific to postmodernity – identifiable as Batman, Superman, Spider-Man – is retrieved in Tolkien's novel in the person of the little hobbit. This initiative demarche characterized by mythical reconstructions brings to our attention another character – Gollum – whose inner nature is cohabited by both good and evil.

4. Conclusion

In his discourse concerning the specificity of the postmodern hero Joseph Campbell emphasizes the idea of exchange of the hero's postulate from a historical period to another that it is possible to recognize in premodern era several substantial transformations in hero typology – from the fabulous to human hero. Coming closer to our culture allows us to ascertain an important transformation in typology of the privileged heroes in modern and postmodern culture, as „where we've observed an exemplary constructive hero, positive (for his society) we'll find more and more a postmodern hedonist and negative hero ... different postmodern heroes are nothing else but various representations of Dionysos" (Campbell, 259).

To conclude with, the hero in his various temporal hypostases is the reflection of man's attempt to create and re-create mythologies in which to believe, valuable aspect especially in the postmodern era, characterized by mythical reconstruction.

Notes

[1] The same is specific for Italian fairy-tales: "c'era una volta…", "al tempo dei tempi", "al tempo in cui Berta filava…", "ai tempi di Bibì e Bibò…"

[2] The beloved sister of the two is the modest and humble one, as in *Cinderella* and *Old Man's Clever Girl*

[3] Romanian fairy-tales have plenty of motifs such as greateful animals, brother in arms.

[4] The Tibetan fairy-tale is about a girl who, being deceived by a demon, killed her own mother, who didn't leave her, reincarnating in a cow and providing necessary food. Due to transformations and favours of the demon, Cinderella arrived at the ball, loosing her woolen shoe, fact that determined her marriage with the prince.

[5] One of the analysis of this typology is to be found in *Triumful lui Fat Frumos* by Mircea Constantinescu.

[6] It is also present later in Delavrancea's prose as Neghiniță.

[7] See also *Faurul pământului* in Călin Gruia's fairy-tales.

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